

**State-Society Relations and Traditional Modes of Governance in Ethiopia: A Case
Study of Sidama**

By

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Acronyms

AC: Academics

APAP: Action Professional Association for the People

BP: Business People

EPRDF: Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front

EPRP: Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party

FDRE: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

GE: Government Employee

LO: Local Official

Meisone: All Ethiopian Socialist Movement

NGO: Non-governmental Organizations

RO: Regional Official

SLM: Sidama Liberation Movement

SALF: Somali Abo Liberation Front

SNNPRS: Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Regional State

UN: United Nations

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations

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Glossary of Local Terms

Aadaa: custom or tradition in Oromo

Abbaa Boku/AbbaaGadaa: the leader or president in Oromo *Gadaa* system

Abbaa Chaffe: the chairman of assembly in Oromo *Gadaa* system

Abbaa Dubbi: the speaker of Oromo *Gadaa* council

Abbaa Seera: the memorizer of laws in Oromo *Gadaa* system

Abbaa Alanga: the judge in Oromo *Gadaa* system

Abbaa Duula: the army commander in Oromo *Gadaa* system

Abbaa Sa'a: the economic officer in Oromo *Gadaa* system

AfaanOromo: Oromo language

Affino: the norm to let others to know the issue at hand, event or actions before reacting on it in Sidama Language

Agisho: the servant of leader in Sidama generational class system/*Gadaana*

Anga: purification through ritual in Sidama traditional system

Anish-Gors: the highest level council in Burji traditional governance

Ayana: Sidama traditional belief of good omen or spirit through which God reveals his will

Ayanto: astrologist and the man in charge of Sidama calendar

Ayide: kin in Sidama language

Balabbats: traditional leaders who served as local representatives of the imperial regime in Amharic

Basha: electoral and representation process in Burji traditional governance

Boosso: sub-clan in Sidama

Burisame: food prepared from false banana and butter during *fichche* festivals and rituals in Sidama

Chambalala: feasts and rituals that include dances, plays and food sharing during *fichche* celebrations in Sidama

Chimessa: (chimeye- plural) leading member of *songo* in Sidama

Danawa: communal land in Sidama

Dee: social norm for sharing the burden of production and construction in Sidama

Dejzmach: high level military rank of Ethiopian imperial regimes in Amharic

Dyna: the second highest office in Burji traditional governance

Eajjeto: Hero/heroine in Sidama

Faano: rebels who resisted the return of the privilege of landlords after Italian withdrawal in Sidama

Fichche: New Year celebration of the Sidama (feast and ritual)

Gabbar: Serf who payed tribute to landlords during the feudal period in Amharic

Gada: the generational class and administrative system of the Oromo people

Gadaana: leader of the generational class system in Sidama

Garo: leader of sub-clan in Faqisa-Tumano clan and the clan leader of Sawula clan in Sidama

Gana: religious and ritual leader in Wonsho religious and songo site in Sidama

Geelo: leader of the Hadicho clan of Sidama

Hagie: generational class and initiation system in Burji

Halaale: principle of ultimate truth and justice in the Sidama language

Hayyicha: wise and intelligent person in the Sidama language

Heera: justice in the Oromo language

Himanancho: prophet in the Sidama language

Jalawa: assistant to leader of the generational class system in Sidama

Jirte: social sub-constitution governing community cooperation during death and other occasions in Sidama

Kakalo: sacrifice made during rituals in Sidama

Kebele: lowest/grassroots administrative unit in Amharic

Khat: stimulant plant

Kiflehager: administrative region during the military regime in Amharic

LayinkiShibre: second terror in the Sidama language

Luba: an administrative system of classes in Oromo *Gadaa* system

Luwa: Generational Class system in Sidama

Magano: God in Sidama language

Mahber: self-help association in Amharic

Maracha: rite of passage for promoting youth to adulthood following purification through circumcision in Sidama

Masalancho: a Philosopher who interprets signs and events and suggests solutions in Sidama

Masha: officer of Olchoin Burji traditional governance

Melkegna: a landlord who owned both land and tenants during the feudal period in Amharic/Sidama

Mercha: former currency in Wolayita

Messane: former currency in Gedeo

Moote: clan leader in Sidama

Naftegna: literally carrier of the gun; local landlords who settled in newly incorporated territories in Amharic

Olla: neighborhood in Sidama language

Olcho: administrative unit in Burji traditional governance system

Omisso: ceremony associated with circumcision and certain initiation rites in Burji

Qetala: Dance and chant during *fichche* celebrations in Sidama

Qorke: giraffe-like wild animal in Sidama

Qaricha: ritual performer in Wonscho religious site in Sidama

Qaricho: leader of women's institution and gatherings in Sidama

Randicho: respected elder sister who is central in rituals and feasts in Sidama

Ras: top military rank of the imperial regime just below the king and above a dejazmach in Amharic

Sadassa: third rank in leadership during *luwa* initiation period in Sidama

Safuu: the Oromo concept of Ethics

Seera: Boran laws, used as reference for law in Oromo

Seera: sanction, ostracism and punishment in Sidama

Siassa: collaboration in Sidama

Sidaamuaafoo: Sidama language

Songo: elders' council in Sidama

Tuba: dress made of leather in Sidama language

Utuwa: privately owned land in Sidama

Waaqeffannaa: Oromo's traditional religion

Waaq: God in Oromo

Wesse: false banana

Woma: Head Priest of Sidama traditional religion in Sidama

Womasha: currency of Sidama

Woreda: district administration in Amharic

Yaka: institution serving as Ombudsman for women in Sidama

YekignAgher: Amharic term for conquered or colonized territory in Amharic

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Appendix I: The General Characteristics of Informants

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Abstract

This study deals with the political history and nature of state-society relations in Ethiopia in general and Sidama in particular. It is undertaken by analyzing the role that traditional modes of governance can play in contemporary Ethiopia in general by drawing on the experience in Sidama. State formation process, the role and impact of traditional governance and administrative practices, and the nature of state-society relations during successive regimes in Ethiopia are the core issues examined by the study. The study identified that there are deficits and gaps experienced in the efforts aimed at building democratic governance in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies like Ethiopia.

A qualitative methodological approach is employed in eliciting information from different but complementary sources on the subject in question. In eliciting the necessary data, the study basically relied on primary sources comprising of officials and functionaries of regional and local governments, community elders, and participants in focus group discussions. This is reinforced by conducting detailed review and analysis of relevant literature that helped in formulating the theoretical framework. More than 70 resource persons (key informants and FGD members) participated in providing information by responding to queries organized in the form of unstructured interview guides and checklists.

Based on the findings and analyses thereof, the study suggested that the overall structure of the contemporary Ethiopian state that is currently at work needs to incorporate the tenable and useful attributes of traditional political institutions in order to promote goals associated with the need for entrenching multiculturalism, peace and stability, and accommodation of diversity. Hence it argues that the failure to link the two modes of governance would result in divergence and incompatibility between formal processes and structures of governance and the enduring traditional systems thereby leading to acrimonious state-society relations. However, the current Ethiopian federal arrangement is hoped to provide opportunities for broadening the public space that could be instrumental in exercising alternative and contextualized modes of local governance in dealing with multifaceted and pressing problems.

Introduction

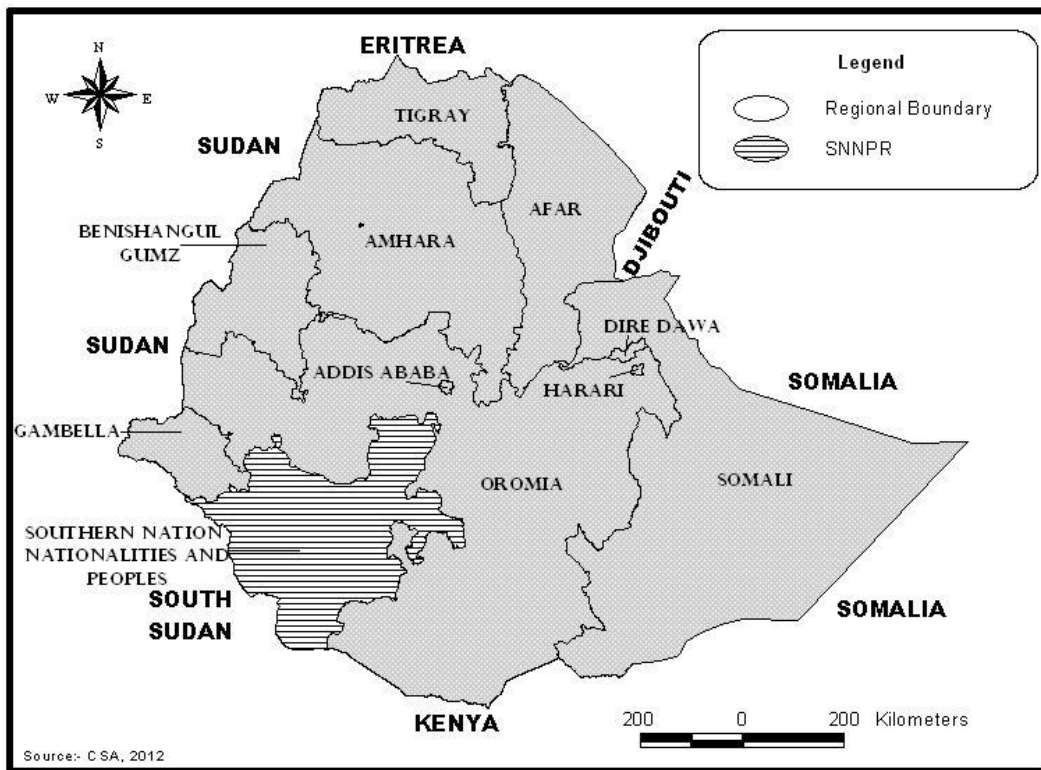
1.1 Background

Ethiopia is a multicultural and multiethnic polity despite the fact that successive regimes blatantly denied this reality in the past. The current Ethiopian politico-legal dispensation recognizes the diversity of the multicultural elements underpinning the makeup of the country. The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) that is currently at work clearly specifies that all nations, nationalities and peoples enjoy recognition and equal legal protection including the freedom to develop and preserve their identity and enhance the unabridged use and enrichment of their cultures and languages. The Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State (herein after referred to as SNNPRS), is one of the nine regional States of the Ethiopian federal system.

The Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) is located in Southern and South-Western part of Ethiopia. It is roughly situated between a latitude of 4 o.43 - 8 o.58 North and a longitude of 34 o.88- 39 o.14 East (Sidama Zone Planning and Economic Development Department, 1996). SNNPR shares international borders with Kenya in the South and South Sudan in the West. Within Ethiopia, it is bounded by the Oromia Region that surrounds much of the areas of SNNPR in the north western and north eastern directions and is also bordered by Gambella Region in the North West. According to SNNPR Statistical Abstract (2007), the total area of the Region is estimated to be 110,931.9 sq km constituting 10% of the country's land size inhabited by a population of 15,760,743, which accounts for nearly 20% of the total population of the country. The region is a multinational and multilingual entity comprising about 56 ethnic groups that coexist within their distinct geographic locations practicing their respective languages, cultures, and social practices that are marked by other defining features. In terms of administrative division, the region has 13 zones, 8 special *Woredas*, 126 *Woredas*, and 3678 rural *Kebeles*. Moreover, there are 22 urban administrations and 114 certified towns enjoying municipal status comprising 238 urban *Kebeles* (Ibid).

The Region's diversity in terms of varied cultures, languages and historical heritages including belief and value systems that evolved through enduring traditional social systems is reinforced by well-entrenched livelihood systems anchored in discernable economic activities. The attitude of the population of the Region towards their natural environment explains their determination to maintain their traditional systems and livelihoods intact.

Figure 1: The Location of SNNPRS in Ethiopia.

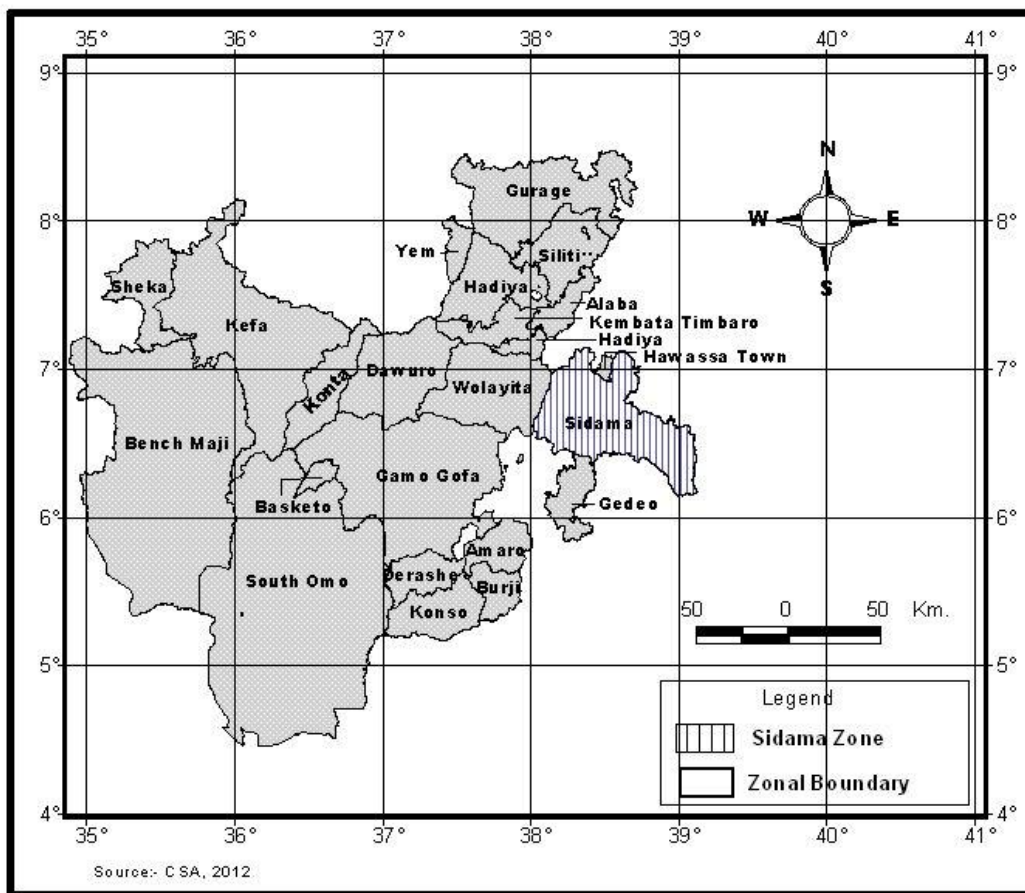


Source: CSA 2012

The Sidama ethnic group is one among the various ethnic groups inhabiting SNNPRS. The Sidama has distinct socio-cultural life styles that are mediated by indigenous knowledge systems built up through generations. The defining attributes of Sidama cultural identity and indigenous institutions was partly lost following the incorporation of the locality into the empire during the expansion of the Ethiopian State in the 19th and 20th centuries. The location of Sidamaland is between Lake Hawassa in the North, the town of Dilla in the South, Lake Abbaya in the South West, River Bilate in the West, and various Zones of Oromia Region in

the East and South East. The astronomical location of the Sidamaland is between 5° 45' and 6°45' North and 38° and 39° East encompassing a land area of 7672 square kilometers (Sidama Zone Planning and Economic Development Department, 1996). Regarding patterns of settlement, the region is among the most densely populated in the country. It is estimated that the total population of the Sidama Zone is about 3.4 million (Sidama Zone Planning and Economic Development Department, 2011). The Sidama Zone has favorable soil and climatic conditions that are conducive for agriculture. The Sidama people predominantly inhabit two zones in SNNPRS, namely Sidama Zone and Hawassa Special Zone. The Sidama Zone is further sub-divided into 19 *Woredas* and two city administrations whereas Hawassa Special Zone comprises seven urban sub-cities and twelve rural *kebeles*.

Figure 2: Zones in the SNNPRS and location of Sidama Zone in the Region



Source: CSA 2012

In the ethnographic literature, the term ‘Sidama’ sometimes refers to the group of east highland Cushitic-speakers, which include Kambata, Kebena, Alaba, Hadiya, Sidama, Gedeo and Burji (Brøgger 1986; Hamer 1966; Tolo 1998). Others like Stanley (1970), and Murdock (1959), use the term ‘Sidama’ to refer to the aforementioned ethnic groups and used the term Sidamo as a name of other peoples of southwest Ethiopia (Stanley 1970). Generally, Braukamper (1978:123) concluded that: "...where there is question of the Sidama, this name exclusively refers to the people that live between Lake Abbaya, lake Hawassa and the upper Genale bearing it as an ethnonym..." In the past, successive Ethiopian regimes used the term Sidamo to refer to the people in question and named the administrative region as such in a manner that designated name of the entire peoples of the region. According to recent studies (Markos, et al 2011) and communication with informants from the ethnic group, one can conclude as established fact that the people call themselves ‘Sidama’. The current established institutional settings also recognize the people as such. Accordingly, for the purpose of this study the word Sidama is used to refer the people in question and the phrase Sidamaland is coined to refer to the area inhabited by the people in question.

This study deals with the political history and nature of state-society relations in the study area by analyzing the role of traditional modes of governance in contemporary Ethiopia in general and Sidama in particular. This is discussed from the point of view of the overall state formation process, the role and impact of traditional governance and administrative practices, and the nature of state-society relations during the period of Ethiopian successive regimes. Moreover, the study attempts to highlight the deficits and gaps experienced in the course of efforts aimed at building democratic governance in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies. To this end, it endeavors to explore whether the Ethiopian federal arrangement creates favorable conditions that could provide room for alternative contextualized modes of local governance. This is undertaken by identifying the major attributes of traditional modes of governance in Sidama that could be adapted to the formal politico-legal context and overall setting. Finally, the study tries to shed light on the broader understanding of state of affairs and provide suggestions that could serve as policy inputs presumed to improve the nature of state-society relations in the study area and the country at large.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Since the commencement and consolidation of the colonial episode in the African continent, there had been dominant political discourses associated with the quest of foreign powers that strived to impose their wills and whims under an environment of international competition and rivalry. It is to be recalled that the colonial powers that encroached on the continent at varying times expressed their urge for control and further their influence under the pretext of entrenching democratization and promoting civilization.

Colonialism imposed different alien politico-administrative models and attendant practices on the colonized peoples through different mechanisms that included both coercion and inducement, which failed to be sustained following the accession to independent statehood of the former non-self-governing territories (Owusu, 1992; ECA, 2007a). The vicious cycle of perpetuation of corrupt and self-serving civilian and military authoritarian regimes that alternated themselves in power contributed to the failure of parliamentary democracy in Africa thereby prompting the need for a fresh look at the overall state of governance with a view to revitalizing traditional political systems (Bahru, 2008). This is evidenced by the fact that even some exemplary African regimes that were favorably disposed towards democratization have faced the peril of breaking down due to the superficial nature of the already entrenched modes of operation and alien cultures (Hinz, 2007). In this vein, the proper and innovative incorporation and application of traditional political institutions into the framework of formal structures resulted in establishing successful democracies in Africa such as in Botswana (Sharma, 2004). This is indicative of the need to fine-tune drives towards democratization in Africa to the realities that are embedded in the cultural setting of societies at least in terms of retaining some useful attributes of indigenous institutions and mechanisms including traditional political practices.

With the view to address the challenges of nation building, Ethiopia that has never been colonized had adopted and implemented the Western model of governance in its aspiration to build a modern empire-state. Such drive towards kickstarting state formation process, which was attempted on the basis of a modernization imperative by abandoning the major elements

of tradition, failed to provide space for nurturing and maintaining the useful elements subsumed under traditional systems and mechanisms. Key elements of modernization that had taken place in the course of state formation persisted during the abolition of traditional political practices that were perceived as harmful and backward. This notwithstanding, however, the inadequate response of formal state institutions to a variety of pressing social needs, the informal and traditional institutions and practices of governance did not totally disappear from the life experiences of existing communities.

In this vein, it could be stated that there are some indications that the present Ethiopian government was attempting to recognize the importance of traditional values, practices and dispute resolution mechanisms. Besides, regional and local governments are trying to involve community leaders and traditional institutions for the purpose of community mobilization and peace building efforts. This indicates that the incumbent political dispensation in Ethiopia is interested in making use of the tenable aspects and elements of traditions to solve recurrent problems whose resolutions are often found beyond its reach. Nevertheless, it appears that there is no committed interest in officially recognizing and empowering viable traditional institutions yet. On the other hand, the current trends in the consolidation of federalism and official recognition and promotion of multiculturalism in Ethiopia provide opportunities for adopting traditional systems as complementary modes of governance in the country. It should be noted that lack of institutional and legal mechanisms and frameworks including empowerment mechanisms undermine the viability of these institutions.

However, there are few cases that prove the assertion that judicious use of traditional institutions can be advantageous in various ways. For example, local officials in Sidama often approach clan leaders in order to mobilize communities for expediting some government-initiated projects that require involvement of people and thus heavily depend on the wisdom and legitimacy of elders to solve problems and find solutions to some issues in grassroots localities. The same is observed in the Oromia Region where government officials make use of the office of the *Aba Gadaa* to deal with various matters. A case in point relates to the conflict between the Guji Oromo and the Burji that is more often dealt with and resolved through the intervention of community leaders of traditional institutions of both groups than

the formal institutions of government (Markos, 2011a). In spite of this, however, there are also huge gaps in terms of upholding the tenable elements of the values and attendant practices espoused by grassroots communities, which must be empowered to deal with and address problems that persistently occur and recur.

There are different traditional types of governance and administrative practices that are indigenous to the various cultural formations in Ethiopia. Among these one finds the Sidama that in the past was governed under a well-organized traditional system prior to the unfolding of the modern Ethiopian Empire State (Stanley, 1970). Incorporation into the Empire State, compounded with policy of alienation and assimilation, undermined and eroded the potency of organized indigenous governance and political systems and cultural heritages (Hamer, 2007). At present too, there are strong influences exerted by ‘modernization’ and urbanization that pressurize the generation of today to abandon and be uprooted from traditional heritages and cultural settings. Due to exposure to such and similar other factors, the cultural traits of the Sidama face the peril of being weakened that was progressively taking effect in the past. Moreover, the ramifications of Sidama indigenous knowledge and traditional practices and mechanisms have not been further explored and adequately documented yet.

As observed in the empirical findings of previous studies (Markos et.al. 2011), there are groups that adhere to the workings of traditional institutions and mechanisms on the one hand, and those who question their viability and ramifications thereof on the other. For the former group, adherence to traditional systems of governance and state-society relations by observing established values is highly advantageous in the face of inadequacies of the workings and arrangements associated with the mode of operation and structures of modern government. According to the latter group, traditional institutions are backward and should not be considered as viable as to formal political arrangements of governance and administration. In this connection, it is worth mentioning that competing and contradictory jurisdictions, competencies and claims exist between community norms and practices and formal and official dispensations. Whereas community leaders try to exercise their authority through mechanisms and modes of operations of established indigenous systems, government agencies exercise the legal authority stipulated in the prerogatives of the “modern” state.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study is that it aims at examining the nature of state-society relations and identifying the critical strands that underlie the major attributes and defining features of traditional governance that can be retained and incorporated into modern and formal arrangements. This is with a view to contributing to the improvement of the modes of governance and state-society relations in contemporary Ethiopia in general and the Sidama area in particular. The research has described and analyzed indigenous knowledge and practice of governance, traditional political systems, and cultural traits of the Sidama and shows how these could be intermarried with and linked to formal and modern governance arrangements.

Based on the aforementioned, the study seeks to attain the following specific objectives:

- Explore the basic characteristic features of indigenous politico-administrative system that are peculiar to the Sidama;
- Document and analyze the nature of state-society relations and modes of governance in contemporary Ethiopia in general and Sidama in particular;
- Describe and comparatively analyze the views of local communities towards their indigenous governance systems and political institutions vis-à-vis the workings of the formal governance system and the mode of operation of the Ethiopian state;
- Examine and identify the attributes of indigenous governance and political systems of the Sidama that can be adopted to complement the formal governance structures and practices in Ethiopia;
- Identify the underlying causes why the attributes and qualities of the indigenous governance and political systems of the Sidama failed to be integrated into the existing fabrics of the modern Ethiopian state;
- Analyze the workings and ramifications of the Ethiopian federal arrangement and determine the extent of its efficacy in terms of accommodating multiculturalism and traditional governance mechanisms; and
- Recommend means and ways of integrating traditional indigenous knowledge systems and practices in Sidama with the formal structures of governance in Ethiopia.

1.4. Research Questions

In line with the objectives, the following research questions are posed and addressed:

- What are the basic features of traditional governance and political system of the Sidama and how do these relate to the modes of formal governance in contemporary Ethiopia?
- How do local community members in the study area view their indigenous governance and political institutions as compared to the modern system of governance and political arrangements in Ethiopia?
- Which aspects of indigenous governance and political system in Sidama can be adopted by and incorporated into the existing practices of the formal Ethiopian political system? and
- Why have Sidama traditional institutions and mechanisms of governance fail to be integrated into the contemporary practices of governance in Ethiopia?

1.5. Hypothesis

The overall structure of contemporary Ethiopian state needs to incorporate appropriate attributes of traditional political institutions in order to promote multiculturalism and accommodation of diversity short of which state of affairs would result in divergence and incompatibility between the two thereby cuminating in acrimonious state-society relations.

1.6. Methodology

This section explains the methodological approach used for collecting and analyzing pertinent data that informs the study. It describes the method employed in conducting the research and highlights the sources of data, instruments of enquiry, research locations and the mode and manner of eliciting various but complimentary information. The method of data collection is focused on gathering qualitative information reflecting the perception of the respondents selected as primary sources.

This study employs qualitative approach in accessing sources of data and in analyzing them. A qualitative methodological approach is a composite of philosophical concepts, data-gathering

procedures, and statistical methods that provide perhaps the most thoroughly elaborated basis for systematic examination of human subjectivity. Central to this enterprise is the meanings and understandings that individuals bring to their endeavors (Given, 2008). According to Sumner (2006), methodology is the philosophy of methods. It encompasses, first, an epistemology – the ‘rules of truth’ for warranting the validity of conclusions – and secondly, an ontology – establishing the ‘objects’ about which questions may validly be asked and conclusions may be drawn. On the other hand, qualitative methodology refers to the research that investigates aspects of social life that are not amenable to quantitative measurement. Associated with a variety of theoretical perspectives, qualitative research uses a range of methods in order to focus on the meanings and interpretation of social phenomena and social processes in the particular contexts in which they occur (Ibid).

Qualitative analysis is a method of enquiry that deals with data presented in words, contains a minimum dose of quantitative measurement, standardization and statistical techniques. A qualitative approach embraces several methods and has many uses, audiences and sponsors and utilizes some quantitative techniques for substantiating the authenticity of generated qualitative data (Given, 2008). According to Henn *et.al* (2006), a qualitative research approach is a style of research; it may involve more than one particular research method or technique, and often the research follows an iterative process. The characteristic features of qualitative research methods are convenient for carryin gout research in ‘real-life’ settings and enable the researcher to make detailed descriptions of people’s behavior and thoughts so as to illuminate their social meanings. Moreover, the researcher is likely to adopt an approach in which there is no precise initial specification of research issues and concepts. Qualitative approach fits more to theory construction rather than theory testing (Ibid). Qualitative research methods involve in-depth interviewing, ethnography, participant observation, case studies, life histories, discourse analysis, and conversational analysis (Sumner, 2006).

From the social science research viewpoint, a qualitative research approach is particularly relevant for the theme under study because it offers a more precise analysis of the meanings and interpretation of social phenomena and social processes. Moreover, description and explanation of socio-cultural and political events and facts necessitates employing a qualitative

approach. In this vein, both inductive and deductive reasoning techniques are used in order to generalize and determine socio-cultural, political and economic events and occurrences as well as test whether general assumptions are applied to the specific contexts of a given thematic research like the one in question. Hence use of a qualitative approach is relevant to the problem under study due to the fact that the focus is on pertinent politico-legal principles and attendant socio-cultural practices that are widely accepted and exercised by the people both in the past and at the present. However, in order to test the opinions and attitudes of the respondents and compare the variations thereof, a quantitative analysis of generated data is applied. In undertaking this study, primary data analysis and interpretation is emphasized given that there is paucity of secondary sources and material regarding the subject. Verifying the authenticity of generated primary data by establishing compatibility with those elicited from secondary sources is undertaken through field visits to the study areas.

Method of data collection primarily focuses on reviewing all relevant literature and eliciting primary data from the members of the communities in the study locations. Different written materials that include books, journals, conference proceedings and other grey literature on Sidama culture and history served as secondary data sources. Primary data sources that informed the study include material, spiritual and cultural symbols, information elicited through structured and unstructured interviews with selected knowledgeable persons, community elders and political activists that served as key informants and participants in focus group discussions. Moreover, official documents dealing with administrative, political, legal and cultural issues as well as those that shed light on the major strands of state-society relations in the study area are consulted, reviewed and analyzed. Primary data collection is undertaken by taking recourse to the following:

- **Participant Observation:** observation of the study area in order to locate places of traditional cultural heritage and historical and cultural sites as well as the overall cultural life style and livelihood of the communities in the study area is undertaken. Accordingly, the researcher visited more than ten religious and cultural sites where councils of elders deliberate on issues and religious leaders perform traditional rituals. This helped in having an in-depth understanding of the real life of people and how

social interactions and engagements take place. Participant observation of those events including the Sidama New Year celebration (*fichche*) and generation class system initiation rituals (*luwa*). This recourse was taken so as to broaden the researcher's understanding and grasp of knowledge. That way, he is not limited to the story told about the events;

- Focus group discussion (FGD): - conducting focus group discussions was undertaken because it is important to understand and identify the key concepts and issues that are critical in conducting the research. Besides, FGD helps in identifying key informants and other knowledgeable resource persons. With this in mind, four Focus Group Discussions were organized in Gorche, Hawassa, Chucko and Arbegona districts of the Sidama Zone.
- Key informant Interviews:- Structured and unstructured questionnaire interviews (see appendix III) were held with key informants whose composition included leaders of traditional institutions, regional and local government officials and employees, religious leaders, as well as residents in both urban and rural settings
- Sampling technique: the sampling technique used is purposive and based on the aforementioned criteria pertaining to educational background, age, social status, domicile (urban-rural), gender and religion in a manner that ensures representation covering most part of the 22 *woredas* of the Sidama Zone. Over 50 key informants are identified based on the researcher's previous experience as a field work leader of Sidama History and Culture study project team. Four data collectors were employed to assist in the fieldwork.

In order to understand the overall profile of the informants, it is necessary to take note of the following selection procedures that were followed. In addition to various field visits that were undertaken to collect data that informed the study, Resource persons were contacted to serve as key informants and focus group discussion members. The task of data collection necessitated deployment of four field assistants who were given the task of assisting in data collection efforts.

The selected number and composition of informants might not be fully representative. There is underrepresentation of women and the youth due to lack of time and resources. The general

characteristics of the informants and the participants are summarized in Appendix I. As described in Appendix II, more than 74 respondents have participated in the whole data collection process in different categories including focus group discussion member and key informants. Given the fact that a qualitative methodological approach is employed in this study, focus is made on eliciting in-depth information from primary sources of data, which can offset the lack of representation adequate numerical size. Based on their consent, elders and community leaders are explicitly mentioned throughout the text whereas government officials and employees who preferred anonymity are identified by using codes in order to address their concern. Accordingly, regional government officials are referred to with the symbol RO, Local government officials are referred to with the symbol LO with sequential numbers; government employees with symbol GE, Business people with BP, civil society and non-government organizations with NGO and Academics with AC are given sequential numbers.

1.7. Significance of the Study

The need to undertake the study on the interaction between the modern and traditional political institutions in Sidama is mainly driven by the urge for clarifying the prevalent hazy state-society relations in Ethiopia in general and Sidama in particular. Contradictory roles and claims on the part of traditional institutions and formal government structures and competing interests that often surface between the two necessitated the search for a clear understanding on the nature of the interaction between them. The failures of liberal political experiments in Africa prompted growing interest of researchers to look for alternative models in the course of which studying indigenous political institutions is placed at the center. The existence of such contradictions and incompatibilities between the two systems and structure, called for further examination of the major issues in this regard so as to effectively respond to the challenges facing drives aimed at empowering traditional political institutions through enacting enabling legal regulatory Frameworks that are crucial for embedding smooth and amicable state-society relations.

It is believed that studying traditional institutions and knowledge systems helps to popularize and preserve the identity of communities and the appropriate aspects of their cultural heritages.

Clear identification of the positive attributes and ramifications of traditional political institutions helps to incorporate them into the modern political system and this will hopefully improve the nature of state-society relations. As one of the few studies conducted on the subject in question, the outcomes of this study research are hoped to be a worthy reference for establishing a reliable source of data for those who seek to undertake similar enquiries and contribute to the existing body of knowledge. Since, the study attempts to bridge the gaps in terms of identifying the positive ramifications of traditional institutions, the findings and analyses thereof provide firsthand information to policy makers in a manner that enables them to understand the situation and utilize information that is made available as inputs for developing policy and taking appropriate measures in the desired areas through proactive intervention when found necessary. In general terms, the study contributes to the ongoing efforts of preserving and retaining positive aspects of cultural heritages, advancing knowledge in the field, and availing firsthand information that could be used as inputs for policy making.

1.8. Opportunities and Limitations

A number of opportunities are made available in the course of conducting the research. One of these pertains to the existence of favorable institutional environment for conducting research since one of the core objectives of the study is to provide inputs for policy measures that the concerned government agencies would embark on. Hence it is believed that there exists a formidable political will in terms of encouraging and supporting such similar other endeavors. Besides, the researcher's previous experience in dealing with matters relating to the study theme including his command of prior knowledge of the research area were advantageous in terms of contributing to the effort of conducting the study without facing significant impediments. Finally, relative accessibility of the study area also has contributed to minimizing probable difficulties in data collection through repeated field visits.

On the other hand, the quest for smooth conduct of the study faced some challenges and limitations. These included paucity of adequate prior studies on the theme under examination, lack of sufficient logistics and facilities including favorable research infrastructure. These, to a certain degree, adversely affected the completion of the study within the scheduled timeframe.

1.9. Organization of the Study

This thesis is structured into six chapters. The introductory chapter (chapter one) deals with the research methodology, the study method and design, statement of the problem under study, and research objectives. Chapter two is dedicated to an extensive review of related literature and pertinent theories whereby identification of the relevant framework of the study is undertaken by providing definition of key concepts. The third chapter is devoted to making an overall overview of the study area by providing a general background and lending specific focus on the political history and socio-cultural organization of the Sidama. In chapter four, a narrative on the evolution and characteristic features of Sidama traditional political institutions is presented. The nature of relations between Sidama traditional institutions and the formal political structures of government is dealt with in chapter five by discerning the major aspects of change and continuity in regard to the workings of traditional institutions on the one hand and formal structures of government on the other. The last chapter (chapter six) is a concluding section where generalizations drawn from the major findings are made.

Chapter Two

Literature Review and Conceptual/ Theoretical Framework

This section focuses on the identification of relevant and related literature pertinent to the theme of the study. The search for literature on the subject under study indicated that there are few cases and relevant sources that are pertinent to the theme on the study. On the other hand, there are a number of related literature and cases in the fields of political anthropology, state-society relations, ethnicity, pluralism, federalism, culture, etc., which if directly applied could divert the focus of the study. As indicated above, the literature and case studies directly focusing on traditional authority and indigenous institutions relating to specific cases of African traditional institutions is limited. However, this section focuses on review of the literature on traditional political institutions in Africa and the characteristic features of the same in two ethnic communities in Ethiopia that are directly and indirectly similar to the situation in Sidama.

2.1. Literature Review

The review of literature is conducted with the purpose of collecting data that are relevant to the study and with a view to facilitating the designing of an appropriate methodology. In this connection, a number of pertinent secondary sources dealing with traditional institutions of some ethnic groups in Ethiopia as well Africa were consulted. Accordingly, various works authored by different scholars like Owusu (1991, 1992, 1996), Ayittey (1991), Sharma (2004), Meneses (2006), Evans (1995), Oomen (2000), Asmerom (2006), Erkison (2002), among others, were reviewed. In addition, works by foreign and Ethiopian scholars on Ethiopia in general and Sidama in particular written by Hamer (1966, 1970, 1972, 1977, 1980, 1987, 1996, 1998, 2007), Stanley (1966, 1970), Brogger (1986), Baukamper (1978), Tolo (1998), Vecchiato (1985), Maccani(1989) including grey literature dealing with pertinent subjects were examined.

As indicated above, the focus of the study is to analyze the overall feature of traditional political system in the study area and to identify means and ways of harmonizing it with modern political structures that are currently at work. As suggested in the introduction and the

hypothesis, the study is aimed at singling out the desirable attributes and qualities of traditional political institutions that could be incorporated into the modern system of administration. This, in turn, is presumed to result in two outcomes: the first is integrating modern political institutions with local contexts, and second to improve their efficiency and effectiveness by retaining the positive attributes of traditional political institutions through adjusting them to fit to the operations of pluralist democracy and good governance.

2.1.1. Traditional Governance Practices in Africa

Since long, African customary norms and practices were misperceived as irrational and incompatible with modern conventions that are vital for realizing socio-economic development alleging that they are ineffective in coping with present-day needs and challenges of governance. Events associated with the coming on the scene of missionary societies, the slave trade, and colonialism have been partly prompted by such perception. Colonialism is an imposition of alien rule over indigenous traditional political settings in socioeconomic, political and cultural spheres of life. Due to this fact, most post-independence states of Africa had fallen prey to such misconceptions and embarked on uncritical imitation of western values and practices by undermining their own traditional modes of governance including those that could have been viable and compatible with present-day needs.

With the unfolding of the political and economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s that prevailed in the continent resulting from policy failures associated with the formal system of government, increasing loss of faith in the Western 'external agency' model of development began to gather momentum. Following this, a number of African countries started to reconsider their institutional setups from the point of view of the ramification of traditional political practices in their countries. According to Nyminjoh (2003:125):

... Africans are far from giving up chieftaincy or from turning it into completely modern institutions. Instead, Africans are simultaneously modernizing their traditions and traditionalizing their modernity... Invented, distorted, appropriated or not, chieftaincy remains part of the cultural and political landscapes, but it is constantly negotiated and re-negotiated with new encounters and changing material realities. The results are chiefs and chiefdoms that are neither completely traditional nor completely modern.

Chiefs and chiefdoms shape and are shaped by the marriage of influences that make it possible for Africans to be both 'citizens' and 'subjects', and to negotiate conviviality among competing influences in their lives.

The practice of revitalizing chiefdoms and chiefs in the context of formal state structures of Cameroon and Botswana suggests that these could be useful agents in effectively dealing with pressing problems experienced by grassroots communities. Chieftaincy is a dynamic institution that constantly reinvents itself to accommodate and be accommodated by new exigencies. This has proved phenomenal in its ability to seek conviviality between competing and often conflicting influences. In this regard, it was noted that:

In the realm of democracy, chieftaincy in Cameroon and Botswana has both influenced and been influenced by modern state institutions and liberalism. The result of this intercourse is a victory neither for 'tradition' nor for 'modernity', neither for 'chieftaincy' nor for 'liberal democracy', neither for 'might' nor for 'right', but a richer reality produced and shaped by both (Ibid: 149).

As indicated in the study by Afro-Barometer (Logan, 2008), traditional leaders, chiefs and elders still clearly play important roles in the lives of many Africans. According to Sklar (2003), the role of traditional institutions in relation to the modern state commands increasing scholarly attention in African political studies. The idea of dual authority implies a systemic relationship between two coexistent dimensions of government. As regards intermarriage between the traditional and the modern, the term "incorporation" is used to connote the inclusion of elements of one dimension within the structures of the other. Specialists on the institutions of traditional authority would be able to assess the impacts of sovereign national governments on the structures of the former (Ibid).

According to the same source, students of African politics and government have often posed this provocative question: To what extent can, or should, the constitutions of sovereign states be shaped by principles derived from indigenous African political traditions? Affirmative response to this question has rarely been specific. Sovereign states are built on legal foundations derived from principles of government that include citizenship, electoral representation, rule of law, limited government, and federalism, among others, that are relevant to all countries. These ideas are as vital to political development in Africa as they are elsewhere

in other parts of the world. There is a second dimension of political identity and authority that primarily exists within the purview of African traditions in which the two dimensions are likely to coexist for many years to come (Ibid).

According to the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA,2007a), the termination of the colonial system of indirect rule left the role of the upper echelons of chiefs and their relations with the new African State intact. Many African nationalist leaders saw chiefs as functionaries of the colonial state and chieftaincy as an anachronistic vestige of Africa of the bygone days that had no place in the post-colonial political landscape. African nationalist leaders, therefore, often pursued policies to Africanize the bureaucracy without indigenizing the institutions of governance. The new elite, which increasingly became self-serving and autocratic, also could not tolerate the existence of contending centers of power (Ibid).

In dealing with African traditional institutions, Botswana has been widely referred to as one of the models for African democracy. However, it is imperative to emphasize here that among the factors that led to the success of Botswana as a model of African democracy is its proper treatment and incorporation of its traditional institutions and structures of governance to fit into the modern politico-legal system. Sharma (2004:2) argues that:

The institution of chieftainship and its associated traditional structures have existed in this part of the world from the pre-colonial times. These have survived in Botswana through the vicissitudes of colonial times and have continued to exist during the post-independence period with changed status, powers and functions. The traditional leaders (Chiefs) enjoyed unlimited and undefined powers over the tribe during the pre-colonial period. The chief was custodian of tribal land and allocated it to tribesmen for ploughing or residential purposes. The villages were divided in to several wards, each headed by a headman. The chief settled disputes, pronounced on tribal customs and traditions, and ruled on matters concerning the tribe in consultation with its members.

Unlike in many African countries, the traditional institution of chieftainship was retained in Botswana after independence and the traditional structures were given recognition and authority by various Acts of Parliament that regulated the powers and duties of chiefs and customary courts, demarcated tribal territories, upheld the jurisdiction of the local police, and elaborated means and ways of dealing with stock theft, marriage, succession, adoption of

children, circumcision and initiation rites, affiliation proceedings, etc. (Sharma, 2004). Some tradition-based structures like the House of Chiefs were also established by the constitution of independent Botswana. Sharma (2004:3) further describes Botswana's incorporation of traditional institutions into modern state structures as follows:

Realizing the political, economic and administrative significance of decentralization, Botswana has promoted local government and decentralization in its democratic set-up through techniques of devolution (creation of statutes) as well as deconcentration (administrative measure without resorting to statutes). The institution of chieftainship and traditional tribal administration structure is one of the four main organizations of public administration machinery and local government at decentralized local level.

According to the same author, traditional institutions and their leadership in Botswana enjoy legitimacy from both their constituents and the formal-legal establishment of the country. With all its predicaments, creation of synergy between the modern and traditional political systems in Botswana has greatly contributed to stability and good governance in the post-independence era.

Traditional leaders in South Africa are given due recognition in the post-apartheid Constitution, which provided for the establishment of councils of elders at both federal and provincial levels (Mijiga, 1998). Scholars criticize this move as inconsistent with the liberal democratic ideals enshrined in the constitution that at the same time recognizes the role of unelected traditional authorities without clear specification of their functions and powers (Ntsebeza, 1999). In this manner, traditional institutions are viewed as legitimate in rural South Africa where the reach of government is limited in dealing with socio-economic and political concerns that include administration and allocation of land. However, the current attempt to put administrative and rural land management matters in the rural areas under the power of local governments is viewed by the traditional leaders as erosion of their jurisdiction and competence (Ibid). Chieftaincy in post-apartheid South Africa was being reinvigorated as symbol of representation.

Recognizing traditional authority has a number of negative implications for equitable land allocation, entrenching democratic local government, ensuring gender equality and universal franchise. The authority of chiefs is ascribed through lineage rather than merit-based achievement and the principles governing patriarchy ensure that major decisions on land allocation and local government are almost invariably taken by men only. The catalogue of collaboration of traditional authorities with the Apartheid system, their autocratic abuse of power and corruption especially during the Apartheid era in general and following the introduction of the Bantu Authorities Act, self-government and “independence” of some Bantustans in particular is well documented (Ntsebeza, 1999).

The contemporary direction in African studies favoring traditional political institutions does not claim for overall replacement of the existing modern institutions by traditional systems. The trend is rather advocating the need for identifying and blending those desirable attributes of traditional political institutions and systems with the currently existing modern systems of government in the continent. In this vein, the need for incorporating some of the desirable elements of traditional governance and institutions in the modern state systems is advocated (Hamer, 2007). According to these scholars, there are discernible qualities and useful attributes of indigenous governance institutions and systems that can be used to strengthen formal structures and arrangements of modern governance. In this connection, it is to be recalled that there are different projects and studies related to interventions aimed at adopting traditional values and practices of governance and political systems in some of the countries in Southern Africa (Hinz, 2007).

According to the findings of a study conducted by ECA (2007b) in Southern Africa, the failure of modernist experiments (socialist and market-led) brought about attractions aimed at adopting traditional modes of governance. This is on the rise due to wider acceptance from the public thereby leading to official recognition of traditional institutions and operational mechanisms. However, it was noted that traditional leaders are playing limited roles resulting from lack of favorable institutional arrangements and deficits underpinning the politico-legal context. According to Hinz (2007), countries like Namibia are incorporating traditional modes of governance systems into their modern and formal political settings.

Kendie and Guri (2005:1) put the function of indigenous institutions in Ghana as follows:

In Ghana, in spite of a modern national political organizational system, the majority of the people (in the rural areas) are organized around various indigenous institutions for carrying out the activities that are important for their development and wellbeing. In fact, civil society in rural Ghana is embedded within these indigenous institutions and they are key to the organization of people at the rural level for their socio-economic development.

Due to the exclusion of Ghanaian indigenous institutions in the 1998 decentralization scheme, the strategy has largely failed to achieve the objective of enhancing local participation in the development process (Kendie and Guri, 2005). Generally, the need for increased recognition and empowerment of traditional institutions by blending them with the existing formal arrangements has become the fashion of the day in African studies. Since there is no any full-fledged solution that fits all societies in Africa, undertaking studies on how distinct communities govern themselves in a traditional manner and how such governance practices could be coordinated with the existing western style politico-legal system of the “modern” state is crucial.

2.1.2. State of Affairs Regarding Practices of Traditional Institutions in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is one few states in Africa with a long tradition of statehood. However, the state formation process that resulted in the current shape and nature of the Ethiopian state was completed at the turn of the 19th century. The modern state formation process in Ethiopia unfolded by embracing the western style of unification without giving due recognition to diversity and local traditions. Clapham (2009:15) describes the nature of polity and nation building process in Ethiopia as follows:

Ethiopia is indeed a very peculiar country: it was never an apartheid-style state, with power reserved to the members of one particular nationality, but has always been multi-national. It has however had a dominant cultural core, notably represented by Orthodox Christianity, the Amharic language, and the acceptance of the ‘great tradition’ of Ethiopian history, which anyone who wanted to ‘belong’ to the state has had to adopt. The resulting sense of inequality was then greatly intensified by the great expansion of the territory of the Ethiopian state at the time of Emperor Menilek, and

by the intensely exploitative system of land-holding that was then established, as well as by the deeply authoritarian culture of the state itself.

The 19th century expansion of the traditional Ethiopian state spearheaded by Menelik II especially towards the South, should be viewed from different angles. In fact the basis for the need to analyze the drivers underlying the expansion from different perspectives arose from the divergence of views espoused by different writers. This process is alternatively termed as expansion, incorporation, conquest, unification, etc., depending on the positions of different scholars dealing with the issue. From among these views, therefore, two major polarized views, namely colonial expansion and re-unification emerged.

Different motives underpin the usage of the different terminologies in regard to the same issue and process. Those who refer to the process as unification (Tadesse, 1972) cite the drives of the medieval rulers of the highland Christian kingdom and the influence of the Orthodox Christian church in encouraging expansion towards the south. Others (Triulzi, 1983) compare the process with the European conquest of the Horn of Africa sub-region and invoke the attendant violence that accompanied expediting the colonial project as the major element that dubbed the expansion of the Ethiopian state as colonial occupation. Others (Bereket, 1980) refer to the meanings of connotations used by the regime to refer to the newly incorporated territories as the evidence for labeling the expansion as a colonial conquest.

The positions that were advanced by the aforementioned authors, however, were not substantially adequate sources to establish the fact, since there still exist different perspectives that tend to disprove these assumptions. For instance, one of the laws of spatial growth of a state is the incorporation of small territories to the aggregate (Glassner and Blij, 1989). Accordingly, Menelik's expansion could be viewed as spatial growth of the modern state. The other is the Marxist school of thought that set criteria for the imperialist and colonialist drives asserting that the criteria for colonial control is that the state should have managed to effect capitalist accumulation and technological advancement that provide the impetus to form the basis of the quest for exploiting and appropriating the resources of conquered territories (Lewis, 1983), which do not tally with the Ethiopian reality of the time. Ethiopia has never reached this stage of capitalist development and had thus not materially equipped (Ibid) to

qualify as a colonial power. Hence, feudal expansion cannot be termed as colonization but conquest.

It is true that Ethiopia had adhered to the western system of nation-state building without imitating the processes involved in the unfolding of European colonialism. In this regard, David Turton (2006:4) puts the situation as follows:

Ethiopia, which owes its existence not to European Colonialism but to 'Western-style' dominant-group 'nation-building by an ethno-national' group, the Shewan Amhara, is an obvious exception to this rule. It is not surprising, therefore, that some Ethiopian minorities should have responded to Amhara domination by seeking autonomy and even succession. Nor is it surprising that multinational federalism should have been chosen as a way of attempting to accommodate different subnational identities within a national, Ethiopian identity.

Empirical studies on the interface between the modernist projects of state-oriented agents and the aspirations and understandings of Ethiopia's rural peasant and pastoralist populations currently abound (Donham, 1999; Abbink 2000). Scott (1998) suggested that the gulf between 'high modernist ideology' and 'practical local knowledge', or '*metis*', is at the root of the way in which schemes to improve the human condition have failed'. In contemporary Ethiopia, it seems that the modernist ideology dominates the nature of politics despite that there are still many pockets where traditional politics and traditional knowledge systems prevail and determine the nature of socio-economic and political life of society.

The Ethiopian Federal arrangement that is currently at work recognizes multiculturalism and ethnic diversity as the dominant features of Ethiopian society. This is the first bold move of its kind against the historic core elements of the mainstream Ethiopian politics that tended to downplay these features in the past. This, among others, is why many scholars and political practitioners dub the new dispensation as being grounded on 'ethnic federalism' (Vaughan, 2006), which seemed to offer the prospect of a shift away from the 'high modernism, of the state's past projects to 'develop' its people, apparently in favour of the collective perspectives of groups of its citizens (Ibid). According to a study by APAP (2011), two challenges have been at the forefront of the Ethiopian national agenda over the past century—building a functioning nation-state and having a competitive and productive economy. Accepting and

implementing what appears to be a successful model—the model of Europe--became one of the eminent response to these challenges.

Beginning from the attempt of constituting a modern empire state in the 19th century, the Ethiopian state has been constantly engaged in a long-drawn effort of adopting governance models from the west in order to set the pace of progress of all Ethiopians towards “civilization” and “development”. According to APAP (2011:12):

... The State and its institutions have thus managed to cater for the needs of only a small sector of the Ethiopian population. Even in functions of ruling, policing and security which are priority tasks for any state, the Ethiopian State had been incapable of covering the whole of its territory and population. As a result, Ethiopians had to either forego having some of their needs satisfied, or find their own means, independent of the state, to cater for their priority. This is thus the overall context within which traditional institutions have to be viewed. They are a continuation of age-old practices. They are also a manifestation of the dichotomy between the formal state law and their structures on the one hand, and the customary practices and institutions of Ethiopians on the other hand. More significantly, they are institutions which address existing social needs that are experienced by individuals and communities but which are not being satisfactorily addressed by the formal state and its laws and institutions.

Despite the fact that plenty of studies are undertaken in anthropology in Ethiopia, those dealing with the dynamics of traditional political institutions and local leaders are limited. There is plenty of literature on southern and western Africa on chieftaincy and traditional political institutions which help to understand the overall picture of the institutions. The premise of this study is that it is possible to harness desirable attributes and qualities of traditional political institutions in Ethiopia provided that they are studied properly. The contemporary politico-legal arrangement in Ethiopia that extended recognition to the positive aspects of local culture provides fertile ground for innovatively incorporating the teneable and useful aspects of traditional modes of governance to formal structures and arrangements. However, it is not easy to simply mix up the formal and informal due to the fact that each locality has its own distinct version of modes of governance and administrative system. In the light of this, there is a need for a proper understanding and interpretation of specific local contexts in order to come up

with concrete suggestions. In this connection, it would be worthwhile to take examples of two Ethiopian ethnic groups (Burji and Oromo) that managed to maintain some of their traditional institutions that serve the management of community affairs in the respective areas.

Despite the fact that the role of traditional governance and political systems is accorded official recognition in Ethiopia, there is no legal backing extended to the role of leaders of traditional institutions in reality. This notwithstanding, however, the institutions and their leaders continue to be active in dealing with multifaceted problems affecting socio-economic and political lives of communities at grassroots level. As indicated above, the Sidama people have been practicing traditional governance since the distant past until the end of 20th century despite the increasing influences and domination of the formal system of administration imposed for more than a century. Similarly, different ethnic groups in Ethiopia share common experience and face similar challenges as had been the case in Sidama.

Oromo society, which is historically known for practicing a well-articulated and organized governance system, has been facing dilemma in terms of entrenching the indigenous system while at the same time being forced to embrace the ‘modern’ governance and political system introduced following its incorporation.

The Burji ethnic group in Southern Ethiopia has retained its well-structured governance system that is currently facing challenges in the course of operating alongside the formal structures of government without getting any legal recognition that is worthy of mention.

The Burji, inhabiting the localities lying south of the Amaro Mountains situated on the eastern side of the southern Ethiopian Rift Valley, are agriculturalists who speak Ean East- Cushitic language (Kellner, 2009). The Burji special Woreda is part of the thirteen zones and eight special *Woredas* located in the southeastern part of SNNPR. Currently, the special woreda is merged with Konso, Amaro and Derash special *woredas* to form the Segen Zone, which became the ninth zonal administration in SNNPR. The Burji are settled in 24 rural *kebeles* and one urban center. According to the 2006 Census, the population of the special woreda stands at 57950 (SNNPRS, Finance and Economic Development Bureau, 2006) of which the youth constitute the majority. In the Burji Special Woreda, the Burji language is the most widely spoken. There are also few other ethnic groups who speak Amharic, Koreta, Afan Oromo and Konso that are living in harmony with the Burji in the special *woreda*.

In terms of domicile, the Burji live in clustered villages in groups. In each locality the settlements and farmlands are separately organized and each cluster has its own culturally defined boundary known as *Olcho*. There are eight olchos, which enjoy traditional recognition and to some extent the support of the local government (Markos, 2011a). Currently, the majority of the Burji live in Mersabit, Kenya, which has become a new center from which they play a major part in socio-economic activities of Northern Kenya. Nevertheless, their traditional home, the Burji Special *Woreda* in Ethiopia, is still their socio-cultural and spiritual locus.

Burji society has developed and maintained the traditional governance system, which is characterized by a system of representation and associated practices. The overall electoral and representation process is known as *basha* through which different office holders are elected and appointed. Historically, there are two assumptions in this regard: that there was no administrative system in place prior to the time of the settlement of the Burji in their current place of domicile and that there was an independent administrative system among the Burji even prior to their movement to Liban. Liban is the first place of settlement of the Burji during their movement to Borana. Amar was considered as the first administrator of the Burji and different leaders of the Burji movement acted as administrators of the Burji obtaining recognition from the public as its representatives (Ibid).

The indigenous administrative system of the Burji plays great roles in solving and managing violent conflicts. All elders with various social roles are expected to actively participate in managing and solving conflicts occurring in the society and beyond (Ibid). There are, generally, four types of conflicts that require adherence to established processes and procedures for resolving and managing conflicts that include homicide, conflict within and between neighbors and between and within families, conflict between different *olchos*, and conflict of the Burji society with other neighboring ethnic groups (Ibid).

Burji traditional governance is anchored in the council system of which the highest authority is known as *Anish-Gors* council. The overall structure and composition of the council has similarity with a modern representative council or parliamentary system. In the council, all elders with high social, political and spiritual status are represented. The council encompasses the former office holders, the incumbent officials and the leaders of each clan, and the

assistants of the core office holders. The core office holders are *Woma*, *Dyna* and *Masha*, each of which has its own organizational feature that can support and advise the office holders in their dealings with multifaceted socio-cultural, political and economic issues of the society (Ibid). The councils as widely recognized traditional institutions also handle issues regarding land tenure by following a series of procedures. Plots around homesteads are classified as inner zones for private use whereas those in the outer zones are communal property. However, Burji land tenure system is now partly placed under private ownership (Anborn, 1984). Land is viewed as the key factor of production since people's livelihoods are highly dependent on it. Whenever the youth reach the age of maturity, the councils allocate plots of land from the parcels available in the outer zone. Nowadays, there is no much land resources reserved for communal use with the exception of some protected forest areas and adjacent disputed territories contested by neighboring ethnic groups (Markos, 2011a).

The basis for the workings of traditional political institutions and regulatory mechanisms is the generational age grade system. This means that the socio-administrative order is formed by the generation group system constituting persons under the same age groups passing through certain ranks at a given time. Apart from this, unilinear descendants as well as territorial groups remain significant (Anborn, 1984). The Burji age-grade system shares several common features with other Cushitic-speaking groups like the Oromo, the Sidama, the Gedeo, etc. This focuses on physical and mental preparation of the youth until the level of maturity is attained. It is the system of indoctrination of the youth to properly understand the culture and communal lifestyle of their communities and then assume more responsibility. There are a series of steps and procedures to be followed by those members of the age-grade system in order to attain the status of maturity for graduation the ceremony of which is one of the important cultural rituals celebrated through festivities (Ibid).

The overall socio-cultural system of the Burji has undergone changes since incorporation into the empire state of Ethiopia. As a policy direction, the imperial regime carried out a series of measures that are aimed at introducing changes in the previously existing cultural and religious setups. This was mainly justified by the need for establishing uniformity in culture, language and religion so as to bring about unity and integration into the polity. The study postulates that there are lots of socio-cultural practices some of which couldn't be even properly recorded and

described whereas most have totally ceased to be practiced currently. This is mainly due to the previously prevalent national oppression that adversely affected the national identity of the Burji society on the one hand and the influence of new developments that rendered several cultural practices outdated on the other. Most of the other ethnic groups in the Southern Ethiopia were also affected in a similar manner. It should also be noted that the Burji socio-cultural and political system largely remains intact unlike what took place in many other areas inhabited by different ethnic groups.

Some of the values and practices retained by the Burji, therefore, could serve as exemplary for others that seek to preserve the positive aspects of their culture (Ibid). It is worth mentioning that one of such enduring practices in Burji society that can be emulated by others is the indigenous governance system that allows for a transition of power from incumbent leaders to those that are incoming. As already mentioned, the local officials support the Burji traditional system for various reasons and work in collaboration with community leaders. In this regard, the overall support by the local officials in order to maintain those cultural values should be appreciated regardless of the underlying reasons. This notwithstanding, however, the onus of preserving traditional values and belief systems and traditional cultural practices is shouldered by the older generation due to the fact that the multiplicity of influences and exposures to urban life is increasingly making the youth neglect them.

At this juncture, for the purpose of broadening the scope of comparison as regards the workings of traditional institutions in Sidama, a brief mention of a look the *Gaadda* system practiced by the Oromo would be worthwhile. The Oromo are the single largest ethnic group in Ethiopia constituting roughly one third of the country's population. They speak *Afaan Oromo* (the language of Oromo), which belongs to the Eastern Cushitic family of Afro-Asiatic phylum. The Oromo are the largest Cushitic-speaking group living in Northeast and East Africa. Available information suggests that the Oromo existed as a community in the Horn of Africa for several millennia (Prouty and Rosenfeld 1981). Bates (1979) states that the Oromo "were a very ancient race, the indigenous stock, perhaps, on which most other peoples in this part of Eastern Africa have been grafted". Historical records show that they were practicing agriculture and herding as the bastion of the economy for quite a long period of time around Walabu proper

(Hussein 2004). The Oromo predominantly live in Oromia region, which is the largest regional state in the country covering 284538 square kilometers¹.

Prior to the introduction and expansion of Islam and Christianity, the Oromo had their own traditional African religion called *Waaqeffannaa*, belief in *Waaq* (the supreme God). Currently, the major religions practiced in Ethiopia are Islam and Christianity. Following their influential socio-political movement into the hinterlands of present-day Ethiopia, the Oromo had some contact with Islam before the 19th century (Hussien, 2004). In nearly all areas of social relations, Oromo tradition deflated hierarchy in favor of egalitarian norms. Although differentials in rank and power exist throughout Oromo society, Oromo customary practices tend to minimize the significance of sharp class differentiation. Delegated authority tends to be balanced by a countervailing authority held by others. Those who occupy prestigious positions were regarded ambivalently and are treated with humor if not ridicule. Thus, although the father in Oromo families plays the role of a patriarchal figure, good-humored, bantering relationships with his wife and children offset the deference due him (Levine, 2007).

The *gada* system is an administrative system of classes (*luba*) that succeeded each other every eight years in assuming military, economic, political, and ritual responsibilities. The traditional *gada* government developed by the Oromo organizes and orders society around political, economic, social, cultural, and religious institutions. It is not yet adequately known when and how this system emerged. However, Asmerom (2006) noted that its existence as a full-fledged system was recorded at the beginning of the sixteenth century when the Oromo were under one *gada* administration. Bonnie Holcomb (cited in Asafa Jalata, 2009) noted that the *gada* system organized the Oromo people in an all-encompassing republican-style setup even before the few European pilgrims arrived on the shores of North America from Europe and built a democratic association at a later stage. According to Asmerom (1973) the word *gadaa* “stands for several related ideas. It is, first of all, the concept of standing for the whole way of life. More specifically, however, it refers to any period of eight years during which a class stays in power”. The *gada* system and its institution are organized around political, economic, social, cultural, and religious functions. According to Baissa Lemmu (2004: 101):

¹Wikipedia, accessed in 2013

Gadaa government comprised a hierarchy of triple levels of government: the national, the regional and the local. At the pan-Oromo level, the national government was led by an elected luba council [leaders] formed from representatives of the major Oromo moieties clan families and clans, under the presidency of the abba gadaa and his two deputies . . . The national leadership was responsible for such important matters as legislation and enforcement of general laws, handling issues of war and peace and coordinating the nation's defense, management of intra-Oromo clan conflicts and dealing with non-Oromo people.

The Oromo age-set system provides clear structural reference to members of the society so that they develop a consistent and stable sense of “self” and “others”. Each male in the society moves through the age-grade system, spending a period of eight consecutive years in each grade (Asmerom, 2006). Since there are five grades, it takes an individual a period of 40 years to pass through the entire continuum of the system. The key feature of this age-grade system is that a man enters the lowest grade at the moment his father retires from the highest grade. In other words, a son enters the system exactly 40 years after the entry of his father.

The *gada* system is considered as one of the most democratic traditional governance institutions where leaders are elected in a democratic and transparent manner. Asafa Jalata (2009:4) describes the legitimacy of the system as follows:

The gada system accepted the Oromo people as the ultimate source of authority and believed nobody was above the rule of law. Gadaaofficials were elected by established criteria by the people from the qoondalagrade and received rigorous training in gada philosophy and governance for eight years before they entered the lubagrade (administrative grade); the main criteria for election or selection to office included bravery, knowledge, honesty, demonstrated ability to govern, etc.

What are the particular roles assigned to the males in each grade? The anthropologist George Peter Murdock (1959) gives a concise description:

During the first grade ...males are forbidden to have sex relations and they wander about begging food, which is always termed "milk" from married women. This is strongly suggestive of the behavior of infants. During the second grade they become

initiated into sexual life but without forming stable relationships, and they engage in masked processions and behave generally in an irresponsible manner suggestive of adolescence. In the third grade they serve as warriors and are permitted to marry. Military valor is encouraged in some tribes... by requiring the taking of the genitals of a slain enemy as a trophy to qualify for full participation in the activities of the next, or ruling, grade. When an age set enters .the fourth, or Luba, grade, its members take over all important administrative, judicial, and priestly offices in the tribe and run its affairs for eight years. ...The chief of the age-set, elected when it occupied the second grade, now becomes the high chief of the tribe. Another man becomes speaker of the general assembly. Others assume various administrative and judicial offices-chief priest, finance minister, and so on. During the last, or Yuba grade, these men relinquish their posts and become "guardians," serving the new officials in a purely advisory capacity.

Under *gada*, the Oromo would hold a popular assembly known as the *Gumi Gayo* every eight years, where laws were established for the following eight years and customary laws are also revised periodically (Asmerom, 2007). A democratically elected leader, the *Abba Gada*, presided over the system for an eight-year term. The structural complexities of the Boran *gada* system have been and still officiated as follows:

- *Abbaa Boku/Abbaa Gadaa* (the president with 2 deputies)
- *Abbaa Chaffe* (the chairman of assembly)
- *Abbaa Dubbi*(the speaker)
- *Abbaa Seera*(the memorizer of laws)
- *Abbaa Alanga*(the judge)
- *Abbaa Duula*(the army commander)
- *Abbaa Sa'a*(the economy officer)

According to Desalegn (2007), the foundation of the *gada* system is rooted in the informal or customary Oromo institutions of *aadaa* (custom or tradition), *seera* (Boran laws), *safuu* (the Oromo concept of ethics), and *Seera* (justice). The term of office of leaders is limited to eight years and subjected to public review and censure in the middle of the term of tenure as the

need arises. Observance of the rule of law is crucial in implementing the system. Leaders who violated the law of the land or whose family members could not maintain the standard behavior and practice as required by the established norms and customary practices were recalled before the end of their term of office. There was also a parallel institution for women that was designed for undertaking activities in line with the principle of *gada*. This was known *assiqqeew* whose main role is maintaining a system of check and balance in the system and defending the core values of Oromo society (Asafa, 2009).

The practice and acceptance of the *gada* system in the wider Oromo community has been declining since the commencement of Ethiopia's modern state formation process and the spread of new religions (Christianity and Islam) to the northeastern part of Africa. Although it lacks formal recognition and legal leverage, the *gada* institution still plays significant roles in solving socio-cultural and political problems as well as managing conflicts in some parts of Oromia. Given that one of the central objectives of this study is to identify traditional institutions that are potent in addressing socio-political problems at grassroots level, designing the way on how these could operate in tandem with the formal structures of government is important.

In general, the state formation process in Ethiopia was undertaken on the basis of modernization and abandoning the various attributes of tradition and neglecting the need for nurturing and maintaining the useful and tenable aspects of traditional governance mechanisms. However, there are limited attempts indicating that the government recognizes the importance of traditional values and practices in dispute resolution as a means of dealing with problems that periodically surface. Unlike what used to be the case in the past, the current trends in federalism and official recognition and promotion of multiculturalism and diversity management provide broader spaces and opportunities that help in preserving useful aspects of traditionalism.

In its relations with the mainstream political establishment, the Sidama share more or less similar characteristics with the Burji and the Oromo. The Sidama also have age-old traditional institutions and governance practices that are struggling to co-exist with the formal structures of the formal political establishment. A recent development in the direction of accommodating diversity is also in the process of benefiting the Sidama in terms of preserving identity and

developing cultural markers. However, no official recognition is yet extended to indigenous political institutions of the Sidama. Therefore, more studies must be undertaken to identify viable traditional mechanisms and incorporate them in the workings of the ‘modern system’ with a view to improving the modes of governance and state-society relations in contemporary Sidama and Ethiopia at large.

2.2. Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

Conceptualization of key terms used in the study is based on the context and perspective of the research theme, which helps in the proper understanding of and dealing with the problem under study. There are several key concepts used in this study that need further definition and explanation. Hence, it would be necessary to assign appropriate meanings for the purpose at hand. These include governance, tradition, indigenous, ethnicity, traditional governance and institutions, modernization, ethnic community, gerontocracy, federalism, informal institution, modernization, legitimacy, etc. These are, therefore, identified as key concepts that deserve standard definition.

2.2.1. Definition of Key Concepts

The term indigenous is mainly used by some writers to refer to aboriginal inhabitants of a territory who are relatively powerless and partly integrated into the dominant nation-state system (Eriksen, 2010). Others like Minority Rights Group (1990) define the term in association with non-industrial mode of production and statelessness. Indigenous peoples are the original inhabitants of the geographic space that was subsequently taken away from them by outsiders either through conquest, occupation, settlement, or a combination of all three (Robert Lee-Nichols, 2007). In contemporary international relations, the definition of indigenous people is used to identify marginalized segments of local population vis-à-vis the European settlers who dominate socio-economic and political life in the subjugated localities. Based on the aforementioned assertions, one can discern that indigenous people may be regarded as ethnic minorities not necessarily in the demographic sense of the term but also in terms of marginalization in socio-cultural, economic and political life. Some writers coin the

term indigenous to depict aboriginal community with isolated nomadic life styles (Fukuyama, 2011).

It seems that different writers currently use the term from the point of view of different contextual settings thereby showing some inconsistency in defining the term. Some use the term 'indigenous' interchangeably with what is known as traditional. According to the UN Declaration on Indigenous People (1995), the term indigenous people does not necessarily refer to traditional institutions but rather "the first people or the aborigines". Hence traditional institutions are directly linked with indigenous people. In the context of this study, the word indigenous is used to refer to the culture, the socio-economic system, way of life, and ways of doing things that are not influenced by others.

Governance Encyclopedia (2007) attributes the term indigenous to those subjugated since the late fifteenth century by European colonial powers. The same is true of indigenous governance defined as the myriad ways in which these peoples continue to formulate, organize, and actualize their self-rule in formal and informal settings. These are categorized into three broad classifications, namely pre-colonial political life; practice of its elements in the colonial era either in coordination with or sanctioned by colonial rule and indigenous movements in anti-colonial struggle or in post-colonial world (Robert Lee-Nichols, 2007). For Erekson (2010) indigenous people means a non-state people always linked with a non-industrial mode of production that represent a way of life that often renders them vulnerable to encroachment by the influences of modernization and the modern state.

Institution is defined as the rules, roles and structures developed by people to organize their joint activities (Kendie and Guri, 2005). Olson (1965) understands institutions as collectively agreed upon social arrangements that govern the interactions among members of a given group of people. According to Kendie and Guri (2005:1):

Indigenous institutions shall refer to the societal norms, values, beliefs and cosmovisions that guide human interaction in any particular community or locality. Indigenous institution also refers to the leadership structures within the community (chiefs, Queen mothers, tindanas- the traditional land owners- elders, clan heads, etc) and their functional roles which ensure that the norms and values of the community are respected. It also includes practices such as the rituals and rites of the people, the

funerals, the dowry system, festivals, and the shrines or the places of worship of the people.

In the case of the Sidama, it is difficult and inappropriate to compare the people with aborigines. Preliminary studies (Hamer, 1987; Stanley, 1966; Tolo, 1998; Maccani, 1986; Betena, 1983) suggest that the Sidama are indigenous whose traditional institutions were vibrant and effective. There are various traditional institutions that deal with different important issues and concerns. However, this study deals with governance institutions that are concerned with administrative and political matters of the different communities in the study area. In the light of this, both terms (traditional and indigenous) are interchangeably used with institutions that are concerned with matters that are administrative and/ or political in nature.

In the contemporary Ethiopian context, traditional institutions refer to those informal institutions that serve the community at local and grassroots level dealing with socio-economic and political matters. In Sidama, there are indigenous social and political institutions whose influences have been declining since the end of 19th century in regulating socio-economic and political lives of the society. However, they still have sizeable numbers of adherents despite the diminishing trend in their potency (Hamer, 1987). Traditional institutions in Sidama can be categorized as gerontocratic, which is a system dominated by elders. In a gerontocracy, people who are substantially older than the bulk of the population hold major powers in running traditional institutions. Hamer (1998) argues that in some cases, a gerontocracy can be extremely stable, thanks to its legitimacy and acceptance.

This notwithstanding however, gerontocracies often struggle to remain in place when societies undergo rapid changes in the face of the former's lack flexibility (Ibid). Gerontocratic society is considered as egalitarian while at the same time enjoying greater leverage in making decisions and influencing the rule of the game in socio-economic and cultural affairs and managing conflicts. Sidama was an egalitarian society in which the role of elders was very crucial in providing leadership (Ibid). In this study, the pervasiveness of gerontocracy in Sidama and how elders served the people for centuries in preserving the societal order is examined. In Sidama, elders have the upper hand and increased influence in dealing with issues that range from family matters to broader societal concerns.

Ethnic community is a self-defined human collectivity whose members espouse a myth of common ancestry, shared memories, one or more elements of common culture, including a link with a territory, and a measure of solidarity, at least among the upper strata (Smith, 1986). Ethnicity refers to the collective identification and political expression of ethnic community invoking communities' claims or counter-claims in the political practices of government. According to Eriksen (2010), ethnicity is an aspect of social relationship between agents who consider themselves as culturally distinct from members of other groups with whom they have a minimum regular interaction. Ethnicity also refers to the aspects of meaning in the creation of identity, which encompasses political, organizational and symbolic factors. In this connection, institutions and practices of traditionalism among people who are sometimes identified as ethnic communities or ethnic groups abound in Africa.

According to Koehn (1999 cited in Tsegaye 2001), there are three approaches that explain ethnicity. The first is primordialism, which considers ethnicity as permanent characteristics of individuals and communities sharing common features in religion, culture and social organization or language that are considered to be objectively 'given'. The second is constructivism that emphasizes the inclusion of additional subjective elements as important aspects of ethnicity. This approach assumes that ethnicity is constructed from dense webs of social interactions and hence a group attitude as regards custom, decent or even physical structure as important aspects that are involved. Finally, instrumentalism focuses more on the process of political mobilization and manipulation by which social groups are constituted on the basis of ethnic attributes such as nationality, religion, race or language. According to this approach, ethnicity has little independent standing outside the political processes in which collective ends are sought.

The constitution of Ethiopia defines Ethiopian ethnic groups as nations, nationalities and peoples. Article 39(5) of the constitution provides limited definition for the terms nation, nationality and people. It reads as follows:

Nation, Nationality or People" for the purpose of this Constitution is a group of people who have or share large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common

psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory.

However, the constitution does not provide clear definition and interpretation of what is meant by nation, nationality or people as a result of which it has become unprecise categorization. Some writers like Tsegaye (2004) view the aforementioned definition as confusing due to its use of one and the same reference to describe all the three categories. One of the seminal works on these concepts is the collection of articles and speeches by Joseph Stalin entitled “Marxism and the National Colonial Question” (1976), which at least provides first hand conceptualization of each from the Marxist point of view. Stalin (1976) tried to specify these concepts with illustrative examples of the socio-political phenomena of the world in the early 1900s. According to Stalin (1976:22), “A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.”

All definitions in the official Ethiopian legal documents identify the Sidama as one of the ethnic groups in Ethiopia, which ranks fifth in terms of population size in Ethiopia. This is also indicated in the successive censuses that were conducted in the last two decades. With distinct culture, language and other markers of ethnicity, the Sidama are currently asserting their right to self-determination for preserving their identity as a distinct group. For the purpose of this study, therefore, Sidama is conventionally termed as a nation.

Federalism as a principle and philosophy seeks to manage diversity and accommodate differences. Federalism refers to the philosophical perspectives promoting the federal solution while federation is an empirical phenomenon and a particular form of institutional arrangement (Burgess, 1993). As a normative political philosophy, federalism prescribes a set of principles that imply the need for combining joint action aimed at realizing self-government and shared-rule. Federal political systems adopt various forms like federations, confederations, unions, federacies, associated states, condominiums, leagues, and cross-border functional authorities. Federalism is tailored to fit to specific conditions for addressing deficits that are unfavorable to constitutional democracy that are not universal but rather peculiar to certain societies (Andreas, 2003). Theories and practices of federalism reflect the level of local autonomy of the local entity in terms of its legislative, executive and judiciary branches although the

prevalent political and social realities are more diverse and complex. Managing diversity and entrusting accountability and responsibility to local and regional government by kickstarting decentralization-cum-devolution is thus the essence of federalism.

Ethiopia has been pursuing federalism as a key principle and mode of state-society relations by defining the form and essence of governance and regime type during the post-1991 years. The Ethiopian federal arrangement is basically designed to address the problem of accommodating ethnic diversity. It recognizes ethnic diversity and strives to address the issue of self-determination and fair representation of all ethnic groups in the national and other levels of government. Hence, ethnicity is highly linked with federalism and the issues of diversity management in the Ethiopian context. In the immediate aftermath of the post-1991 arrangement, Sidama had been accorded a regional status along with two other ethnic groups. However, five regions were merged to form SNNPRS and Sidama is constituted as a zone under this region in the 1995 constitution.

Culture is an intrinsic part of life and awareness of individuals and communities. It is a living asset of past and present creative activity, which has shaped the system of values, traditions and tastes that define the distinctive genius of people over the centuries. Thus culture is bound to make an imprint on economic activity and define the strength and weaknesses of a society's productive process². Broadly speaking, traditional political institutions and practices are part of culture or are highly associated with cultural values. Charles A. Ellwood (cited in Amponsah, 2010:597) explains the multiplicity of culture as:

a collective name for all behaviour patterns socially acquired and socially transmitted by means of symbols; hence a name for distinctive achievements of human groups, including not only such items as language, tool making, industry, art, science, law, government, morals and religion, but also the material instruments or artefacts in which cultural achievements [sic] are embodied and by which intellectual cultural features are given practical effect, such as buildings, tools, machines, communication devices, art objects, etc.... The essential part of culture is to be found in the patterns embodied in the social traditions of group, that is, in knowledge, ideas, beliefs, values,

²Online source: Federico Mayor, Director General of UNESCO 1989, accessed on June 2011

standards, and sentiments prevalent in the group. The overt part of culture is to be found in the actual behaviour of the group, usually in its usages, customs, and institutions.... The essential part of culture seems to be an appreciation of values with reference to life conditions. The purely behaviouristic definition of culture is, therefore inadequate. Complete definition must include the subjective and objective aspects of culture. Practically, the culture of the human group is summed up in its traditions and customs; but tradition, as the subjective side of culture is the essential core.

There is a loose link between culture and traditional institutions. Traditional political or social institutions are components of the overall cultural life of the society. The strength of traditional institutions and the extent of their influence in the society vary from culture to culture. According to a study conducted by APAP (2011), traditional institutions are characterized in terms of longevity of existence in discharging certain functions and the degree of their acceptance by the community. The study depicts the community's consent as basis and source of legitimacy. Accordingly, traditional institutions refer to those entities whose processes, actions, roles, participants, and results are accepted by a community as concordant with tradition. It is also tradition on the basis of which indigenous institutions derive their legitimacy and authority as markers of societal adherence to mechanisms, rules and procedures involved.

Given their acceptance in this manner, traditional institutions often engage in conflict management activities and restorative justice as pressing concerns of their constituencies. For example, the western interpretation of *ubuntu* and restorative justice is more or less in line with this although the actual practice may be different. *Ubuntu* is the African concept of community, which provides a corrective hermeneutic for Western salvation theology that focuses on the individual. According to Archbishop Desmond Tutu (cited in Bell, 2002), the African understanding of *Ubuntu* is far more restorative – not so much to punish as to restore the balance that has been knocked askew. Tutu stated that “the justice we hope for is restorative of the dignity of the people” (Ibid). This shows that the way justice is understood in traditional African society is slightly different from what is understood in the modern or western perspective. Hence the study of traditional institutions helps to understand the basic philosophies and perspectives of leadership and administration whose line of thought is not yet fully accounted for and systematized for wider generation of knowledge.

In Sidama, there is the concept of *halaale* implying what is understood as “the true way of life” (Hamer, 1987) or “the ultimate justice”. The concept of *halaale* is central in decision-making and conflict management. It focuses on remedies and restoring harmony in the society than simply punishing offenders. Among the Sidama, it is possible to restore peace, harmony and tranquility among and between groups, families and individuals without resorting to retribution and violence.

2.2.2 Theoretical Framework

The research problem that this study seeks to examine made it necessary to employ a multidisciplinary approach by taking note of the fact that there is no any stand alone theory that can be used for analyzing the study findings. Hence methodological approaches pertaining to the fields of political science, political anthropology, political sociology and ethno-history are combined in the course of describing, interpreting and analyzing facts, figures, events, processes, practices, claims, opinions, and values that are pertinent to issues under examination. Accordingly, three areas of theoretical significance are focused on.

The first deals with discussions regarding the discourses in Liberal and Non-Liberal Schools of Thought dealing with divergent assumptions of competing explanatory models in interpreting issues pertinent to the study and form the methodological basis in evaluating the findings. The discourse advanced in these schools of thought would thus help in harnessing their basic assumptions in dealing with ethnicity, collective rights, diversity management, alternative conflict management, and traditional institutions and governance. Second, analysis of the assumptions of the different schools of thought on the role of traditional leadership would be made. Here, comparison of the assumptions is made on the basis of the role and relevance of traditional modes of governance and political systems in contemporary African Society. This varies from extreme valorization of traditional institutions and values to extreme trivializing attempts to harness traditional values and practices to address contemporary problems and issues. Third, discussions on theories of state-society relations that include conceptualization and analysis of different approaches as espoused by different schools of thought vary from liberal to Marxist and those that lie in between in terms of orientation.

Liberal and Non-liberal Theories

Liberalism is one of the prominent ideologies that dominate contemporary socio-political and economic lines of thought and practices. In spite of this, however, it is difficult to precisely define Liberalism due to lack of consensus on the issue (Berlin 1969). However, it is possible to shed light on some of the assumptions espoused by liberals who give more emphasis to individual liberty and identity rather than collective rights and identities in all aspects of socio-economic and political life. Here, the focus is to identify the basic assumptions of liberalism as regards collective identity and dynamism of ethnicity. Contemporary theories of liberal philosophy and communitarianism fail to agree on the issue of ethnic dynamism and national integration. Communitarianism holds that belonging to a community is a primary feature of personhood while liberals emphasize the primacy of the individual by failing to fairly uphold multiculturalism and pluralism. Governance Encyclopedia (in Eagan, 2007:576) defines multiculturalism as follows:

Multiculturalism refers to the position that cultures, races, and ethnicities, particularly those of minority groups, deserve special acknowledgement of their differences within the dominant political culture. This acknowledgement can take the forms of recognition of contributions to the cultural life of the political community as a whole, a demand for special protection under the law for certain cultural groups, or autonomous rights of governance for certain cultures. Multiculturalism is both a response to the fact of cultural pluralism in modern democracies and a way of compensating cultural groups for past exclusion, discrimination, and oppression.

The above definition suggests the need to accommodate diversity in a setting of modern democratic governance. However, the assertions of both liberals and communitarians take strict position on the primacy of the individual over the collective. However, neither provides answer for the search for the coveted 'middle ground' combining respect for cultural difference with recognition of universal rights (Eriksen, 2002).

Communitarianism evolved as a political philosophy by claiming the necessity of attending to community alongside, if not prior to, liberty and equality of the individual. Communitarians believe that the value of community is not sufficiently recognized in liberal theories of justice

or in the public culture of liberal societies (Goodin and Pogge, 2007). Communitarians criticize liberals for separating individuals from the society as if human beings come into the world with no social ties, owning no allegiances, and no emotional attachments. The fairly middle ground in such a debate would be the combination of respect for cultural differences along with recognition of individual rights.

Parekh (2000) attempts to reconcile the basic tenets of liberal individualism with the need for recognizing cultural differences, which is complex and based on both academic research and direct involvement in policy. He notes that while many theorists are sympathetic to cultural pluralism, they present a strong argument in favor of upholding the value of belonging to a community and the intrinsic value of inter-group interaction that is rarely treated. It is thus proposed that dialogic approaches where the plurality of perspectives and their cross-fertilization is needed for entrenching a democratic multiethnic society (Ibid).

In the light of the foregoing, it is necessary to explain some of the assertions that surface in some theories of ethnicity since the study is focused on identifying the nexus between ethnicity, tradition and modernity. In this regard, Koeng (1999) posits three theories of ethnicity, namely Primordialism, Constructivism and Instrumentalism. Primordialism considers ethnicity as a permanent characteristic of individuals and communities sharing common features such as religion, culture, social organization or language that are considered to be objectively “given”. Constructivist theorists assume that ethnic identities can change over time (Chandra, 2007) and argue that there is a need for including additional subjective elements such as psychological make-up as important. According to these theorists, ethnicity is constructed from dense webs of social interactions and hence a group attitude about customs, decent or even physical structure that form major aspects of ethnicity.

In summary, it is claimed that the various strands of constructivism hold that “ethnic groups are fluid and endogenous to a set of social, economic and political processes.” (Ibid: 7). On the other hand, Instrumentalism is more concerned with the process of political mobilization and manipulation by which social groups are constituted on the basis of ethnic attributes such as nationality, religion, race or language. Hence, ethnicity has little independent standing outside the political process in which collective ends are sought. One prominent solution to the

problem is aimed at identifying special rights to be accorded to cultural groups to enable them hold on to their particular customs and traditions (Koeng, 1999).

Kymlicka (cited in Shutter, 2005) suggests the need for recognizing self-governing, polyethnic and special representation rights as group-differentiated rights for protecting cultural minorities in the state. This is because different groups in a liberal society would be suitably equipped to enjoy the protection of their particular cultural values and live as citizens in the liberal nation state (Ibid). To the query on whether respect for difference can be duly honored within the perspective of a Universalist moral and political theory, the democratic solution offered by theorists of deliberative democracy responds in the affirmative. Benhabib (2002) in particular argued that in the modern world, the deliberative model of democracy offers the best prospect in accounting for the kinds of institutions needed to deal with the salience of cultural differences in modern society.

The distinctiveness of the theory of deliberative democracy, according to Benhabib, lies in “...its vision of the interaction between liberal commitments to basic human, civil, and political rights, due process of law, and democratic political struggles in civil society” (Ibid). Benhabib offers a “two-track model” of deliberative democracy according to which cultural disputes are regulated directly and indirectly by the state, but without ending the “dialogue and contestation” that is a marked feature of the “civil public sphere [that is] essential for a multicultural democratic polity” (Ibid). When disputes arise, for example over laws governing cultural minorities, it is not enough to argue whether or not groups should have cultural rights. What is needed is a political process in which cultural minorities can put their case without fear or favor. Yet, this also means minorities recognize that they themselves cannot simply demand to be left alone since their traditions are often subjected to various sorts of pressure. This is precisely so since members of their communities demand change and are willing to take their place in the political process of democratic deliberation.

For Benhabib, this is something that such communities cannot escape since it comprises different and contesting perspectives. The very boundaries of cultural communities are not permanently settled but capable of being reconfigured in the deliberative process. Hence consensus is achievable and group secession from public life has to be resisted (Ibid). It is thus important not to overstate the significance of consensus, since it is at times important to defend

claims made in the name of universal justice. Moral universalism and cultural difference might be in tension but the point is to resolve the tension through engagement in democratic politics. According to Kymilcka (cited in Goodin, 2007), the proliferation of different dimension of liberalism including liberal multiculturalism in recent decades is intended to show that a liberal society is not exclusively 'individualistic' but rather can accommodate and support a rich array of collective identities and associations. This can be done without compromising the basic liberal commitment to the protection of individual civil and political rights. Nowadays, this assertion is gathering momentum in the realm of liberal philosophy especially for the purpose of accommodating and managing diversity in multi-cultural and multi-ethnic societies.

Generally speaking, there are several theories and schools of thought of various persuasions that argue and counter-argue on how to accommodate diversity and how to manage differences for societal good. As is indicated above, some tend to resort to total denial of the need of lending attention to diversity by advocating uniformity in state policies. On the other hand, there are many theorists who strive to devise mechanisms that could be used to accommodate diversity and manage differences. In the light of this, this study seeks to identify mechanisms for accommodating and recognizing different forms of institutional practices and devise the means through which they can operate in tandem with formal structures of government for the good of society.

Perspectives on the Role of Traditional Leadership

As mentioned in the discussion in the conceptual section, the word traditional refers to something different from what is termed as "modern". In this study, it is used to distinguish the western political system introduced to Africa since the unfolding of colonial rule from African indigenous political systems that had been widely practiced in pre-colonial Africa persisting in some communities in Africa without getting due recognition from modern governments.

Mattes (1997) depicts traditional leadership as a backward and or outmoded form of governance that is is totally irrelevant to modern life. On the other hand, various studies (Oomen, 2000, Owusu, 1996, Williams, 2004, Logan, 2008, Keulder, 1998) suggest that it is improper to abandon all forms of traditional leadership totally. The role of traditional leaders

in modern Africa, especially in modern African democracies, is complex and multifaceted. In this regard, there are two commonly used terms in the debate: modernist and traditionalist. Traditionalists regard Africa's traditional chiefs and elders as the true representatives of their people, accessible, respected, and legitimate and, therefore, are still essential to the enterprise of conducting politics in the continent. Keulder (1998:11) describes features of the traditional perspective as follows:

.... For them the institution, traditional leaders and its procedures of governance is not only a simpler form of government, but also more (sic) accessible because it is closer to the subject than any other system of government; subjects have more direct access to their leaders because they live in the same village and any individual can approach the leaders and ask him or her to call a meeting ...; decisions making is based on consensus, which creates greater harmony and unity; it is transparent and participatory because most people may attend tribal meetings and express their views, directly not through representatives; and lastly, harmony and unity prevail because the interests of the tribal unit rather than an individual or group of individuals, are pursued and expressed.

Modernists, by contrast, view traditional authority as gerontocratic, chauvinistic, authoritarian and increasingly irrelevant form of rule that is antithetical to democracy (Oomen, 2000, Logan, 2008). According to Owusu (1996), "modernists" argue that patriarchal traditional systems often silenced the voices of women and the youth. His assertion is substantiated by Molutsi (2004) who contends that in Botswana "the 'kgola democracy' was made up of male tribal elders comprising senior tribesmen. Mattes (1997) questions the democratic nature of the traditional system stating its decision making as coercive and demanding consensus rather than free consent. According to the same source, traditional authorities rely on deterrence and place the community ahead of the individual, and hence, "traditional authorities constitute an anti-democratic or at best a non-democratic form of governance. Modernists thus believe that these institutional absolutes impede the development of a virile, prosperous, democratic, and just society, and thus should not be given place in any progressive society (Owusu, 1996).

In more evocative terms, Oomen describes modernist and traditionalist respectively as "Trivalizers" and "Romantizers". Trivalizers are those who see traditional leaders as leftovers

from a time that is swiftly fading whereas Romantizers are viewed as those who nurture parochial image of traditional leaders as shepherds of communities who still live off the land and follow traditional norms and customs. Goheen (2003:21) describes the link between national and local in his article on Chiefs in Cameroon:

By taking an active role in traditional government, and paying attention to customary law and local opinion when making national decisions, the new elites secure the co-operation of traditional authorities in their leadership and entrepreneurial ventures. They have become the mediators between the local and national arenas, the interpreters as well as the architects of the intersections between customary and national laws. Importantly, by assuming these roles and often acquiring traditional titles, these modern big men assume a legitimate and culturally appropriate social identity.

Traditional leaders may also be valued because they provide a sense of continuity and stability in an era of great change. Williams (2004) is of the view that they can serve as intermediaries who ensure that change occurs in an orderly and familiar way. According to Van-Kessel and Oomen (1997), chiefs have also displayed impressive flexibility by adapting themselves to the needs of the day in an effort to preserve or enhance their position within local communities. Oomen (2000:6) notes the problem of the recent moves on the part of “Trivalizers” and “Romanticizers” as follows:

On the one hand, tradition is trivialized as if it were a rather unfortunate relic of the past that stands in the way of progress and is doomed to disappear in a modern democracy. On the other hand, tradition is romanticized in a manner that gives it a pristine, timeless, pure and sovereign character that is completely incompatible with its actual entanglement and functioning in contemporary society.

The foregoing is thus indicative of the need to finetune African democracy to the realities of modern society at least in terms of creatively adopting some useful attributes of indigenous institutions and traditional political practices. In contemporary debates that underpin the disciplines of political science and African studies, modernist and traditionalist schools of thought have contradictory claims. The modernist assumption dominates the trends in post-colonial African nation-building processes in a manner that depicts traditional political

institutions as an impediment to the values of liberal democracy that enjoy wider recognition in several African societies.

The leaders of African nationalist movements who presided on the transitional dispensation of post-colonial states in their respective countries preferred to marginalize traditional institutions by embracing what is perceived as “modernity”, which is underpinned by western philosophy and lines of thought. As a result, the holders of power constituting African leadership circles viewed traditional institutions as facilitators of colonial rule and inimical to the goals of the first wave of democratization and nation-building. However, the reality is more than half a century of experiment along these lines in present day Africa did not bring about a situation where the ideal of democracy and good governance could be entrenched and sustained.

On the other hand, traditionalists favor indigenous political institutions and propose that these should be brought forward as instruments for buttressing the quest for good governance and democracy. Traditionalists regard Africa’s hereditary chiefs and community elders as the true representatives of people due to their alleged accessibility, recognition and legitimacy. Hence they are viewed as essential intermediaries for entrenching durable political dispensations in the continent (Logan, 2008). This notwithstanding, however, it is argued that the capacity and institutional efficacy of traditional institutions did not persist as was the case earlier due to alienation and marginalization that took effect as a consequence of colonial rule and attendant developments. It is also worthy to note that what came to be known as the phenomena of modernization and urbanization have undermined indigenous cultural values and practices including traditional political institutions.

According to the traditionalists, indigenous institutions have proved both acquiescent and adaptable to changes but still have the capacity to draw on their historical roots in unique and valuable ways that render them to be amenable to adjust to current realities. They see “tradition” – however contested – as a resource that could be used to strengthen the community and polity and overcome the many failures of the Western liberal democratic model as has been applied in Africa (Ibid). Logan finally comes up with the common assumption that lies between these competing explanatory models and schools of thought. This is in the sense of implying that traditional authority and elected political leaders tend to be competitors.

Moreover, the struggle between the two for political power and legitimacy is seen as a zero-sum game (Ibid).

According to Williams (2004), even as chiefs "...have sought to direct and redirect the democratization process", the institutions of traditional leadership and democratic electoral politics may be interacting in a mutually transformative process" that causes each to shape and reshape society's interpretations and understanding of the other. Meneses (2005: 19-20) describes traditional authorities and their laws in the following manner:

Amongst all the entities involved in community justice, the traditional authorities and their law have, for a long time, been the most significant. A particular trait of this form of customary law and justice is the presence of a plurality of culture and symbolic universe- given that what counts as traditional varies from community to community, from ethnic group to ethnic group and also from one historical period to another- but all of these are distinct from the Western Symbolic and cultural universe which dominates in official law and justice. Traditional law and justice, therefore raise two very complex questions, the question of what is traditional and the question of what counts as multicultural.

A study conducted by ECA (2007a) on the relevance of African traditional institutions of governance indicated that the post-colonial states in Africa have failed to establish rights-based political and economic systems of governance that would facilitate the consolidation of state-building and economic development. The same study asserted that the main cause for the failure has been attributed to the prevalent disconnect between indigenous African institutional and cultural values and state building processes that unfolded following accession to independence. After assessing the failure of such attempts, Maxwell Owusu (1992: 3) lamented the adverse effects resulting from the imposition of alien political models on any society. In this vein, he argued that:

...There are obvious dangers in the sweeping and indiscriminate application of theoretical models and procedures to a particular case-study, as there are bound to be setbacks in any attempt to democratize a country without paying serious attention to its history, traditions, culture and symbolic meanings, and economic circumstances.

The failure of liberal democracy in delivering what is expected of it in Africa prompted many scholars to switch their focus towards alternative forms of political systems, namely indigenous African form of democracy (Barber and Watson cited in Owusu, 1992; Bahru, 2008). In this regard, some scholars persistently search for success stories of liberal democracy in Africa. Similarly, the study undertaken by ECA (2007a: 9) regarding the relevance of traditional institutions summarized the problems surrounding governance deficits in Africa as follows:

Africa's deepening crisis, is thus, unlikely to be reversed under the existing duality of institutions. The formal institutions of the State, i.e., rules regulating the structure of polity, property rights, and contracting, cannot be effective if they disregard or contradict the customary rules of the traditional institutions, which govern the lives and livelihood of large segments of the population. For instance, the State unlikely to succeed in state-building and in mobilizing the cooperation of large segments of its citizens for socio-economic development without connecting itself to and harmonizing its political apparatus with the institutions, cultural values and interests of all its constituencies, including rural populations.

Based on his empirical findings, Sharma (2004) has documented the contribution of the traditional structures and traditional leaderships by stating that they are instrumental in entrenching political stability during transitions, democratizing state-society relations, ensuring independence of the judiciary and legitimacy of political and administrative structures, bridging the gap between urban and rural societies, protecting cultural diversity, resisting homogenizing approaches in nation building, and facilitating planning, implementation and monitoring of local development initiatives by consolidating bottom-up processes. This shows that incorporation of traditional modes of governance into formal structures is advantageous in filling the gap left behind by the 'modernization' models of governance and political systems.

Ethiopian society in general and the Sidama in particular have indigenous institutions of governance and conflict management mechanisms, which play significant roles in running day-to-day lives of communities, which could probably be taken as the core elements that keep the peace in times when effective government is lacking or during a situation of power vacuum in the past. In Sidama, even today, informal and traditional institutions play significant roles

in maintaining stability and harmony in the society. In light of this, it is necessary and appropriate to find means and ways of using these in tandem with the modern politico-legal system in a manner that improves the mode of operation of the system thereby contributing to enhanced governance and stability.

Theories on State-Society Relations

The history of state-society relations spans different trajectories of human development since the emergence of the state as a form of political organization and governance. The cornerstone of state-society dichotomy is associated with the notion of the homogenizing disposition of the state itself. It has always been difficult to define the state independent of other variables such as culture and societal values and norms. According to (Michell, 1991), therefore, the boundary between state and society appears elusive, porous, and mobile. Talcot Parsons (cited in Nettle, 1968) identifies the state with maximal control of resources and coercive machinery—a maximization of coercive power that presumably is present in every organization, but is highly pronounced in political organizations par excellence. Parson has neither specifically “appropriated” nor tried to integrate this into his systems theory in any meaningful way. On the other hand, Marxists view state institutions as instruments of domination and exploitation of the poor by the rich.

However, the focus in this section is to briefly show the pattern of state-society relations from various perspectives. Poulantzas (cited in Easton 1981) modifies the Marxist proposition by labeling the state as “condensation of class conflict”. The same author further argues that the state is the relationship of forces which could be described as material condensation of such a relationship among classes and class factions (Ibid). According to Nettle (1968) and Sellers (2010), the state is an institutionalized collective power that is super-ordinate to other organizations and is sovereign vis-a-vis other states, autonomous or distinct from the rest of society, and identified socio-culturally within a purview of national collectivity. According to this view, the state as the highest form of political organization in society must mobilize its citizens for the tasks it deems necessary that also calls for acceptance and legitimacy on the part of members of society.

It should thus be noted that the quality of the state's internal organization and its relations to society affects its capacity and ability to mobilize people and material and resources either positively or otherwise. However, the statist approach to political explanation presents the state as an autonomous entity whose actions is not reducible to or determined by forces in society (Michell, 1991). This approach typically perceives the state as a system of decision making focusing on the formation and expression of authoritative intentions.

The statist approach always begins from the assumption that the state is a distinctive entity, opposed to and set apart from a larger entity known as society. As indicated above, it is extremely difficult to identify and understand the state without explaining its relation with and role in society. States depend on society to survive and function effectively through the cooperation of societal actors in terms of provision of resources and manpower expressed in revenue generation in the form of taxes and mobilization for war including other important engagements in the public realm. On the other hand, societal actors provide the needed cooperation only if the state is regarded as legitimate, perceived as representing societal interests, acts lawfully, treats societal actors justly and fairly, and provides them with information.

States cannot function properly and effectively when state actors and societal forces are unable to cooperate in implementing policies and fail in judiciously sharing the necessary information and resources. This is often the case as examples of several failed state experiments of imposing their whims from above resulting in disastrous outcomes has amply demonstrated (Scott, 1998). Moreover, success requires state actors and societal forces to be bound by multiple ties that allow for a two-way transfer of knowledge and resources (Esman and Uphoff, 1984). A strong bond between societal actors and the state also allows the former to monitor state agents in their discharge of duties and make sure that state agents implement policies in favor of the public interest instead of furthering private gains at the expense of the public good. Societal oversight can help in this regard by preventing the structures of the state from becoming not only unresponsive to public interests but also from becoming ossified and decadent. In other words, in order to function effectively states have to be embedded in society (Evans, 1995).

Two fundamental concepts have been identified in respect to the bond between state and society. First, state-society relation is partly about the state itself. Despite the notorious elusiveness of “stateness”, and the fluctuating fortunes of this concept (Nettl 1968), the notion of stateness has remained useful to identify a set of common organizational, administrative, legal, territorial and socio-cultural attributes of public authority. The cornerstone of the state-society dichotomy is thus the tendency to homogenize and blend different strands of elements that constitute the major underpinnings of the polity. Second, in contrast with purely statist accounts, the notion of state-society relations is viewed as a focal point of examining the interactions and interdependence between the two. Among a range of theoretical perspectives, scholars in the field concur on a broadly similar conclusion that society provides crucial elements of support for the state to be effective, and that a state is critical to collective action in society (Kohli 2002 and Evans 1995). Hence the statist approach alone cannot be complete to properly undertake a study of state society relations since there is a need for making a sound analysis of the nature of the relations with society.

Given that this study focuses on identifying the nature of relations between the state and society in the study areas in Sidama and strives to come up with a proposal on some sort of alternative, the foregoing discussion is deemed as relevant and appropriate theoretical focus. This is more so since the study is also aimed at exploring the nature, role and functions of informal and traditional institutions that cooperate with and compete against the formal institutions of the state. For the purpose of this study, the state is viewed as an institutionalized collective power as expounded by Nettle because this approach identifies the nexus between state and society and shapes the interaction between the two characterized by both cooperation and competition and gives room for society in shaping the decisions and actions of a collective entity.

Chapter Three

Overview and General Background of the Study Area

3.1. Background

The Sidama are one of Ethiopia's ethnic groups whose homeland is the geographic locus of the Sidama Zone and the adjacent territories in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region (SNNPR). According to the 2011 estimates, the total population of Sidama was 3.4 Million (Sidama Zone Finance and Economic Development Sector, 2011). The major language is called *Sidaamu-afoo*, which according to the 1994 national census is the language of 99.5% of this ethnic group (CSA, 1994).

Archeological studies affirm that Ethiopia is the first spot of ancient human settlement. By citing different archeological findings, Ehret (2002) indicated that Africa is the continent that is designated as the origin of human ancestors. According to the same writer, the earlier human beings lived in the northeastern part of Africa, comprising Cushitic-speaking groups in the Horn of Africa to which the Sidama people belong and claim as their ancestral home. Ehret asserted that the name Ethiopia is derived from the historical designation of the Cushitic-speaking people who inhabited the sub-region in the distant past. However, this assertion is questioned by some scholars who maintain that the name Ethiopia was a Greek designation that was given about 1000 BCE to refer to Nubia and Northern Ethiopia near the Blue Nile. The Hebrew people called all of these people including the Sidamas "people of kush". Due to the dynamics of conflicts, migration, assimilation and other politico-demographic influences over the past seven millennia, the Cushitic-speaking population dwindled and became a small minority in the Sudan, Eritrea and Kenya while they became majorities in Ethiopia and Somalia³.

The Sidama are one of the members of the Cushitic-speaking groups that are indigenous to the north eastern part of Ethiopia (Tadesse, 1974; Conti, Rossini 1928, Braukamper, 1977). Later, the people moved towards the south and southwest to settle in Dawa, which is the first place where the Sidama ancestors settled and became distinctively identified from other Cushitic-

³ Online source: [http://www.buzzle.com/article.buzzle.com/Cushitic civilization](http://www.buzzle.com/article/buzzle.com/Cushitic%20civilization), accessed in March 2012)

speaking families (Markos et.al, 2011). Dawa is located in the southeastern part of Ethiopia around the river Dawa. At a later stage, the Sidama moved towards the Northwest and began to live in their present territory (Getachew, 1970). Different sources attest that the Oromo expansion of the 16th century made its first encounter with the Sidama in their current places of settlement. According to Girma Negash (2001), when the Oromo crossed the Wabishebele River around the early 16th century, they encountered non-Oromo inhabitants like the Hadiya and the Sidama. In fact the first non-Oromo nationality they first encountered and fought with for territory and grazing land was the Sidama . As a result, for the Oromos, any ethnic group of Hamitic or Semitic stock who is not an Oromo is “Sidama”. The Oromo designation for the Amharas is thus “Sidama” not “Amhara.” Oromos for example say “Sidama Oppression” not “Amara Opression” to speak of the Menelik and consequent feudal cruelties they had to endure.

There were many causes for the movement of the Sidama people towards their present location of domicile. The lack of suitable grazing and agricultural land (Betana, 1991) and pressure from the Oromo people around the Dawa River (Tolo, 1998) were singled out as major push factors that had contributed to this. According to information provided by elders⁴, Dawa had been the place where many members of the Cushitic-speaking groups had lived together and later dispersed in different directions due to a variety of causes. It is not yet clearly known about the situation regarding either their way of life before coming to Dawa or the exact period when they settled there. However, elders⁵ established the facts about the situation in Dawa area and the direction of the Sidama movement from there. Accordingly, the Sidama are said to have moved step by step towards the northeastern direction and eventually settled in their current places of domicile.

It had been difficult to get a clear record of the Sidama and other Cushitic-speaking peoples until the turn of the 16th century after which peoples’ movement in the Horn of Africa that include the Sidama and other members of Cushitic-speaking groups were mentioned in the historiographic literature. Despite this, however, the name Sidama was not mentioned clearly at first. This had created confusions and controversies regarding the exact name of the people.

⁴ Interview with Tunsisa Geneffe, September 20, 2010, Bensa; Zekarias Lodo, July 28, 2012, Chucko; Alamu Ebiso, September 13, 2010, Wondogenet

⁵ Summary of focus group discussions in Chucko (August 23, 2013), Gorche (August 19, 2013), Arbegona (July 20, 2010) and Hawassa (September 16, 2010)

Different writers (Hamer, 1966, 1987; Murdock, 1959; Stanley, 1966; Brogger, 1986; Getachew, 1970; Gasprini, 1976 and Maccani 1988) used different terms to describe the people in question.

Many anthropologists and historians (Murdock, 1959; Brogger, 1986; Gasprini, 1976) referred to the Sidama as 'Sidamo'. In the ethnographic literature, the term Sidama sometimes refers to the group of east highland Cushitic-language speakers, which included Kambata, Kebena, Alaba, Hadiya, Sidama, Gedeo and Burji (Brøgger, 1986; Tolo, 1998). Whereas others used the term Sidama to refer to these groups and used the term Sidamo to identify the people inhabiting the southwestern localities, Murdock (1959) used the term Sidamo as did Brogger (1986) arguing that this was accepted by the people themselves. In one of his recent writings, Hamer (1987) introduced the term Sadama while Stanley (1966), Karsten (1966) and Braukamper (1978) used the term Sidama. On the other hand, Getachew (1970) preferred to use the term Sidanchos in order to single out the groups by the language they speak. Generally, Braukamper (1978:123) concluded that: "where there is question of the Sidama this name exclusively refers to the people settled in the region between Lake Abbaya, Lake Awassa and the upper Genale bearing it as an ethnonym for themselves."

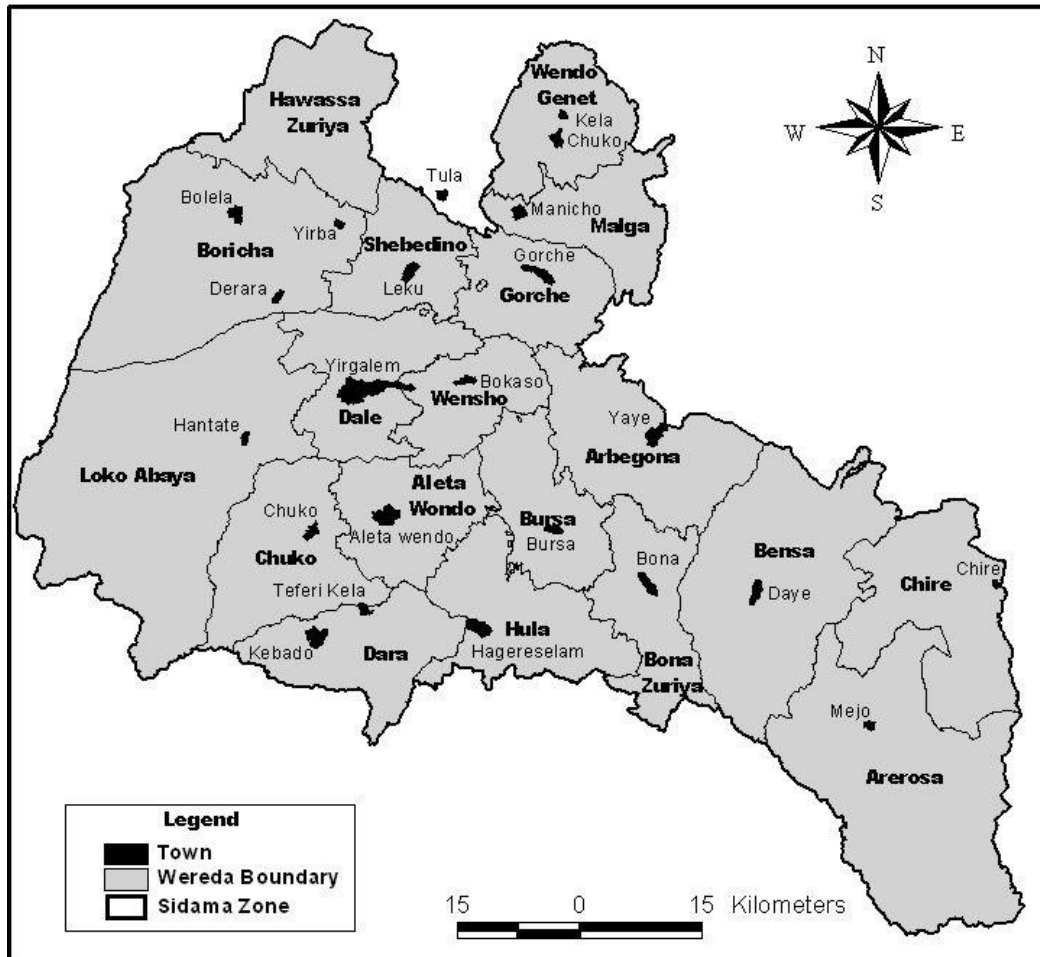
For the purpose of this study, the terms Sidama and Sidamaland are respectively used to refer to the group and the geographic locality that is currently known as the Sidama Zone and the territories adjacent to it that are inhabited by the Sidama people. According to the existing conventional information, there are two ancestral groups and fourteen clans that constitute the Sidama Nation. The Sidama people regard Bushe and Maldea as their two ancestral forefathers under which further sub-divisions within each subgroup down to the small hamlets as far as constituting each and every family come. The Bushe group includes Hadicho, Holo-garbicho, Malga, Faqisa-Tumano, Awacho whereas Hawela, Qewena, Sawola, Alata, Darasha, Dafina, Alawa, Hoffa and Fardano belong to Maldea (Markos, et.al 2011).

The clans are autonomous in terms of social organization and governance arrangements that enabled them to manage their socio-cultural and administrative affairs. The Sidama are homogenous and have common language and culture although there are autonomous clans existing as sub-categories. The interesting fact about inter-clan relations among the Sidama is that the entrenched norms and values prohibit marriage within a clan but encourage marriage

between different clans. Such modality of interaction contributed to the homogeneity of the people and entrenchment of strong inter-clan relations within which allegiance to the clan and linear descent is inherited through the male line.

The settlement pattern of the Sidama people is based on kinship. A group of families that belong to common ancestors live in closely knit villages and hamlets, which expand and extend to the larger group and eventually constituting the larger clan to which they belong. Each clan has distinct areas of settlement with which it is identified. The land inhabited by a specific clan whereby the area takes the name of the clan. To date, such settlement patterns remain intact mainly because of the convenience of the places of settlement for reasons of security, maintenance of socio-cultural factors and livelihood patterns that are still at work. The current area of Sidama settlement, at least until recently, was highly convenient for sedentary agriculture and animal-rearing. Such state of expedience marked by practical convenience and the workings of the political establishment discouraged mobility and movement away from the clan-based settlements. For example, members of a clan always enjoy reverence, mutual help and protection from their clan members, which they cannot enjoy if they settle in distant localities.

Figure 3:Map of Sidama Zone and Location of Administrative Districts



Source: CSA 2012

Source: CSA 2012

3.2. Culture and Social Organization

Sidama society has distinct tradition and cultural life as regards marriage ceremonies and arrangements, resolution of problems between individuals and groups, religious practices, celebration of culture-based holidays and ceremonies like New Year festivals (*fichche*), classification of generational system or *luwa*, adherence to the *yakka* institution serving as Ombudsman for women, customary norms, and mourning rituals. These are among the most cherished customary norms and social values of the Sidama that distinguish the Sidama from other ethnic and socio-cultural formations. Hence, it would be worthwhile to briefly introduce some of these in order to properly understand the workings of cultural and social organizations and how they take effect in the study areas.

3.2.1. *Fichche* and Sidama Calendar

Fichche is the most celebrated Sidama cultural holiday which is based on the lunar calendar. Sidama elders known as *ayanto* observe the movement of the stars and determine the exact date when the New Year and the *fichche* celebration take place (Hamer 1987). Currently, the event is getting increasingly popular taking a slightly modified name known as *fichche-chambalala*. *Chambalala* is an aspect of *fichche* celebration referring to performing cultural dances and plays as well as children's visit to neighborhoods and relatives to be provided with *burisame*, which is a special food made from *enset* with excess use of butter.

The Sidama New Year, therefore, is unique in that it does not have a fixed date. It rotates every year following the movement of the stars. The *ayanto* are responsible in systematically constructing the calendar not only in regard to the celebration of the event but also taking responsibility for coordinating all other associated social, cultural and ritual functions. As part of cultural revitalization, Sidama scholars attempted to find equivalent interpretation and adjustment of the Sidama calendar with the conventional Ethiopian New Year calendar. According to the Sidama Calendar, there are 12 months in a year, namely *Badheessa* (March), *Dotteessa* (April), *Onkoleessa* (May), *Ella* (June), *Maaja*(July), *Woxawaajje* (August), *Wocawaaro* (September), *Birra* (October), *Bocaasa* (November), *Sadaasa* (December), *Arfasa* (January), and *Amaje* (February). Moreover, a thirteenth month known as *fooqais* introduced to make the Sidama Calendar fit to the conventional Ethiopian Calendar. March is considered as the beginning of the New Year⁶ but this is always marked with the celebration of *fichche* which has no fixed date and rather rotates throughout all the months of the year. This is done for the cultural and social purpose of matching the New Year to *fichche* celebrations.

Figure 4: *Qetala* dance performed during *fichche* celebrations

⁶ Summary from focus group discussions in four locations in Sidama, see also footnote no. 2



Field photo of 2013 celebration

Each month of the year in Sidama Calendar is equally divided into 28 days while the 12th month has 29 days. One interesting aspect of this calendar is that each day of the month has its own name designated as follows: *Argaajjima, Arba, Bolla, Basaama, Basabeetto, Charroowa, Durette, DullatteBeetto, Bidirsa, DeetteBeetto, Karaawicha, Gardaaduma, Sonsa, Rurruma, Lumaasa, Gidaada, Ruuda, EreereAma, EreereBeetto, AdulaAma, Harfatto, DeetteAma, DullatteAma, Bitu, Chicho and Sorsa*⁷. A week has four days and hence each month has seven weeks instead of the conventional four weeks. The names of the four days in Sidama week are: *Dikko, Deela, Qawadoo and Qawalanka* followed by *Dikko* completing the cycle of a four-day week. In conventional Sidama calendar, a year has less than the conventional 364.25 days. That is why *fichche* celebration always takes place at different days in less than a time span of a year.

3.2.2. Luwa

Luwa is a generational class or age-set system that is practiced as a way of transforming generational leadership. Age sets are groupings formed of males entering adulthood after going

⁷ Ibid

through a common rite of passage together following which the status of young adulthood is bestowed on them. A new group of adolescent boys would be initiated in a ceremony held approximately every eight years (Ehret, 2002). It is to be recalled that the Sidama practiced this since time immemorial as a mechanism of mentoring, training and initiating the youth to take up multifaceted social, economic, cultural, ritual, and political roles.

The *luwa* system has social, cultural, political and military dimensions and passes through five generational cycles revolving approximately every eight years in which it takes about 40 years to complete the cycle. The five cycles are *Mogisa, Fulasa, Wawasa, Darara and Hirbora*. The political and administrative ramifications of the *luwa* system is dealt with in detail in section 4.2.1.

3.2.3. *Yakka*

Yakka is an indigenous socio-cultural institution that focuses on defending the rights of women. It is organized and led by elder women as a unique institution in terms of purpose and objectives focusing on protecting women from domestic violence. All members of the institution are women engaged in preventing domestic violence, abuse and mistreatment. *Yakka* also strives to draw the attention of the community in times of the aforementioned mishaps affecting women urging community leaders to involve and interfere in protecting women from maltreatment. If the community fails to respond and solve a given problem, members act to the extent of protesting and rioting against the transgressor in various forms (Markos, et al., 2011).

3.2.4 Religion

The traditional Sidama profess indigenous religion anchored in the belief that the creator manifests itself through different rituals and processions. According to (Seyum, et al. 1997), the majority of the Sidama practice their traditional religion and it is only in the 1960s that it was undermined following the coming of European missionaries to Sidamaland. As a result, it was learnt that during the 1994 Census only 14.9% practice the traditional religion whereas 66.8% were Protestants, 7.7%, 4.6%, and 2.3% professed Islam, Catholicism, and the

Ethiopian Orthodox creed respectively (Ethiopian Statistical Authority, 1995). According to the 2007 Census, the proportion of followers of the Sidama traditional religion among the Sidama dropped to below 3% (ESA, 2007).

According to Kifle (2007), God and the spirit of ancestors are the foundational elements of faith for the Sidama and are the constitutive aspects of their spiritual life. God is named the omnipotent and omnipresent *Magano* in which the Sidama people believe. The spirit of ancestors is believed to be very close to *Magano* through which they communicate with Him. Veneration and respect for the spirit of ancestors as well as recognizing the importance of elders are considered as the best ways to get the grace of *Magano* who is revealed through good omen known as *asayana* and the spirit through which *Magano*'s presence is manifested in the course of rituals and blessings is referred to as *danchaayana* (good omen). Sidama traditional religion has very strong attachment with the traditional political and governance system, which is dealt with in more detail in chapter four of this study. It is traditional religion that lends legitimacy to and justifies the indigenous political system and traditional leadership. *Halaale*, good way of life, is the central element in Sidama traditional religion and the Sidama obey *Magano* through adherence to the principle of *halaale*.

Kifle (Ibid) argued that the Sidama are monotheists and they do not see *Magano* as a tribal or exclusive entity. They believe that God speaks to people in their cultural and situational settings and each individual or group responds to this communication or revelation according to his/her understanding of God and culture. In this regard, there are many sacred places of worship where rituals for ancestral veneration take place, among which *Wonsho* that is located near Yirgalem Town is the most popular. With the current expansion of Protestantism the influence of traditional religion among the Sidama is declining. The role of religion in the traditional governance system of the Sidama is dealt with in detail in section 4.3.

3.3. Socio-Cultural Values, Practices and Norms

There are various socio-cultural practices and social norms and values that characterize the Sidama as a distinct group, which are highlighted in section 3.2. Among those that are not discussed earlier, *Dee* and *Jirte* are cited as social norms through which the members of society express their support and render services to each other on various occasions. Whereas *halaale*

is a very important norm that is adhered to by the Sidama, *Affino* is a cultural practice that the Sidama exercise in order to avoid confrontations by harmonizing relations between individuals, groups and communities.

3.3.1. *Dee*

Dee is one of the social norms through which members of the community shoulder the burden of engaging in production and construction. This is mainly because some tasks are very difficult for individual households to perform by themselves thereby necessitating neighborhoods and communities to join hands in order to accomplish impending tasks. It is also the *Dee as a* forum that enables members of the community to have more interactions and socialize and also serves for sharing of skills and knowledge.

3.3.2. *Jirte*

Jirte is the social sub constitution of the Sidama and refers to the mechanism of community cooperation during death and other mishaps. In Sidama, community members living in nearby villages form one *jirte* comprising 4-6 villages and are usually formed on the bases of lineage. If a person dies, community members share the burden of looking after aggrieved until the mourning period which usually takes one week end (Wolassa, 2011). Membership to *jirte* is considered mandatory for each and every household in anticipation that facing the aforementioned problems that calls for cooperation is inevitable. A household head who fail to fulfill his commitment to *jirte* would face marginalization and ostracism (Markos, et.al, 2011).

3.3.3. *Halaale*

Halaale refers to the pursuit of a true way of life that is a highly observed socio-cultural value among the Sidama. According to Hamer (1996), ,honesty is emphasized in observing *halaale* when settling disputes between neighbors and kin on the basis of the principle of mutuality in all social exchanges necessitating that fairness and generosity should be shown to others. The members of the community in general and elders in particular are expected to live

according to the principle of *halaale* that represents an acceptable level of moral standard (Aadland, 2002). Adhering to the code of *halaale* is considered as observing the rules of agreement entered into with the supreme creator, *Magano*. According to Vecchiato (1985), the concept of *halaale* refers to strict adherence to the highest standards of probity, integrity, honesty and truthfulness by standing against any form of crime and wrongdoing. Every member of the community is expected to be just and fair in his/her dealings with others, which is highly intertwined with the Sidama religion, governance system as well as dispute resolution practices. It has various contexts, which are dealt with in the fourth chapter in more detail.

3.3.4. *Affino*

Affino is one of the cultural practices of the Sidama that refers to the need for transparency of discharging socio-administrative tasks concerning individual and group cases and community affairs. *Affino* means letting others know the issues that concern them before reacting to them. This is a very important tool that restricts unnecessary responses by restraining them from being susceptible to provocations before letting others know the issue at hand and intercede and contribute to means and ways of addressing it (Markos, et.al., 2011). Anyone who receives a call to participate in *Affino* must act immediately and help in mediating or mitigating the situation. This is closely linked with traditional conflict management in Sidama.

3.4. Socio-Political Status and Roles in Traditional Sidama Society

In different Sidama communities, there are leading personalities who enjoy the respect of the members of society and thereby play significant social roles. These people who are believed to possess special qualities and wisdom are recognized as important in supporting efforts aimed at fostering harmonious relations among community members and defending the community from externally-induced negative influences. Such individuals are known as *eajjeto*, *hayyolle*, *ayanto*, *masalano* and *himanano* whereby @acquiring these statuses and roles are realized through proven experiences and demonstration of capability in various ways. There are no specific procedures and formalities to be followed in this regard since individuals achieve a given status through practical demonstration of talents and capabilities.

3.4.1. *Eajjeto*

Eajjetos are considered to be heroes of the people as a result of demonstrating such traits like bravery, confidence and coordination and other skills in instances when their communities face extraordinary and abnormal circumstances including conflict episodes and undertakings demanding close cooperation. In this regard, there are often individuals with exceptional talent and capability that they apply to defend and commit commendable acts. Such individuals are given the status of *eajjeto* resulting from their accomplishments.

This status is also bestowed on individuals who stand firm in the face of fights against wild animals and during times when natural disasters and calamities occur⁸.

3.4.2. *Hayyole*

Hayyole (*Hayicha* singular) is a name given to a Sidama elder who is wise and intelligent and plays key roles in interpreting events, solving problems, and making in-depth analysis of different phenomena.

3.4.3. *Masalano*

Masalano (*masalancho* singular) literary is an equivalent term for a philosopher or wise man who interprets events, phenomena and other uncommon trends whether these have positive or negative implications for the wellbeing of the society. If the envisaged phenomena or event is found to have negative implications, the *Masalancho* suggests remedial measures for dealing with the impending problem. This is undertaken in the form of carrying out rituals or advising the concerned on how to behave and handle possible occurrences⁹.

3.4.4. *Himanano*

⁸ Interview with Chokole Agafaru, Gorche, August 12, 2013.

⁹ Interview with Tunsisa Genefe, September 2010, Bensa

Himanano (*Himanancho* singular) are considered as prophets who forecast the future and indicate the way forward for the betterment of the society.

3.4.5. *Ayanto*

Ayanto is a name given to an astrologist who calculates and constructs the calendar and decides on the timing of New Year celebrations (*fichche*) by identifying the appropriate day for this. He also suggests on days that are suitable for conducting different social ceremonies and rituals¹⁰.

3.5. Politico-legal Structure and Leadership

As indicated in the foregoing sections, the Sidama people have their traditional political and administrative system based on their own distinct culture that distinguishes them from others. In the period before Menelik's expansion, there was no centrally organized political system in Sidama. There were fragmented traditional administrative and political units and systems where there was no particular group that dominated others. It should be noted that these did not develop into monarchical authority because of the restriction on exercise of absolute power by the council of elders (*Songo*).

The council of elders (*Songo*) consists of the leading personalities known as *Chimeye* whose members are drawn from each community. There are around four hierarchical levels of the system of council of elders where the lowest level consisted of family members led by the heads of the concerned groups of families. The highest level *Songo* is the one led by the leader of the clan known as *Moote*. There are also different structures that play roles in the traditional leadership although there was no unified leadership style in the Sidama *songo* system. However, there were exceptions of legendary leaders of the Sidama before the middle ages who were regarded as authoritative and despotic in the history of the Sidama (Betana, 1983; Ababu 1996) This is described in the next section whereas details of traditional leadership as the core element of this study is dealt with in the fourth chapter.

¹⁰ Interview with Gaduda Gabiso, Hawassa, July 2011

In Sidama oral history, three personalities are widely known to have assumed leadership positions at varying times. They are historically renowned legendary leaders. It is difficult to precisely indicate the chronology of their reigns supported by firm evidences. However, their stories are very popular in the oral literature and folklore of the Sidama.

3.5.1 Gololcha Orde

Gololcha Orde was one of the legendary leaders of Sidama society and is known to have been a ruthless person. According to legend, he had ruled the people with an iron fist as a result of which he was extremely feared and known for his odd character of eating too much and serving strange orders to get the supply of abundant food to satisfy his lust. Oral tradition has it that he finally perished in the Lake Hawassa area after being deserted by followers and due to lack of supply of food with which he was accustomed (Markos, et.al, 2011).

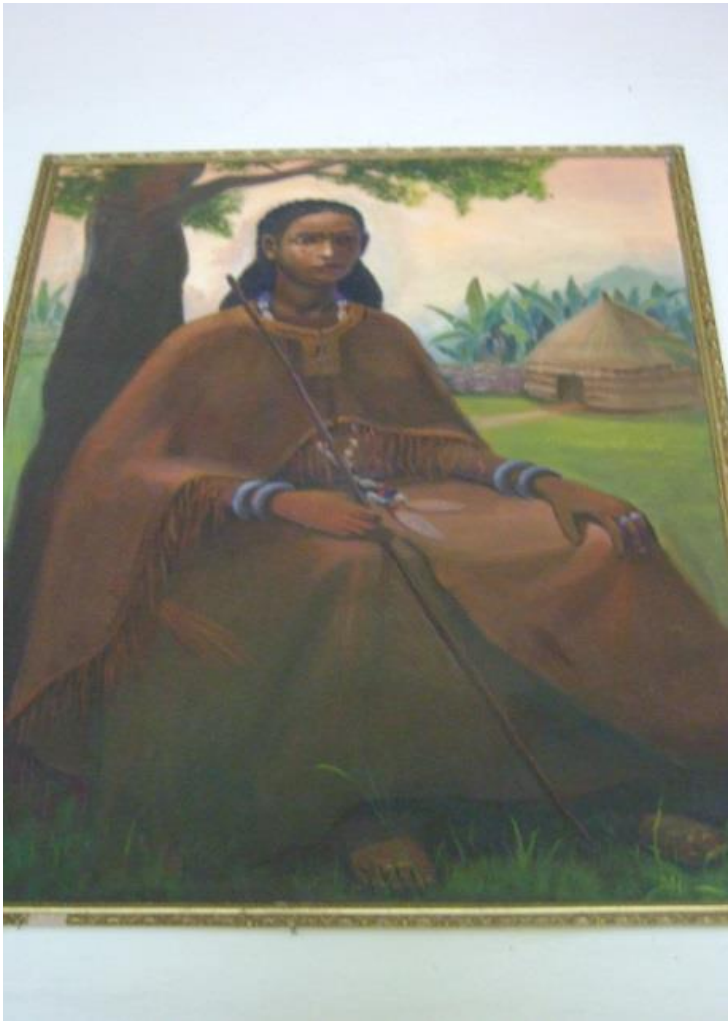
3.5.2. Dingama Koya

Dingama Koya was also one of those legendary leaders in Sidama history famed for his huge physique, strength and tenacity. According to elders, today there are so many stelae in Sidama and its surroundings that are considered to be put in place by Dingama Koya (Markos, et.al, 2011).

3.5.3. Queen Furra

Queen Furra is the most popular legendary woman leader in Sidama's history. She is the only woman leader to have ever assumed power in the history of the society and women regard her as their hero and role model whereas men regarded her as their bitter enemy. According to elders, Queen Furra's source of power and legitimacy was her husband who was a powerful leader prior to her gaining prominence. Some people referred to her husband as none other than Dingama Koya.

Figure: 5:Portrait of Queen Furra



Source: Courtesy of Furra Institute of Development Studies, Yirgalem

Queen Furra favored women and despised men during her rule. She gave many odd orders against men and selectively killed elders who were short and bold for she believed that such people always conspired against her. One of her odd orders was asking men to bring an animal that no one had climbed before. Then the men brought *Qorke* (Giraffe) and tied her on it, which became the cause of her death thereby eventually bringing relief to men's ordeal. There are many proverbs and oral poems about the deeds and life of Furra (Markos, et.al, 2011).

3.6. Economic Resources and Sources of Livelihood

The Sidama people eke their livelihood from agriculture by practicing mixed farming and cattle-rearing. Since the basis for the practice of mixed farming is land, land ownership has great value among the Sidama. There were two types of land ownership in Sidamaland before the 'land tenure' system was introduced during the reign of Menelik II. Prior to this, Sidama society was able to maintain a sustainable socio-economic and political system for centuries. During those days, land in Sidama was mostly owned privately. Such kind of land ownership is called *utuwa*, which means privately owned land. Every household had access to land and was able to produce enough for meeting basic and essential needs. Land outside of the realm of private ownership was owned communally and was called *danawa* land. The *danawa* was administered by the local *songo* and distributed to newly married men and newcomers based on their needs. Communal land in Sidama was properly conserved (Betana, 1983; Markos, et al. 2011). It is widely believed that the early Sidama at the outset came and settled in Sidamaland and brought with them different kinds of crops like barley and wheat. It is also believed that *enset*, which is a staple food of the Sidama, was later introduced to the area by the Gurage people (Ambaye, 2000).

Prior to Menelik's expansion, coffee was grown in the area mainly for local consumption and small-scale exchange with the neighboring inhabitants. It became significant as a cash crop only after Menelik's conquest of the area (Ababu, 1995:5). At present, coffee is the main source of income for most of the Sidama and the chief export earning commodity for Ethiopia as well. Nearly 95% of the Sidama depend on agriculture as a major source of livelihood. An important staple food is *wesse* plant or *enset* while at the same time other crops are also grown. Perhaps the most important source of income is coffee, and the area is a major contributor to coffee production constituting a high percentage of export commodities second only to the Oromia region. Currently, a mild stimulant plant known as *khat* has become the major source of income to a significant number of people among the Sidama population.

3.7. Overview of Sidama Political History

The making of history starts from the very inception of humankind. As indicated in the above section, the history of Sidama starts with the early existence of the people in their present place of domicile. However, due to lack of written sources and archival material it has been difficult to trace the early history of the Sidama. As already mentioned, the study attempts to trace the early history of the Sidama from oral sources and genealogy of the notable elders. The political history of the Sidama mainly focuses on the overall functions of the socio-political institution of the people and interaction with neighboring peoples. During the period prior to Menelik's expansion, there are accounts of interaction of the Sidama with neighboring peoples. Since settling in the current location of domicile, the Sidama have interacted with different neighboring communities that include: the Arsi and Guji Oromo, the Gedeo, the Halaba, the Wolayita, the Hadiya, and the Kambata with whom they have forged various types of relations by sharing common socio-cultural and linguistic characteristics. Except the Wolayita who belong to the Omotic family, all the aforementioned groups belong to the Cushitic-speaking groups.

Commodity exchange and trade ties had been one of the features that characterize the nature of relations between the Sidama and the neighboring ethnic groups. Trade as a field of economic engagement was not as such significant in Sidama society. In order to get locally unavailable commodities, the Sidama used to engage in trade relations with the neighboring peoples like Wolayita, Gedeo and the surrounding Oromo. There were different medium of exchange like *messane* of Gedeo, *mercha* of Wolayita and *womasha* of Sidama. The main imports from Wolayita were clothes whereas exchange of food products and live animals with the Gedeo and the Arsi Oromo and imports of salt through Bale were known to have been the major expressions of trade relations (Ibid; Betana, 1983).

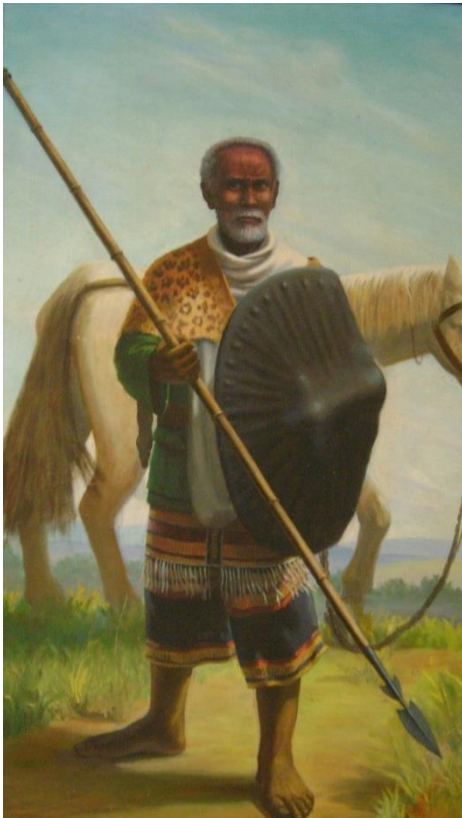
The relations and interactions between the Sidama and neighboring ethnic groups had not been free of conflict. The relations between the Sidama and their neighbors were characterized by both violent conflicts and cooperation that took place at varying times. The causes of such conflicts were mainly associated with competition over resources like grazing land and water points, which became the major factors that had contributed to the taking shape and escalation

of conflicts between the Sidama and the neighboring ethnic groups. In the recent decades, governance deficits and politicization of ethnicity has led to the escalation of conflicts.

The Sidama had established administrative systems since the 9th century despite that these were made up of a loose coalition of different Sidama principalities (Markos, 2002; Markos, et. al 2011). The Sidama people had been ruled by councils of local elders (*chimeye*) and chiefs known as *Moote*, *Gadana* and *Woma* who were elected and appointed according to the generational class system governing such matters. This state of affairs began to experience changes after the end of the nineteenth century (Tolo, 1998). The changes began to occur when the first forces of the Ethiopian state under Menelik crossed River Bilate under the leadership of *Dejazmach* Beshah Aboye in 1889 (Tsehay, 1969). There were different motives that prompted the Southern expansion of Menelik II in the late nineteenth century. The existing accounts indicate that the main objectives of Menelik's expansion were economic, political and creating a buffer zone against the surrounding colonial powers that gained a foothold in the Horn sub-region (Hamer, 1987; Tsehay, 1969).

At the time of the conquest of Sidamaland and people, Beshah Aboye was the governor of Southern Shewa that included Alaba and the Gurage area. Most of Beshah Aboye's soldiers who participated in the campaign against the Sidama were from these territories. Beshah's expeditionary force started its campaign from a place called Kasse that is near Alaba (Tolo, 1998). Before launching the campaign Beshah sent a message to the Sidama demanding their peaceful submission without giving any room for negotiation; it was rather presented as an order directed by the Emperor (Ibid). This demand was contrary to the *Fethaha Negest* (traditional legal code), which required peaceful negotiations to be held prior to subduing new territories before embarking on military conquest (Markakis, 1975).

Figure 6 Balicha Worabo: the symbol of Sidama resistance and collaboration during the Ethiopian State's expansion towards the south



Courtesy of Furra Institute of Development Studies, Yirgalem

As mentioned in the first chapter, at the time of Menelik's conquest there was no centrally organized political authority in Sidama. The people were not united as a unified political grouping but rather divided into fourteen chieftencies. As a result, the Sidama failed to cooperate against the incorporation (Hamer, 1991) they failed even to agree on how to respond to the request of Beshah demanding their submission (Betana, 1991). Owing to this, some clan leaders proposed to submit peacefully while others rejected the request and waged a resistance.

When Beshah's soldiers intruded into Sidama, the clan that was on the head way of Beshah's army accepted his rule realizing that it was their clan who would become the first victim of the invasion (Ibid) whereas others like Aleta and Hadicho refused and individually tried to defend themselves (McClellan, 1978). However, because of the military superiority of the expeditionary force, Beshah was able to defeat the resistance and established his first garrison

at Shisha, which is said to have been the first garrison town in Sidama. But the Sidama did not fully accept alien rule and they were preparing to oust it.

According to Tsehay (1969), Beshah's stay at Shisha was precarious as a result of which he could neither subdue the population nor exact tribute. The Sidama refused to come nearby his encampment and continued to wage sporadic attacks against the expeditionary force, which was forced to withdraw without much success as a result of which the Sidama stayed for about a year without being subdued (Ibid). In 1891, *Ras* Leulsaged completed the mission of conquering the Sidama to the extent of using Sidamaland as a base for launching campaigns against the neighboring territories (McClellan, 1978). *Ras* Leulsaged came to Sidama with a far more superior and organized army than *Dejazmach* Beshah and the people resisted and tried hard to resist the invasion of the *Ras* than before. Nevertheless, because of various reasons the attempt of the Sidama to defend their territory was easily suppressed (Ababu, 1995).

The first reason for the poor resistance on the part of the Sidama against subjugation is attributed to a host of weaknesses. Militarily, Menelik's army, the first Ethiopian army that was fully equipped with modern weapons, was superior to the traditional instruments of war that the Sidama had (Tolo, 1998; Clapham, 1969). This enabled the army of Menelik's regime to easily overcome the resistance of the Sidama. Second, internal disagreement and disunity among the Sidama became an obstacle to design a unified resistance strategy to repel the incorporation (Ababu, 1995). These and similar other shortcomings suffered by the Sidama were taken advantage of by Menelik's army. Finally, the propaganda of the invincibility of the expeditionary force launched by the forces of the central state helped create fear among the Sidama (Ababu, 1995). Moreover, sabotage on the part of some collaborators in the ranks of the neighboring communities had contributed to the failure of the attempts to resist. The participants in the conquest were called Amharas for they spoke the Amharic language and claimed that they belonged to the Amhara ethnic group though this may not be entirely the case. In fact, in addition to the Amhara, and the Oromo from Shewa, the Gurage and the Silte participated in the conquest following which they settled in the garrison towns (Tolo, 1998).

The southward expansion of the Ethiopian State could be viewed from different perspectives. Different writers labeled the process of the expansion using different terms like incorporation, conquest, unification, etc. From among these, two polarized and divergent views could be

discerned: colonial expansion and re-unification. There are different motives behind the usage of these different terminologies for the same issue and process. In fact, most Ethiopian historians and the ruling elite of the imperial regime viewed the process as an act of reunification claiming that there were indications that before Menelik's expansion there was the influence of the highland Christian Kingdom to the south, the southeast and southwest of the traditional Ethiopian polity. In this vein, they provided two historical justifications. The first one is the medieval period empire builder warrior king Amide-Tsion subdued and conquered the Southern territories during the medieval period (Tadesse, 1972:132-145). The second one is based on the fact that the existence of age-old Orthodox Churches in places like Kaffa and other southwestern localities were built much before the commencement of Menelik's expansion. On these and similar other grounds, it is claimed that even before Menelik's conquest most of the southern territories were part of the Ethiopian empire (Ibid: 233; Henze, 2000; Andargachew 1993).

On the other hand, some writers (Keller, 1988; Bereket, 1980; Markakis, 1987) view the process as colonial conquest. Triulzi (1983:117), stated that "Ethiopia is cited as a de facto colonial power and that colonial violence was used in incorporating adjacent territories and colonizing its peoples in spite of some obvious but not crucial differences with European Colonialism". Moreover, Bereket (1980) invoked connotation used by the imperial regime itself in using terms that relate to colonization and wrote: "The Southern region was referred up to the last days of emperor Haile Selassie as *yekignhager* (conquered or colonized territory). Moreover, Addis Hiwet (1975) describes the whole socio-economic structures of post-conquest Ethiopia by using the term military-feudal colonialism. Furthermore, McClellan (1978:8) describes Ethiopia's position of late-nineteenth century when he wrote: "I have alluded already to Ethiopia's unique position among African nations. Not only was she successful in fighting off European attempts to colonize her but she was also an important participant in the scramble for Africa."

The aforementioned notwithstanding, however, there is a different perspective that disproves such assumptions. For instance, one of the laws of spatial growth of a state is the incorporation of small territories to the aggregate (Glassner and Blij, 1989). Accordingly, Menelik's expansion could be viewed as spatial growth of a modern state. The other is the Marxist school

of thought that set criteria for domination by imperialist and colonial powers. The main criterion is that a state should have reached a stage of mature capitalist mode of production and technological capacity in order to exploit and embark on appropriation of resources in conquered territories (Lewis, 1983). But this was not the case in regard to Ethiopia during the time in question. Ethiopia has never reached this stage of capitalist development and had not materially advanced (Ibid). Therefore, with feudalism, one can speak of conquest not colonization. Hence, the march of the traditional highland Christian kingdom of Ethiopia towards the South, Southeast and Southwest is termed as territorial expansion. For the purpose of this study, the terms territorial expansion and conquest are simultaneously employed.

Shortly following the establishment of garrison towns in the newly incorporated territories, every clan in the different indigenous communities was required to provide annual tributes of two large oxen and a pot of honey. Though this form of tribute was shortly discontinued, the *gabbar* system, an Ethiopian version of serfdom, was simultaneously imposed on the conquered people with farreaching consequences lasting over a longer duration (Hamer, 1987). According to Aadland (2002:32):

The tribute system, gabbar (a system of feudalism administered at the local level), was probably the most significant contact between the administrative structure and the traditional Sidama people. The gabbar system was established by Emperor Menelik II to organize a means of support to the military from the local people. After military force conquered the land of the Sidama, the military was remunerated for its efforts both in the conquest and in subsequent administration of the province by— temporary or hereditary—rights to appropriate a portion of the peasants' (gabbar) produce. This right (comparable to a European fief) was later often transformed into ownership rights (Aadland, 2002:32)

The economic motives of the conquest manifested itself mainly in the form of land alienation (Ambaye, 2000). Moreover, the new rulers introduced an alien social and economic relationship expressed in *nefteгна/melkeгна-gabbar* system, which turned the indigenous people into tenants (Ababu, 1995). Furthermore, Tolo (1998:68-69) who conducted intensive research on the Sidama regarding the workings of the newly introduced system describes the situation as follows:

The most crucial change probably was that a new national taxation and ruling system was introduced: the neftegna-gabbar system. The Sidama had been ruling themselves in an autonomous society. From now on they were ruled from above by a central government (Tolo, 1998:68-69).

The *neftegna-gabbar* system is an expression that describes the relationship between the nobility and the soldiery that actively participated in the incorporation of the people and land of the new territories. The term '*Neftegna*' means soldiers and soldier-settlers who were armed and assisted the governors in ruling the new provinces. *Gabbar* means one who is a tenant, serf or tribute payer. According to Tolo, it was between 1893 and 1897 that the Sidama were fully integrated into Menelik's Ethiopia and it was from 1897 to 1916 that the *neftegna-gabbar* rule was introduced in the area (Ibid). It is said that it was the favorable agroecological environment and availability of cash crops that attracted the settlers who fostered active land alienation and establishment of *neftegna-gabbar* system in the area.

As mentioned, the Sidama did not completely accept defeat and voluntarily embrace the newly-imposed socio- economic and political system (Ababu, 1995). The system was explained not only in terms of confiscation of land belonging to the indigenous society (Markakis, 1975) but also the settlers partitioned the local people and made them render *corvée* services by working on the farms and in the households of the settlers (Lapiso, 1983; Betena, 1991). Moreover, the system aimed at imposing the supremacy of the settlers over the Sidama by virtually destroying their culture and traditional institutions altogether (Ambaye, 2000). The local elders state that the economic and political oppression was more harsh and unbearable than the military measures taken during the conquest (Ababu, 1995). This notwithstanding, however, the Sidama resisted domination in different ways during the subsequent periods. One way of resistance was direct opposition and opposition to new arrangements on the part of some *gabbars*. The other ways of resistance was that some *gabbars* left their land and fled to the bush in the remote highlands where the reach of the *melkegna* was minimal (Betana, 1991; Hamer, 1987).

During the imperial period, granting land and *gabbar* in lieu of salary to the administrators and the soldiers was the typical feature of feudal Ethiopia (Markos, 2002). Rights over the portion of land that belonged to the state were distributed to various groups which claimed such rights

on the basis of services rendered during the campaigns or in compensation for continued service, and to the clergy and settlers who migrated to the incorporated regions (Markakis, 1975). In Sidama society, every affair of life is associated with land. The Sidama believed that the land was given to them by *Magano* and no one should be denied the right of using land. Tolo (1998:72) was obviously aware of the importance of land and its impact on the societal life of the Sidama when he wrote:

Land should be regarded as a resource which was necessary for everybody to survive and live. In the Ethiopian cultural context, access to land was always interrelated with other rights. As a man needs air for breath and water to quench the thirst he also needed land to exist (Tolo, 1998:72).

When one compares the above statement with the new 'land tenure' system that was introduced after the conquest, the existence of national oppression could be clearly understood because at the time confiscation of land was tantamount to confiscation of everything that the Sidama peasants had. Markakis and Nega (1986:23-24) described the situation that accompanied the incorporation:

*Immediately after the conquest, the northern rulers divided the southern lands into three, theoretically equal, parts according to a traditional principle known as *sisso*, meaning one third. They confiscated two thirds outright, leaving the last third to the indigenous population. To win their collaboration, the local chiefs, or *balabbats*, as they came to be known, were given their choice of the remaining one-third and were either exempted from taxation on it or paid a reduced amount.*

At this juncture, it would be necessary to briefly look at the relation between the Italian occupation forces and the Sidama during the former's brief stay in Ethiopia between 1936 and 1941. During the early period of the Italian Occupation, there was cooperation between the Italian forces and the Sidama. However, after a lapse of two years when the Italians began to implement their policy of colonial exploitation and oppression, the people began to oppose the Italian colonial forces and begun to rebel against them (Markos, et.al, 2011).

Regarding the view of local people toward the Italians in terms of explaining the cause for cooperation, Ambaye (2000:28) stated the following:

In the early days of the Italian occupation the Sidama were less reluctant to the new government. Moreover, there seemed to be a form of (sic) appreciation among the Sidama concerning the Italian Occupation. This was because of the oppressive and severe administration and was looking for an outlet in order to express their vexation against the inhuman acts of the neftegna. Initially, therefore, it seems that the Sidama considered the Italians as liberators from the neftegna rule.

The Italians manipulated the Sidama and other southern peoples citing their unpleasant experience resulting from the taking effect of the *neftegna-gabbar* system. Immediately after the occupation, most of the Sidama fled to the bush following which the Italians called them back and told them "We are your friends who defeated your masters and oppressors" (Hamar, 1987). Furthermore, the Italians refrained from immediate confiscation of Sidamaland for their focus was on stabilizing their rule by pretending to be liberators. Due to this fact, the level of resistance from the people was largely mild that led to the recruitment of many collaborators and supporters in the area.

However, the collaboration with the Italian forces did not last long. The people began to resent the moves of Italian colonialists. In the course of time, the people became disenchanted with the rigid measures and the continued requisition of cattle to feed the troops and resented the Italian proposal to appropriate land (Hamer, 1987). On the other hand, the *balabbats* who benefited from the Ethiopian imperial system firmly opposed and resisted Italian rule from the very beginning and most of them spent the occupation period in the bush with other members of the resistance during which they fought against the colonial forces.

3.8. Local Chiefs and their Roles

As indicated earlier, there were about fourteen chiefdoms led by the councils of elders and *mootes*. During Menelik's conquest, the reaction and role of the traditional leaders can be categorized into three. The first category was those leaders who mobilized their councils and the community at large to resist the incorporation and remained defiant after the *neftegna-gabbar* rule was introduced. The second category of the traditional leaders was those who

closely collaborated with the forces of the state from the very beginning and remained loyal to the central government by assuming new positions, land and other privileges under the imperial system. In the third category, those who resisted in the very beginning and then compromised some of their stances and tried to negotiate in order to protect the rights of the people are found. The latter remained silent and appeared to be harboring neutral position but generally they tend to balance by finding the middle ground between the defiant groups and the collaborators. Those in the second category of traditional leaders were later given the title *balabbats* or chiefs. They got recognition from the imperial government and assumed intermediary positions and liaised between the rulers and their subjects (Kifle, 2007). The question is then why was the role played by *balabbats* important for the *neftegnas*? John Markakis (1975:106) stated the reasons as follows:

Given the limitation of the organization and resources of the state structure, the ignorance of local language and customs, and the predominant concern with security and taxation, the new rulers were forced to rely on the intermediary of indigenous traditional authorities, whom they called balabbats and to whom they offered recognition and economic privileges.

Some *balabbats* retained their position after the consolidation of the conquest whereas others collaborated from the very beginning with the objective of pursuing their self-interest. Their collaboration with Imperial rule undermined the capacity of the peasantry to resist the ensuing oppression and exploitation (Markakis and Nega, 1986). According to Ernesto Cerulli (1956), the main functions of the *balabbats* were to act as intermediary between local people and the newly installed rulers by transmitting and executing orders, collecting taxes and controlling those who attempted to defy the powers that be. Hamer (1987) coined the phrase “cultural broker with the conqueror” to describe the role of these intermediaries whereas Aadland (2002) labels them as the representatives of both traditional and official authority. According to Aadland (Ibid), “...quite a number of balabat used their position to obtain land rights and to win favors from the conquerors. Subordinated to the *balabbats* were the *qoro* and the *chiqa-shum*. The *chiqa-shum* was in charge of collecting taxes and enforcing orders from the superior officials”.

Moreover, the *balabbats* began to accumulate wealth and claimed additional land that was vacated as a result of the Sidama flight following the intrusion of the *neftegna-gabbar* rule. Opportunities for individual gains came as a result of the rights of *balabbats* to appropriate vacant land and bribery in the context of fast developing cash economy (Hamer, 1987). Some *balabbats* have worked effectively as political go-betweens in protecting their people, but in later years many of them have acquired a reputation of being more interested in winning favor with government officials by providing the latter with unauthorized gifts of local land (Ibid). As a result, these collaborators relatively became richer than other sections of the society (Ambaye, 2000).

As aforementioned, the roles and duties of the *balabbats* are limited to intermediary position by liaising between the rulers and the ruled. They facilitated the ensuing oppression and exploitation of the masses by retaining considerable privileges and wealth for themselves. According to Markakis (75:134):

The balabbats proved themselves indispensable as intermediaries between the northern governors and the southern masses. In return, they were accorded status and privileges and gradually emerged as a distinct (sic) group associated with the northern ruling group and emulating its dominant characteristics.

However, there were some *balabbats* who were keen to protect the rights and interests of the people whereas most of them tried to pursue their own personal interests disregarding the legitimate demands of the society (Hamer, 1987). Le Fort (1983) described the feelings of the southern peasants in the period of the revolution concerning the *balabbats* and concluded that the *balabbats* were largely viewed as not representing their claimed constituencies by all means. His conclusion was that as far as the *balabbats* possessed much larger land than the people and as far as they made themselves the instruments of state domination, it is impossible to consider them as representatives of the society. Generally speaking, the aforementioned changes in and the behavior of the traditional leaders during imperial rule had negatively impacted on the legitimacy of traditional leadership in Sidama. This also contributed to the growing marginalization of the traditional leaders that led to ill-feeling against traditional institutions in Sidama during the post-revolution years.

3.9. The Impact of the *Neftegna-Gabbar* System on Traditional Life in Sidama

The adverse impact of the *Neftegna-gabbar* system was considerable highly pronounced on the economic, socio-cultural and political life of Sidama society. The conquest and the attendant entrenchment of alien rule resulted in a radical transformation of the socio-economic structure and political life of the people. Being incorporated into Greater Ethiopia entailed a radically changed situation for the Sidama (Tolo, 1998). Although economic and political motives of the Ethiopian State were not mutually exclusive, the practice of land alienation and introducing of corvée-labor that reduced the Sidama people to the position of tenancy made economic motives outweigh the political ones (Ambaye, 2000). This had been the main problem of the society that created stratification and domination of the Sidama popular masses in terms of social, political and cultural life. Moreover, until the 1975 revolution that abolished the *neftegna-gabbar* system, the cash economy that became so important after the conquest was entirely controlled and monopolized by settler groups in the main rather than the local population (Markos, 2002).

The conquest and attendant incorporation of Sidamaland and the population at large also affected the viability of the Sidama language. Let alone during imperial rule, even during the heydays of the revolutionary upsurge the lowest officials of the state used to speak the Amharic language for transacting each and every matter that affected the lives of the local population. This has, therefore, been seen as the main obstacle to promote and develop the Sidama language. In this connection, Markakis (1994:225) argues:

Understandably, their [Amhara ruling elites] perception of national identity was the mirror image of their ethnic and cultural ego. Thus, the language of Amhara and Christianity became the salient features of Ethiopian nationalism, and the Arab language and Islam of Sudanese nationalism. In Ethiopia no other indigenous language was allowed to be printed, broadcast or spoken in public functions... and the attempts to study the culture and history of other groups were decidedly discouraged.

The officials of the regime had also played a significant role in discouraging practices of the different aspects associated with cultural values and traditions (See appendix IV). However, absence of integration into urban life on the part of the Sidama and lack of social interaction

between the urban settlers and the Sidama inhabiting the rural areas minimized the degree and extent of acculturation as a result of which the Sidama were able to retain their culture and traditional values by default. Disengagement in urban life and urban economic activities on the part of the Sidama was caused by different factors.

First, the Sidama people were tacitly prevented from settling in urban centers, which resulted in preserving their cultural and traditional values. Second, economic problems that did not allow the local population to build houses and settle in urban centers necessitated the confinement of the large majority of the Sidama in the rural areas and eke their livelihood from agriculture (Markos, 2002). Third, the settlers did not want the Sidama to settle in the urban centers and engage in urban-based economic activities (Kifle, 2007). This was done with the aim of preventing the local population from competing with the urban dwellers in terms of accessing opportunities and services as well as keeping them in the rural areas so that they plough the land that belonged to the urban-based landed gentry. Besides, it could be for fear on the part of the settler ruling classes that settlement in urban centers would create opportunities for the local population to access modern education that could lead to acquiring political consciousness regarding the nature and workings of the oppressive *neftegna-gabbar* system.

However, the urban settlers later opted to assimilate some of those who wished to integrate to urban by changing their names and professing Orthodox Christianity as their religious creed (Markos, 2002). The state-sponsored Orthodox Church facilitated the expansion process spearheaded by the imperial regime in Sidama and other incorporated territories as well as served as the ideological back up for ensuring the legitimacy of the regime and its endeavors in the occupied territories (Merera, 2002; Markakis, 1974).

At the time of Emperor Haileselassie's return from exile following the defeat of the Italians in 1941, there was conflict between the returning settlers and the Sidama especially those who were known as '*faano*' led by Yetera Bole and Hushula Tadiso. *Faano* is the term used to identify members of the resistance against Italian occupation but this was used in Sidama in a different manner. The Sidama *faano* firmly opposed and struggled against the reoccupation of Sidamaland by the *melkegna*, representing the settler landowners (Betena, 1991). The divergence on this issue is known as *Layinkishibre*, which refers to the conflict between the

Sidama peasants and the restored elites of the imperial regime who reclaimed their land and tenants. After this conflict, the local peasantry was reluctant to continue serving their former masters, the *melkegnas*. The former *melkegnas* and the patriots who resisted the Italian occupation engaged in rivalry and competition over the issue of reclaiming tenants and land (Ibid) following which the regime tried to solve the problem through introducing moderate measures by enacting administrative regulation known as Decree No. 1/ 1942.

The Decree dealt with the reorganization of administrative territories and establishment of a tightly structured and formal administrative system that is intended to unify the country and centralize power under the emperor. Nevertheless, the mechanism that sought to implement the Decree was strengthening the centralization drive mediated by the doctrine of the Orthodox Christian Church (see appendix V). However, this was resented by most of the local people because of the contradiction between the requirement of baptism and the culture and traditional values of the society (Ibid.). The baptism requirements included shaving of the head, adherence to fasting practices, and accepting change of Sidama name to Amharic and baptism names and others that were resented by the people.

Consequently, Amharic became the *lingua franca*, state-backed Orthodox Christianity became the only legitimate religion in the empire, and all forms of Amhara culture were imposed on the subjected peoples of the south as the only legitimate and ‘civilized culture’ (Teshale, 1995). During this time, one has to be “Amharized” to get some privileges. John Markakis (1994:227) argues that “in imperial Ethiopia for instance, it was easier for a non-Christian, who also did not speak Amharigna, to pass through the eye of a needle than to enter the charmed circle of power and privilege”. Poluha (1998:31) discussed the realities of access to power in Imperial Ethiopia stating that “...Nevertheless, a person aspiring to power had to be a man who had mastered Amharigna, adhered to [Orthodox] Christianity and had developed a good relationship with a powerful patron”. Such trends resulting from subjugation of the Sidama continued up until the revolution. In this connection, Aadland (2002: 33) described the trends characterizing the ruling system in Ethiopia as follows:

The modern, “westernized” state is an alien concept not only in the Ethiopian (sic) context, but more generally in Africa. Under Emperor Haileselassie, mengist, the Ethiopian concept of state, was experienced by people as domination from the center

and subjugation under its local representatives who wielded almost absolute power over the local people. The imperial monarchy developed into an absolutist state with a power structure based on feudalism and ethnicity.

Although some measures aimed at addressing the quest for protecting the rights of the Sidama were taken by the imperial regime, the practice of *neftegna-gabbar* rule persisted unabated. By the same token, the unorganized resistance of the local people continued up until the revolution in which the Sidama people actively participated hoping to regain their land and associated rights.

3.10. Political History of Sidama During the Upsurge of the Ethiopian Revolution

National inequality and oppression, the impact of backward mode of production, the failure of the imperial regime to transform state-society relations as well the marginalization of other religions and cultures were the historical causes of the Ethiopian revolution (Markakis & Nega, 1986; Merera 2011). These inadequacies brought about the fall of the millennia-old imperial system. Moreover, there were immediate causes that triggered popular anger against the imperial regime that included the famine episode of the early 1970s, rise in oil price, and the Education Sector Review Policy (Merera, 2011).

As detailed in the previous section, the marginalization and oppression perpetrated against the Sidama were unbearable and provoked a series of sporadic protests and violence. The Sidama people had no organized direct involvement in the revolution but made sporadic and spontaneous struggles against the system particularly after the end of the Italian occupation. Following the unfolding of the revolutionary process, the Sidama were mobilized to support the change. During this time, the Sidama peasantry protested against the landed aristocracy whom they dislodged from their rural holdings including land.

Since the 1960 aborted coup, student activism with a leftist orientation had slowly taken political shapes that led to the emergence of different political movements and groupings in the urban centers. In 1968, the first organized clandestine political group known as the All Ethiopian Socialist movement (*Meisone*) was organized and subsequently another political

force that came to be known as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) was formed a few years later. These political groups consolidated themselves in the wake of the Ethiopian Revolution but remained underground being confined in the urban centers (Ibid).

It is to be recalled that in rural Ethiopia, there were isolated peasant protests and uprisings against the imperial regime since the early 1940s. These took place Tigray, Gojjam, Bale and Gedeos indications of popular disillusionment and opposition against the imperial regime (Gebru Tareke, 1996). Similarly, there were sporadic conflicts and violence against the proxies of the imperial regime in the rural areas of Sidama (Betena, 1991).

In the urban centers, students in colleges and high schools mobilized by different political forces and student activists who later joined the different political groups that were mushrooming underground. In the Sidama area, the provincial town of Yirgalem had been the center of political activism that was highly networked with political forces in the center than with the sporadic resistances of the Sidama peasantry in the rural areas. Few elites and students in Sidama had been involved with those political forces. It is difficult to categorize the involvement of Sidama elites with clearly identified agenda of their own when joining the different political forces that came on the scene during the unfolding of the revolutionary process. However, needless to say that most of them were allied with the underground political force known as All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (*Meisone*). There was no visible political and ideological difference between the emerging leftist political groups since most claimed to have embraced Marxism-Leninism confounded with blurred nationalisms of various denominations including upholding of the national question targeting oppressed ethnic groups. The Sidama welcomed the 1975 Land Reform Act that abolished landlordism, which was the major cause of marginalization, class domination and national oppression in the country.

Despite the demise of the imperial regime following the September 1974 Revolution, which brought to power the military dictatorship spearheaded by Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam, there was no significant change as far as the fundamentals of centralism and ethnic domination were concerned (Seyum Hamesso 2001). The Ethiopian Revolution, to some extent, dealt with the problem of ethnic oppression in the course of abolishing class oppression. This notwithstanding, however, the marginalization of ethnic identity and culture persisted unabated under the pretext of preserving unity and uniformity of national culture.

In the aftermath of the revolution, the Sidama supported the military regime for its enacting of the Land Reform. Initially, the military regime mobilized the support of the populace mainly in the rural areas of the country including Sidama. Articles 8 and 10 of the 1975 Land Reform Proclamation provided that, peasants shall be organized under farmers' associations, which were charged with the task of facilitating the implementation of rural development programs and policies. This provision later served as the political instrument of the military dictatorship for controlling and dominating the peasantry. Hamer (2007:6) described the situation in the following manner:

Finally, there is the question of how these rituals and the authority of the elders have changed in the twenty years of revolution and upheaval that have afflicted Ethiopia, from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s. Interviews with Sidama in Addis Ababa late in 1984 indicated that the cash economy expanded until 1977, then gradually contracted as a result of taxation and marketing controls imposed by the Marxist government. Voluntary development associations were replaced by peasant societies permitted to exercise police power. Other nationwide changes [included] nationalisation of land, acreage limitations, and the principle that land would be allocated only to producers, had less impact. This was because the vast majority of Sidama were smallholder producers before the 1974 revolution. Moreover, though all peasant associations acquired judicial committees, the Committees tended to function on a consensual basis, like traditional councils, with elders often retaining authority. Though formal appeal against judicial committee decisions could be lodged with a district (Wereda) committee, because of administrative difficulties and corruption few were realized.

The military regime pursued a highly centralized administrative structure comprising 14 administrative regions whereby Sidamaland had been included in the Sidamo Administrative Region under which six sub-provinces, namely Sidama, Wonago, Borana, Jemjem, Wolayita and Arero were established. Sidama sub-province constituted eight local administrations that included Awassa, Dale, Shebedino, Bensa, Arbegona, Wondo, Hagereselam, and Aroressa. Administrators for each sub-province were assigned and appointed by the officials of the administrative region or sub-provinces and the appointed local officials largely behaved in

authoritarian and undemocratic manner due to the fact that they were not answerable to the people over whom they ruled. According to this arrangement, the lowest administrative units were peasant associations as equivalents to grassroots administrative units.

The military regime pursued oppressive policy under the banner of “Ethiopia First” and “Ethiopia or Death” both of which were based on aggressive patriotism and ruthless use of coercion that was detrimental to the legitimate claims and demands and aspirations of society. Accordingly, no recognition was accorded to diversity and respect for culture and identity of the people whereby primacy was given to the nation building process in a manner reminiscent of the centralization drives under imperial rule expressed, albeit in a new form. Hence, neglecting traditional social institutions and cultures of peoples became the unwritten policies of the regime. The Sidama were not exceptional in this regard and the much expected revolutionary changes did not address the national question that was caused by the expansionist imperial rule as a result of which the dictatorial nature of the military regime and its harsh measures entailed the intensification of the demand for national self-determination.

Injustice, corruption and suppression of rights were the characteristic features of the workings of the military regime in Sidamaland as was the case in other areas of the country. Opposition to such manifestations of suppression resulted in arbitrary arrests and extra-judicial killings that took place under the pretext of supporting organized opposition movements in the area. This state of affairs described the regime as a force that employed violence against its own people (Abbink, 1996). The people were forced to learn Amharic and suffered to get access to government officials due to language barriers. During the period in question, it was commonplace that the officials of the regime repeatedly stormed and dismantled different cultural and religious sites and banned cultural practices and rituals from taking place. In this manner, the most prominent ritual site of the Sidama that is located near Yirgalem Town was closed and its property was confiscated by officials of the military regime under the pretext of promoting ant-communist and anti-revolution thoughts and practices. One of the most striking acts of the unruly local officials and their local militias in the study locations was that they had harassed and attacked Sidama women who wore traditional clothes made of leather (*tuba*). Although regional and ethnic factors did not come to the forefront during the incumbency of the military regime, Amhara culture and language continued to be preferred since the officials

mistakenly believed that it is cultural and linguistic unity and integration that is most desirable for nation building.

As discussed in the foregoing, the oppression under *neftegna-gabbar* rule was unbearable for the Sidama. During the heydays of the revolution, the Sidama participated in the popular uprisings and contributed to the downfall of the imperial regime that contributed to the abolition of the *neftegna-gabbar* system and nationalization of land as public property that prompted the Sidama to anticipate that they could regain their land. However, this did not materialize because the military regime freed the peasant from the bondage of the landlords and put them under the bondage of the state through its forced collectivization policies and state-led agricultural marketing scheme (Girma Kebede, 1992). Peasant Associations and Producers' Cooperatives and Unions were the main instruments of the regime's political and economic dominance. Peasant associations assumed a wide range of responsibilities, including implementation of government land use directives, adjudication of disputes over land, implementation of development programs designed by employing top-down approaches in the form of water and land conservation, construction of schools, clinics, and cooperatives, as well as organization of defense squads and tax collection (Mulatu, 1991).

Since 1976, farmers were forced to form cooperatives. Both producers and service cooperatives were formed in most peasant associations and became the core units of production and distribution of goods and services. Service cooperatives provided basic and essential inputs by undertaking sale of farm inputs and consumer items, provision of loans, education of peasant association members in socialist philosophy, and promotion of cottage industries. The Land Reform Proclamation freed the Sidama people from the bondage of the *neftegna-gabbar* system but the practices of peasant associations and cooperatives put the people under the bondage of the state. In this connection, Hamer (2007:6) describes the nature of the regime and the disenchantment of the people as follows:

Gradually, taxation and marketing controls become more oppressive and attempts were made to impose collective farming. These oppressive measures led to the rustiness and the formation of the Sidama Liberation Movement. At the same time the government sought to draft the youth into the army to fight in Eritrea.

The literacy campaign that had been launched by the regime after the revolution was highly welcomed and it had some positive impacts in improving the overall literacy rate of citizens. However, this was geared to indoctrinating political ideology. Although there were attempts to introduce some widely spoken languages in the literacy campaign, the focus was mainly on teaching Amharic as the *lingua franca* of the country. The campaign for basic education helped to improve the overall understanding of the community about education and positively changed the attitudes of parents prompting them to send children to school.

The objectives of the 1985 Villagization Program, which grouped scattered farming communities throughout the country into small village clusters, was declared to be vital for promoting rational land use, conserve resources, provide access to clean water, health and education services, and strengthen security. Although the government had villagized about 13 million people by 1989, international criticism, deteriorating security conditions, and lack of resources doomed the plan (Mulatu, 1991). Critics (Markos, et.al 2011) also claim that the government wanted to establish villages for the purpose of controlling people's way of life and preventing political dissidents from infiltrating the villages.

There were mixed feelings regarding the government-led villagization and collectivization schemes. In terms of providing access to utilities and services, many concur that the schemes had some positive impacts. However, the way through which they were implemented was against the will of the people since the schemes uprooted the people from their ancestral lands and confined them in small hamlets where the people felt alien in the new places of settlement. In Sidama area, the staple crop is *enset* plant, which is traditionally grown around the homesteads with continuous care and application of manures. It requires several years to mature, but due to forced villagization people abandoned this plant and suffered from food shortages as a result of which the villagization program faced stiff opposition that led to dire consequences. In most parts of the country, resettlement took place without adequate assessment of the different implications as a result of which thousands of people were subjected to malaria infection and many other problems.

Generally, the aforementioned policies and attendant practices of the military regime created dissatisfaction and opposition against the regime. They put the people under total control and dominance of the state and the nature of the relation between the state and society was skewed

against the latter that remained disadvantaged as a result of the ill-advised policies and decisions of the government. The policies and practices of the government further dismantled the already endangered traditional institutions of the people. Due to such negative developments, the people of Sidama were forced to fight one of the worst wars against the military regime for over eight years. Hamer (1987) describes the difficulties that the Sidama people were forced to bear during the period in question as follows:

The crisis and turning point came in 1980 when the government sought to impose collective farming in Sidamaland, which led people to believe their smallholdings would be confiscated. This action and rising discontent with the Marxist regime led to the formation of the Sidamo Liberation Movement. There followed pitched battles with government troop, resulting ultimately in the cancellation of the forced collectivization programme. Nevertheless, there was continuous suffering and struggle throughout the 1980s as the Sidamo Liberation Movement sought to recruit youth to fight against the government and the latter drafted young men to fight in Eritrea.

3.11. The Struggle of the Sidama Against National Oppression and Inequality

The Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM), which was established in 1978, is the first organized political movement under the leadership of Dubale who was among the first group of elites who tried to represent the interest of the Sidama people. Woldemannuel was the founder-leader of the Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM), which was initially regarded as the true representative of the Sidama people but later it lost its support amongst the people because of the war that adversely affected the civilian populations taking place in the vicinity of the settlements. This notwithstanding, however, the main cause that led to the establishment of SLM was national oppression that had taken place since the conquest of the Sidama by the Ethiopian state under the leadership of Menelik II.

The establishment of the SLM could be considered as a continuation of past covert and overt resistance against the oppression of the Sidama under the imperial system (Markos, 2002). The birth of SLM did not take place overnight but rather constitutes the continuity of earlier sporadic popular resistances. The issue of internal self-determination, equitable political representation and protection of Sidama identity are among the key goals that SLM sought to

realize (Kifle, 2007). The founder and the late leader of the Movement, Woldeamanuel, explained the driving goals of SLM's struggle as follows:

The goals of the Sidama people [in its organized struggle in the late 1970s and the 1980s] were the removal of all types of oppression that had been imposed on them by the ruling class, the respect of their basic rights of which the ruling class deprived them, and the creation of a system in which they and other Ethiopian peoples would live in equality. The main and principal goal of the SLM is to ensure; that the Sidama national group governs its own territory through its own democratically elected leaders; that it is represented in the federal government, at a national level, by its own democratically elected representatives; and that its language and culture are respected (cited in Kifle, 2007: 203)

Some of the major leaders of the struggle were those who were involved in the Somali-Abo Liberation Front (SALF), which was established earlier than the SLM, which heralded transformation from the earlier unorganized resistance to organized struggle. The establishment of the SLM was correlated with the struggle of different 'underground' organizations that flourished after the revolution. Most of founders of SLM were mobilized under *Meison* (Markos 2002). Needless to say that there was the claim that *Meison* members were predominantly from Oromo and other southern nationalities whereas those belonging to EPRP as members were predominantly the young educated Amharas and Tigreans (Merara, 2001; Kifle 2007).

In due course, the military regime fell under the increased control of hardliners who began to eliminate all opposition forces and targeted those educated elements who were organizing ethno-national parties (Clapham, 1988). WoldeemannuelDubale and his colleagues actively participated in the struggle under *Meison* in a secret and covert way and hence SLM was organized under the shadow of *Meison*. SLM tried to raise the consciousness of the people and prepared them for the struggle against military rule by organizing local militias and peasants (Markos, 2002).

Initially, Woldemannuel did not know that his clandestine activity under *meisone* was exposed to the regime. Later, he got some clue from some relatives about the regime's intention to arrest him after which he fled to the bush and embarked on the establishment of the Sidama

Liberation Movement with his followers. The first move in establishing SLM took place in Yirgalem on January 10, 1978, few days before Woldemannuel's escape to Aroressa with some SLM founding members and local followers. Aroressa was the place where the final draft of the Movement was ratified following which members who were active under *Meison* were mobilized to participate in the subsequent course of the struggle.

It had been difficult to get an official account of the war waged against the military regime in Sidama. There was also no much media attention of the war unlike the case of other movements in the different parts of the country mainly because the war in Sidama was one of the regime's best-kept secrets (Human Right Watch, 1991:87). Despite human, economic and physical impacts of the war in the region and the intensity and scope of the fighting, very little mention of it is found in the literature given that the military regime was repressive and never tolerated opposition (Merera, 2011; Markos 2002).

The commencement of the struggle against the military regime in Sidama is continuation of the unorganized movement in southeastern Ethiopia through *siassa* (collaboration) with some the Somali Abo Liberation Front (SALF). The actual launching of the guerrilla war in Sidama started when 700 trained and well-armed SLM fighters returned from Somalia and attacked the army camp at Hache in Bensa District. According to some SLM leaders, this first surprise attack showed the people for the first time that Sidama peasants could destroy the well-armed government forces (Markos, 2002). It was believed that the initiation of the struggle inspired and motivated the ordinary people to join the guerrilla fighters. After this initial encounters, SLM fighters established their base in Aroressa by controlling the whole of Aroressa and part of the District of Bensa.

At the initial stage of the guerilla operations, the headquarters of the SLM guerillas was in Mogadishu. Their stronghold was in Aroressa from which they attacked Bensa, Arbegona and Hagereselam Districts employing guerilla tactics of hit and run. Their main targets were the urban centers because they wanted to focus on urban areas where government officials and soldiers were concentrated. The guerrilla fighters also attacked and destroyed the institutions of the regime as a result of which public utilities under government control were destroyed (Ibid). After series of engagements between the military regime and the SLM guerrilla fighters, the war ended in 1984 with the virtual defeat and surrender of the insurgents. The war claimed

the lives of thousands and led to the destruction of public utilities and institutions, demolition and burning of many urban and rural houses, and exposed hundreds of thousands of people to starvation and displacement.

Lack of skilled manpower, communication barriers, shortage of supply and logistical problems as well as the deterioration of the morale of the guerrilla fighters were the main factors that led to the defeat of SLM. The recruitment of local people for counter-insurgency operations by the regime had also contributed to the defeat of the insurgency, which most of the leaders of SLM regarded as the main causes of the experienced setbacks. Their justification for the surrender was that after the enlisting of new local recruits in the counterinsurgency of the regime, the war would be conducted between the Sidama people as a result of which the lives that would be lost on both sides would adversely affect only the Sidama. Hence, they argued, "Whom do we claim to liberate? Would we fight to liberate barren and empty land of the Sidama, after loss of millions of lives of Sidamas? If we continue to do so, it would be mass massacre"(Leaders of the SLM cited in Markos 2002). Based on this, SLM preferred to abandon the struggle prompting the leaders to return to exile and spend their time abroad until the fall of the Military regime (Ibid). Subsequently, several guerrilla fighters agreed to return home and lead normal life by taking advantage of the amnesty declared by the regime.

At this juncture, it is worth mentioning to give account of popular uprisings against the military regime in Boricha and Wotera Rasa that took place in the 1980. Boricha is a district in Sidama located to the southwest of Hawassa where the people protested against the regime's arbitrary rule and its ruthless measures against civilians who were accused of supporting the rebels. The people also opposed the discriminatory measures introduced to disarm the Sidama people who were in the hostile relations with the neighboring people due to competition over renewable resources. The stubborn stand of the regime's local officials never gave room for dialogue on the issue. The regime's local 'intelligence' officials, without consulting the political and civilian leadership of the region, requested the military leadership of the Army's Southern Command stationed in the region to take measures against the people. The information by the intelligence unit detailed out that the people in Boricha were fully armed and had forged close ties with the rebels and hence were prepared to launch attacks against government forces. Following this, the military command dispatched troops to 'destroy' the 'rebels' by launching

military attacks on the villages. Following this, the people mobilized forces from all walks of life and started to defend themselves against indiscriminate attacks by the army and eventually reversed the offensive by pushing back the regime's forces that sustained severe damages¹¹.

The commander of the military in the region, General Demise Bulto, who later became one of the leaders of aborted coup of 1989, was irritated by the outcome of the conflict and ordered the military to attack with full capacity by using heavy armaments against the protesters. The renewed military offensive resulted in thousands of casualties including destruction of many villages. Since the full-scale military offensive was launched in the vicinity of human settlements without discriminating between civilians and fighters, the level of damage inflicted was so severe that affected hundreds of children and women. Later, the military blocked all the routes to deny people from getting access to information and barred the families from collecting the remains of their loved ones who were buried in mass graves using construction machineries. Due to this, the exact number of those who lost their lives remained clearly unknown. Later, President Mengistu came to the region and was annoyed by the excesses of the army undertaken without his knowledge. However, he was mollified after the officials persuaded him by justifying the deeds¹².

The incident at Wotera Rasa took place few months after the Boricha massacre. Wotera Rasa is located to the southeast of Hawassa. The incident was caused by factors that were similar to Boricha but the intervention of political and civilian officials resulted in a peaceful settlement with less casualty though rampant abuse of rights and arbitrary arrests were experienced. The peasant rebellion in Wotera Rasa was actually caused as a result of protest against the ruthless military measure taken in Boricha. In Wotera Rasa, the military made limited direct confrontation with the people and hence the number of casualties became highly limited as a result (Ibid).

¹¹Interview: Zekarias Loodo August,2013 Chucko; Hailu Dawaqo, August 2013, Chucko; Talo Butano 2010, Hawassa; Hegiso Gacheno, Hawassa, 2011)

¹² Interview: Zekarias Loodo, August 2013, Chucko; Hailu Dawaqo, Chucko August, 2013)

3.12. Administrative Structure and Political System in Sidama under EPRDF

The Sidama Zone is one of the fourteen zones in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State comprising 19 districts (*woredas*), 549 grassroots units of administration (*kebeles*) and two autonomous town administrations. Hawassa city serves as the capital city of the Regional State as well as Sidama Zone. Hawassa Zuria, Dale, Boricha, Gorche, Aletawondo, Aletachucko, Bona Zuria, Bensa, Arbegona, Aroessa, Chire, Wondo genet, Malga, Shebedino, Dara and Wonsho are the 19 *woredas* of the Sidama Zone whereas Aletawondo and Yirgalem are organized as towns with special status within the zone.

Historically since the incorporation of Sidama into the modern empire state at the end of the 19th century, Sidama had been organized as distinct administrative unit. In widely using the name Sidamo, the imperial regime governed it as one of the 14 governorate generals incorporating Sidama and other adjacent territories and peoples. During the brief Italian occupation, the Italian administrators preferred to name most parts of the southern and southwestern parts of the country as Oromo and Sidama with Jimma as the administrative center. The previous naming of the Sidamo governorate general was reinstated and administrative practices continued in the aftermath of the restoration of the imperial regime in 1941. A similar trend was followed by the military regime, which reorganized the country into 14 *kiflehager*/prefectures when Sidamo became one of these encompassing Sidama proper, Wolayita, Gedeo, Borena, Arero and Jemejem with its capital first in Yirgalem, and later in Hawassa.

Following the introduction of new arrangements resulting from the 1991 regime change that heralded the ouster of military rule, the right of ethnic groups to self-determination obtained constitutional recognition as affirmed by the Transitional Charter that was ratified at the July 1991 Conference. The Charter established a transitional government in which the EPRDF secured the highest share of seats in the Council of Representatives (Kinfu, 2001). The Charter opened a new chapter in the country's constitutional history as far as the nationality question is concerned. During this time, the Sidama were recognized as one of country's distinct ethnic

groups with the right to preserve and develop their cultural traits and ethnic identity and exercise self-rule based on the principle of self-determination.

The Transitional Charter recognized the establishment of 14 ‘self-governing’ regional states namely: Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somali, BeniShangul-Gumuz, Sidama, North Omo, South Omo, Guraghe/Hadiya Gambella, Harari, Dire Dawa and Addis Ababa as regions 1-14 respectively. After 1994, five regions were merged together and designated as the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPRS) as a result of which the number of the regional states in the country was reduced to 9. Dire Dawa and Addis Ababa were given special status as city administrations under the federal government. Article 39 of the 1995 constitution ‘granted’ ethnic groups ‘unconditional’ right to self-determination up to and including secession. Moreover, article 41(9) of the constitution provided for the protection and preservation of cultural and historical legacies of the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia including SNNPRS.

With the adoption of the incumbent constitution, the merging of the 5 ethnolinguistic regions that formed SNNPRS was recognized as one integrated multi-ethnic and multinational region. Accordingly, the Sidama was constituted as one Zonal administration, Sidama Zone, under SNNPRS. A good number among the Sidama elite were against such a merger and since then the quest for acquiring a regional status became the cornerstone of politics and state-society relations in Sidama. At a later stage, Hawassa and its environs were detached from the Sidama Zone and constituted the Hawassa Special Zone whereas the Sidama Zone administration was reconstituted with 19 local administrations (*woreda*) and two special town administrations. Such restructuring of Hawassa detached from the jurisdiction of Sidama Zone was resented by the people and led to clash between government forces and the local population as evidenced by the taking place of a major peaceful demonstration that resulted in considerable loss of life. The nature of state-society relations and the relations between the regime’s governance policies and the situation of the traditional political institutions in Sidama are dealt with in two subsequent chapters.

Chapter IV

Essence and Functions of Traditional Modes of Governance in Sidama

4.1. Background

Prior to dealing with the issue at hand, describing the traditional and indigenous political institutions in pre-colonial Africa would be worthwhile. The pre-colonial institutions in Africa were considered as the original indigenous institutions due to the fact that they were free of influences of western culture and state structures underpinned by modernity and associated attributes. Since the 16th century, Africa's indigenous institutions had gone through series of changes resulting from various interactions and contacts with the outside world. In pre-colonial Africa, there were as many as 10,000 polities with sundry political systems and groupings (Merdith, 2006 cited in Arowolo, 2010). Scholars argue that there had been heavily structured clan groupings in the Horn of Africa (Arowolo, 2010). Dzivenu (2008:8) describes the nature of pre-colonial political institutions of Africa as follows:

Before Africa was colonised, most indigenous states had a well-organised system where chiefs and their council of elders governed. The headman, who was the leader of the smallest constituent, was responsible to the village chief. The village chief was subject to a senior (sic) or divisional chief who is in turn subject to the paramount chief. It is also worth noting that in every village there are structures for conflict and dispute settlement through the chief and his council of elders.

The aforementioned citation also reflects the reality of the Sidama before its incorporation into the modern Ethiopian empire state. The Sidama have their own system of governance and traditional regulatory mechanisms for conducting traditional political and administrative practices that are anchored in their own distinct cultures that distinguish them from other people. In the period preceding Menelik's expansion, the Sidama had strong but highly decentralized political systems that allowed each clan to run its affairs autonomously. There were fragmented traditional administrative and political systems where there was no particular

group that dominated the others. In Sidama, thirteen subgroups had been identified as having been administered by their respective *songos* (elders' councils) on which the *mootes* presided¹³.

Sidama traditional authority did not develop into monarchical rule because of restriction on exercise of absolute power by the councils of elders (*songos*) consisting of the leading elders known as *chimeye* (singular- *chimessa*) representing each local community. If the *mooto/garo* was found guilty he was liable to be brought before the group assembly for questioning and possible deposition. In this regard, Ababu (1995:11) notes that:

Although they lived in a definite geographical territory, the people spoke the same language and followed a similar socio-economic system; the Sidama people, surprisingly enough, do not have the tradition of centralized political system, except for a brief period of two legendary rulers- Digamma and Furra who succeeded in imposing their arbitrary power up on the whole Sidama people.

The traditional administrative system of the Sidama starts from the family in ascending order up to the council of the group called *gare* (literally: clan). The councils operate as independent units. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are fourteen councils of the subgroups that operate in the entire Sidama society. The leadership style can be termed as democratic gerontocracy, which means administration based on age-grade system (Hamer, 1987; Tolo, 1998). Like other Ethiopian egalitarian administrative traditions, the leadership of Sidama social institutions is based on patriarchal relationship (Hamar, 1966). Women's participation is restricted to lodging specific complaints and/or giving testimonies regarding litigation surrounding incidents in households and neighborhoods as eyewitnesses. Despite the very nature of fragmentation of the political and administrative systems, there was no cultural, linguistic and socio-economic differences among the Sidama.

The evolution of traditional political institutions is associated with the evolution of the Sidama as distinct ethnocultural group. Sidama traditional institutions are part of the identity of the

¹³Interview: Hailu Dawaqo, August 2013, Chucko; Zekarias Loodo, August 2013, Chucko; Woma Bekele Biliso, July 2011, Gorche

people that are linked with enjoying smooth life and survival. As a matter of principle, stateless Sidama society had its own mechanisms of managing affairs and tackling problems arising between members. Sidama political institutions also evolved as the major means of managing the affairs of the society and tackling problems that unfold among the members of the community. Traditional leadership is part of Sidama culture and it evolved in tandem with the socio-cultural and political relations between people. Thus, whenever cultural life unfolds traditional leadership and institutions take shape. According to the elders, it is impossible to deal with issues surrounding traditional leadership without understanding the culture of the people. This is due to the fact that traditional political institutions are integral part of the wider culture¹⁴.

Traditional institutions in Sidama can be categorized into three. The first one is *luwa* with the *gadana* as a leader and commander who is responsible for preparing the next generation to shoulder tasks associated with defense by assuming, greater social responsibility and leadership. The second is traditional religion that conducts rituals for bestowing support and divine legitimacy to the core values, customs and institutions of the people conducted by the *woma* who is the leader of traditional religion and the chief performer of rituals. The third is the traditional political institution, which is charged with the task of regulating the overall socio-cultural and political life of the community¹⁵. The evolution, continuity and legitimacy of the traditional political institution in Sidama depend on the aforementioned. *Moote/geelo* refers to individuals who are leaders of traditional political institutions with different names playing similar roles in their respective clans.

Sidama traditional political institutions evolved through the ages since time immemorial by engaging in guiding, leading and harmonizing relations between community members. According to the elders, traditional political institutions played the role of defending the people from potential and actual threats and external attacks by determining the mechanisms used for averting impending dangers facing the community.¹⁶ These were indigenous systems of

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Summary from Focus group discussions, August 2013, Chucko

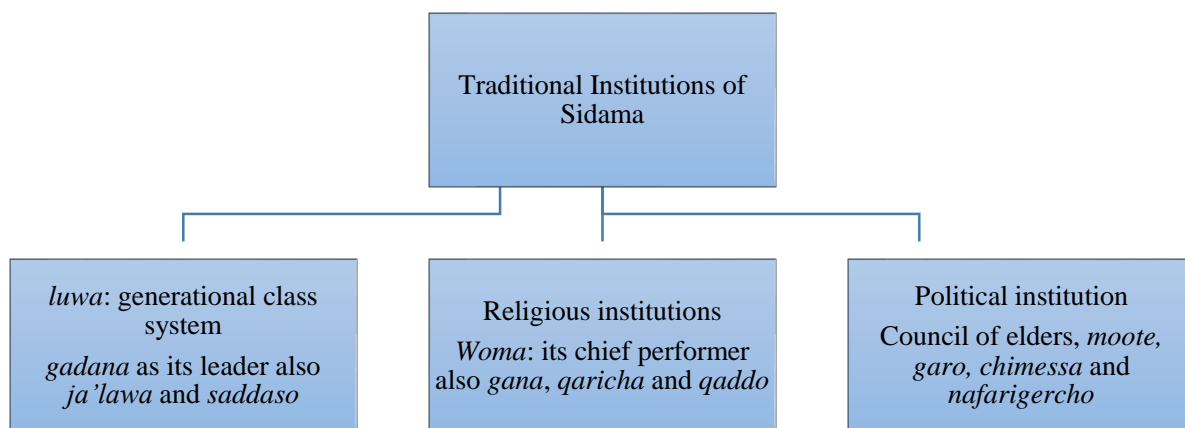
¹⁶ FGD, August 2013, Gorche

administration that fully regulated the interactions in society before the coming on the scene of modern systems of administration and governance.

4.2. Structure, Roles and Typology

The organization of Sidama traditional institutions can be classified into three depending on the role they play. These are generational class system or *luwa*, religious institutions (*buduama'no*) and the political institution that is mainly represented by the council of elders' or *songo*¹⁷.

Figure 7: Structure of Sidama Indigenous Institutions



The generational class system is a major institution that prepares the youth to take greater responsibilities in the community for both spiritual and secular life of the society. As explained in the following sections, *luwa* is the basis for all other institutions and socio-cultural practices. The age-grade system (*luwa*) where the youth is transformed to manhood through series of initiations provides the ground for constituting traditional political institutions. *Luwa* also guarantees the continuity of the system since one of its objectives is to train the younger generation to assume greater responsibility in leading the community and managing various

¹⁷ The researcher's conclusion based on the exchanges made on FGDs held in four locations in Sidama between 2010 and 2013

issues concerning members. It should be noted that only those who had passed through this system are eligible to assume responsibility and gain respect in dealing with problems that occur in the society. The *gadana*, who is the leader of this whole process, has greater responsibility to lead and manage the whole process of initiating people into subsequent cycles. In the case of *luwa*, there are three offices associated with it. These include *Gadaana* the leader and the two deputies called *jalawa* and *saddasso*. There is also the servant of the *gadana* called *agisho*, who is a member of a caste, which is not recognized in contemporary practices¹⁸. In the *luwa* system, the young generation would be trained and prepared for greater social responsibilities as future spiritual and secular leaders.

Sidama religious institutions manage the whole process related with the spiritual life of the community and are charged with the responsibility of carrying out all rituals and traditional festivities. As mentioned earlier, the *woma* as the ritual leader presides in all religious affairs of the community and advises and guides other leaders on how to manage community affairs. This institution also provides spiritual and ritualistic services for entrenching adherence to and protection of core values, beliefs, customs and institutions. It is the source of legitimacy and power for traditional leadership. Religious institution carried out various functions and played different roles in the context of organized structures. *Halaale*, ancestral veneration and *magano* (the creator) are the core elements that constitute the Sidama religion. The overall characteristics features of Sidama traditional religion are dealt with in section 4.3. *Woma* is a spiritual leader who commands legitimacy by passing through the different phases of the *luwa* system by invoking family connections with spiritual leaders. *Woma* provides spiritual service to the society and guides and advises the secular traditional leadership in spiritual matters and takes the lead in ritual ceremonies and festivities¹⁹.

The Sidama traditional political institution is the center of focus in this study. It directly deals with socio-political and economic life of the community that is basically constituted as the council system through the agency of collective leadership. The exercise of power depends on

¹⁸ Interview Woma Bekele Biliso, August 2013, Gorche

¹⁹ Interview Woma Bekele Biliso, Chokole Agafaru, August 2013 Gorche; Woma Mude Yume, September 2010 Bursa

how the leader manages the *songo*/council and harnesses the legitimacy of the council of elders and the community at large. The leadership structure is decentralized based on autonomous clan where each clan has its own traditional leadership in various forms like *songo*, *woma*, *moote*, *gadana*. There is only horizontal relation between the leaders of one clan and the other. If there is a need to deal with the overall issues of the entire ethnic group, the elected leaders and members of the council from each clan should come together to discuss and finally reach consensus on issues of common concern.

Leaders of traditional institutions were expected to respect the basic values, norms and beliefs of the society. Respect for *halaale* and obeying God's will are also virtues that were highly expected to form the behaviors and actions of the leader. If a leader violates the basic virtues enshrined in *halaale* and does wrong against others, there are mechanisms to strip him of power by replacing him. If he is found guilty, he would then be restrained by *seera* or sanction not to exercise his power until the next council meeting. However, the leader also had the opportunity to appeal and clear himself. Unjust decisions, dictatorial tendencies, violation of social norms and values especially violation of *halaale* may lead to the dismissal of the traditional leader in a transparent manner that involves dialogue and discussion²⁰.

There are procedures in conflict management and mechanisms involved in making appeal. Traditional leaders are entrusted with high office and power to act on behalf of the community under the guardianship of the *songo* that has procedures, roles and functions in the society and acts on the basis of established rules and procedures. However, some of the rules and procedures slightly vary from clan to clan but are similar due to close interaction between clans. Traditional leadership used to prevail in Sidama society by sanctioning the transgressors by applying mechanisms embedded in socio-cultural values and customary norms. There are different procedures on the basis of which the traditional leadership functions that depend on *seera* to regulate the affairs of the community. Customary rules and values, contract with the leaders as well as strong commitment to *halaale* are the basic factors that promote the role of

²⁰ Interview Zekarias Loodo, September 2010 Chucko; Woma Bekele, July 2011 Gorche, Duchisho Buraqo, July 2010 Arbegona

traditional leaderships and enable them to fulfill their duties and obligations (Markos, et al 2011).

4.2.1. Luwa: Generational Class System

Luwa is an age-grade system that deals with the promotion of a generation from youth to adulthood. Its practice started in the Rift Valley Region of Ethiopia thousands of years ago (Ehret, 2002). According to elders²¹, the generational/age class system evolved in parallel with the identity of the Sidama people. Some scholars like Braukamper (1977) claim that the practice of *luwa* began before the Sidama moved to their current settlements. The *luwa* system has social, ritual, cultural, political and military dimensions. According to Hamer (1998), *luwa* is the generational class system that structures society into different sets of classes consisting three sets of people—elders(fathers), initiates(active), and pre-initiates where all men are linked to one another in a junior-senior relationship throughout the life cycles. Each of the five cycles of the *luwa* contains pre-initiates, initiates and elders (Hamer, 1970). The relations between these classes are characterized by deference and providing services to the elders and redistribution of wealth and knowledge to the youth.

The classes rotate clockwise, changing every seven years. The *ego* group belongs to the class following on the footsteps of fathers. As a pre- initiate is temporarily a member of the *luwa* of his great-grandfather, the elders assume the role of foster-fathers. Individuals in this group are initiated when the father in the preceding class is promoted to the status of elder. Thirty-five years later the ego group will begin the first seven years as an elder, when his father finishes the last year of his thirty-five-year elderhood cycle. It is worth mentioning to cite Hamer's (2007:208) explanation of the *luwa* in order to understand how the system functions:

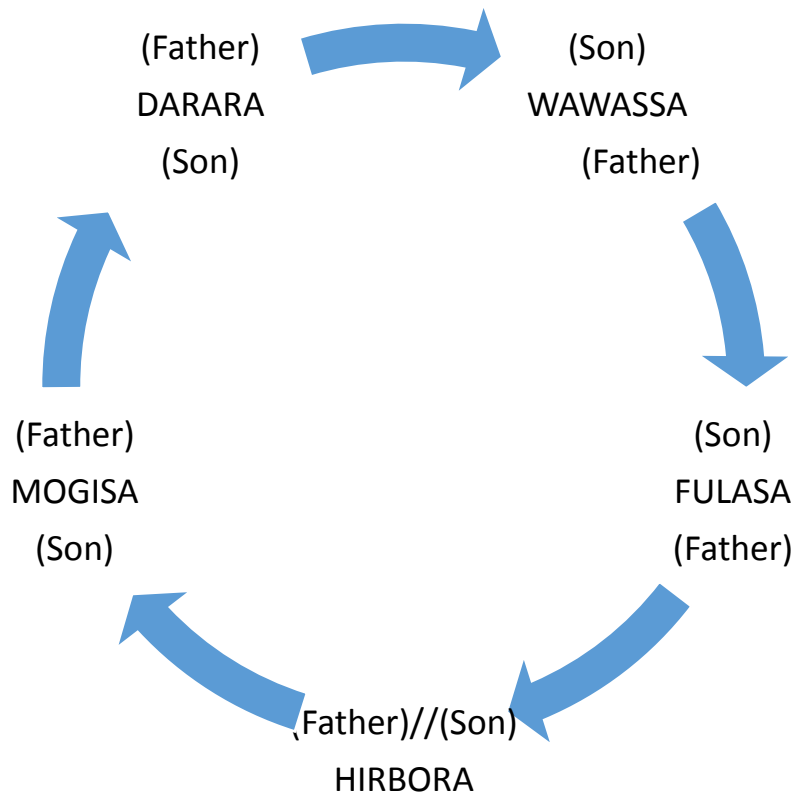
In the Luwa, there are five rotating classes that change every seven years, with each class consisting of three sets of elders, initiates, and pre-initiates. All five classes are intricately articulated with one another in the rotation system. Consequently, sons who

²¹Wome Mude Yume, September 2010, Bursa and Woma Bekele Biliso -July2011, Gorche,

are never initiated into the same class as their father initially become pre-initiate members of the third class, and gradually, as they move in the cycle, become foster-fathers to youth who will ultimately become initiates in their father's class. The significance of this system is that all men become linked to one another in a junior-senior relationship throughout the life cycle. This means that regardless of wealth obtained by personal initiative, all males, during the life cycle will shift from a youthful status of providing deference and service for elders to the position of the latter in redistributing wealth and knowledge. The movements within and between classes continue from birth until death.

According to Asmerom (1963:136), "...as a group individuals initiated in the same interval, whose membership in a group is compulsory and for life and who pass, as a group, through several successive intervals, which constitute major division of the whole, or part of, the life cycle". In the *luwa* system the relation between father and son is that a son becomes an initiate in the class of his father, as the latter's class begins its elderhood cycle. Consequently, the promotion of the son to elderhood should be made after the completion of his father's cycle.

Figure 8: The Luwa Cycle



Source: Adopted from Hamer 1987; Betena, 1983

When the members of the age-set group are initiated to start the cycle, they declare their newly elected *gadana* that indicates the beginning of the age-grade cycle. This takes place in a specific camp, which is often known as *woyyo* or *maancho*. The camping usually takes about three months (Betana, 1983). Now-a-days, the duration of stay in the camp is limited to less than three months due to financial and social factors. During this period, those in the camp avoid daily routine and interactions and rather spend time together in sharing experiences and practicing hunting and cattle-raiding. They do not spend the night at home but in the camp with *luwa* colleagues chanting, dancing and coaching each other. Going for hunting and cattle-raiding are practices that were sought to help in gaining physical fitness and enable to identify exceptionally gifted persons in terms of physical capability. At present, however, raiding the

enemy's cattle is not practicable since this is becoming a despicable act as opposed to the custom during earlier times²².

Figure 9: Celebration Ceremony at Bassa



Source: field photo

After the camping period, the initiation stage would lead to circumcision that is an equally important practice by males in Sidama society. The members of the age-set cycle group depend on their preparation to carry out circumcision any time within seven years before the initiation to the next *luwa* cycle. Ritual ceremonies also take place to enable individuals purify themselves and join upper class of elders through processes known as *qooto* and *maracha* by fulfilling the requirements of *anga*, which involves ritual purity of food and other attributes of behavior mainly focusing on preparation of food and observing eating habits.

For example, one should not eat meat unless the one holding the *angastatus* slaughters the animal (Hamer, 1987) whereas failure to do so in the specified period is considered as inability

²² Narratives summarized from FGDs held in Chucko and Gorche ,August 2013

to qualify for a very important step in life. This leads to the individual's marginalization and relegation to a status of inferiority. The one who leads the whole process and expedites the ritual ceremony including circumcision is acclaimed as one who has achieved the highest stage in life and given high respect and responsibility in the community and achieve the title known as *chimessa* (Makos Tekle, et.al, 2011). Following this, the individual is entitled to actively participate in the *songo* and is at the same time expected to strictly follow and adhere to the core values, customs and norms of the community. Short of this, individuals cannot command respect in the community and participate in the *songo*²³. In this regard, Vecchiato (1985:210) explains strong moral commitment expected from elders after achieving the aforementioned title:

... An elder is expected to behave in moral conformity to the ideals entailed by his position. The elders, first of all, expected to display an unequivocal commitment toward halale(truth), a quality which implies not only avoidance of any form of crime, such as stealing, perjury, corruption, injustice, but also a strict adherence to the highest standards of probity, integrity, honesty, and truthfulness. Furthermore, an elder is supposed to uphold the mores of the society as they have transmitted by their forefathers. In this respect, they are the repository of the tribal heritage which has been passed on from generation to generation (Vecchiato, 1985:210).

According to Hamer (2007), women are central for ensuring the survival of the generational class system without having formal membership due to their limited roles as sanctioned by established social practice. During the actual camping period of about three months, the active members of the cycle are prevented from interacting and engaging in sexual relations with women. According to elders²⁴, women can actively manage, facilitate and honor final celebrations of the initiation stage by supplying abundant food and drinks and performing dances and songs. The exclusion of women from direct participation in the generational class system can be expressed in terms of their limited roles and responsibilities in managing the ritual and participating in socio-political affairs of the community.

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Interview Woma Bekele, Woma Mude Yume, see above

■ Gaddana

As mentioned, gaddana is the leader of the age-grade institution known as *luwa*. *Gaddana* is literally considered as the military leader since one of his roles is capacitating and enabling the youth by training them as effective warriors and mobilizing them to cope up with challenging situations. Appointment to this post is complex when compared to positions in other traditional institutions due to the fact that appointment to this post is merit-based rather than ascribed. Hamer (2007:210) explained the role and position of *Gadaana* and in the wider community in general and the age group in particular as follows:

... a ritual leader Gadaana who is elected for his ability as peacemaker, tangibly symbolized by bodily perfection, character, oratorical ability, circumcision and wisdom. As a man of peace he cannot participate in a war or cattle raiding. There is, of course, a minimal occurrence of the latter in present-day affairs. Still, the Gadaana remains one of the two most highly respected peacemakers: not only is he called upon to settle disputes within his luwa, but he can be requested to negotiate settlements, in cases where elders' councils fail, anywhere in Sidamaland.

The *gadana*, who is the ritual and political leader of the *luwa* cycle, presides throughout the process of initiation period. He is the chief performer whenever sacrifices are made for the benefit of the age-set. The *Gadaana* convenes the *songo* for matters that are most important only. He is the father-figure and peace maker for both the *luwa* cycle and the community at large and commands high respect and influence among the members of his own group (Stanley, 1966).

There are steps that must be followed in appointing the commander of the *luwa* cycle during initiation. The commander maintains the same influence and power among members of the same generations mainly in defense and military matters. The desirable qualities of *gadana* include wisdom, appearance, ability to mediate disputes, etc. The elders' information²⁵ on the appointment procedure of *gadana* can be summarized as follows:

²⁵ Excerpts from FGDs held in Chucko, Gorche and Hawassa between 2010 and 2013

- Two individuals will be nominated at a time for the post based on their background and understanding of the values, customs and traditions of the society and their commitment to adhere to and uphold these. Until the decision is openly declared, the candidates would be told to stay in their homes and refrain from going to market places, crossing rivers, mixing with the crowd, and cutting their fingernails and hair. During their seclusion, they are required to engage in praying in honor of the deceased forefathers and wait until the *ayana* (good spirit) of the forbears reveals its preferences on the matter;
- This is followed by series of discussions, deliberations and consultations in the elders' councils that take place to decide who would be the preferred candidate;
- The elder's council and the members of the *luwa* cycle in question then deliberate on the issue by focusing on who is favored by the forefathers' *ayana* (good spirit). It is believed that the preference of the forefathers is revealed through indication of which of the candidates is blessed with good luck following which they select one among the candidates and call for holding a ceremony (*malawo*) to declare the favored one as *Gadaana*. Performing the *luwa* cycle rituals usually takes from six months to one year for graduation after which the chosen individual takes responsibilities for seven to eight years until the next generation is initiated.

Baasa ceremony is held in *woyyo* or *maancho*, as the site for conducting the *luwa* ritual. *Baasa* refers to the processes of officially declaring the leader by heralding the initiation of the cycle. On the basis of the recommendation of the council and cycle members, the leader, in consultation with the members, appoints two deputies-the second and third level leaders known as *ja'lawa* and *saddaso* respectively and one servant, the *agisho*. The successful launching of the aforementioned process signals the start of the formal functioning of the *luwa* cycle. Hamer(2007:233) summarizes the role of *gadana* as follows:

In addition to these gerontocratic patriarchs, the classes all have heads called Gadana. Though they are initially leaders of new classes of initiates, after promotion to elderhood they become leaders of all elders and initiates, regardless of class. Their

position is based on the belief that the *Gadana* represent elderhood perfection, being adept at settling disputes and creating a spirit of harmony among all the people. Though every new group of initiates must have a leader they are selected on a basis of speculation and hope.

Figure 10: Leaders of Luwa Institution in Descending Order of Hierarchy



■ Other Offices

Ja'lawa is a title given to the assistant of the *Gadaana*. *Ja'lawa* is the one who commands members of his age/peer groups while they are in the field and is considered as the second in command next to the *Gadaana*. *Saddaso* is the third level leadership title and the person who assumes this post usually takes responsibilities in the field during camping. *Agisho* is the private servant of the *Gadaana* who would be recruited from ordinary members and does not take part in the initiation cycles.

In its overall nature, *luwa* has similarity with the major characteristics of the generational class system that is common among the eastern highland Cushitic groups. For example, it shares some similarities with the *gada* system of the Oromo in terms of time span, accommodation of generations, and number of cycles, etc. However, there is a clear difference in terms of the purpose it serves. For example, the *luwa* system of Sidama mainly focuses on preparing the

youth for greater socio-cultural and political responsibilities. Unlike the Oromo *gada* system, it doesn't directly take part in functions associated with leadership and governance. It rather familiarizes the leaders with the workings and modes of operations of religious and political institutions in a manner that enables them to assume greater responsibilities through training and indoctrination.

In the case of the Oromo, the elected leaders of the *gada* system assume top positions in the ethnic hierarchy whereas their counterparts in Sidama have never been at the centre of institutional life to such a high degree. Besides, dualism is not experienced with regard to different rights in the Oromo *gada* system where the assimilated groups remain in underprivileged position. Among the Sidama, by contrast, there was de facto full integration of the three heterogeneous fragments into the new ethnos and into *gada* complex as well (Braukamper, 1977). In Sidama, anyone who would like to take part in rituals and assume socio-cultural and political responsibilities must pass through the generational class system. In *gada* system of the Oromo, the generational class directly takes the responsibility for overall affairs of the society. It directly constitutes the leadership for coming eight years until the next cycles takeover. Asmerom (2006: 31) defines the *gada* system as "...a system of *gada* classes (*luba*) or segments of genealogical generations that succeed each other every eight years in assuming political, military, judicial, legislative and ritual responsibilities" (Asmerom, 2006: 31).

In the same vein, it is also important to make a brief assessment of the equivalent age grade system in Burji society, which is known as the '*Hagie*'. *Hagie* is the social order where men of common generation pass through certain ranks at a given time. The overall system is also called *gada*, which more or less shares common features with state of affairs among the Oromo and the Sidama (Markos, 2011a). According to Cerulli (1956), the social grades that are achieved by passing through initiation rites are very important since they enable the youth to enter the subsequent phase and attain the next stage. This generational class was mainly known for its military activities. Some authors (Amborn, 1984) refer to this group as warriors who had duties of guarding clanfrontiers and undertaking police functions and economic responsibilities. However, there are some clans among the Burji who do not practice this.

The age-grade system makes the members of all age-group proud for belonging to their respective categories that entail corresponding privileges. The formation of age-groups is regulated and mediated by circumcision that is associated with certain initiation rites performed during a ceremony called *omisso*. Age-groups pass through six cycles, namely which include *Barbara, Dambala, Gamassi, Bale, Harbora or Halbola, and Kumbulili*. During the conducting of *omisso* festivals, all the elders gather and offer an ox to the *gada* priest (Markos, 2011a).

Having briefly compared the workings of traditional systems and the institutional arrangements in Sidama with that of the Oromo and the Burji, there is now a need to look at new developments that affect the vibrancy of the Sidama traditional governance system in regulating societal affairs in various ways. It is to be recalled that conflict between the Sidama and other neighboring groups led to the emergence of the *luwa* system that is charged with the task of training the youth for shouldering the upkeep of the welfare of their communities. It should, however, be noted that the rationales and justifications that led to the establishment of *luwa* are increasingly fading into oblivion due to a number of factors associated with the dynamics affecting the socio-political and cultural landscape as well as the nature of state-society relations in the country in general and the study area in particular.

Currently, large sections of Sidama society tend to believe that education has become the replacement for the *luwa* since families are increasingly keen to send their children to schools than encouraging their participation in traditional practices and other cultural exercises. As a result, many people do not find time to lend attention to observance of established societal norms and cultural practices. Moreover, the youth are more interested in finding gainful employment opportunities without confining themselves to the traditional places of domicile. Some elders²⁶ opined that *luwa* is very important for sustaining the culture of the Sidama whereas others²⁷ are of the view that it is possible to modify and adjust the system to modern way of life and teach the youth about the culture and tradition of the ethnic group. Many are worried as regards the diminishing number of *luwa* entrants from time to time. For example,

²⁶ Interview with Argaw Bantora August 14, 2013; Woma Bekele Biliso July 16, 2011, Gorche

²⁷ Interview with Zekarias Loodo, August 14, 2013, Chucko; Tafesse Huriso, August 14, 2013, Chucko; Hailu Dawaqo, August 14, 2013, Chucko

the elders²⁸ from Hawela clan are highly worried that two years have lapsed without starting the preparations for the upcoming *luwa* cycle despite announcements to this end by the elders.

4.2.2. Elders Council and Leadership

One of the characteristic features of gerontocratic governance system is its being dominated by the elders' council, which functions in different settings to deal with the multifaceted socio-cultural, political and economic problems of the society. Hamer (1987:112-113) notes the following in this regard:

Elders' councils are referred by the term songo. They constitute the formal organization for making policy and settling the disputes that arise within and between hamlet, neighborhood, and descent groups. It is in the day-to-day functioning of these groups that quarrels are resolved and policies devised for avoiding autarky at the house-hold level for preserving the community cooperation maintaining production.

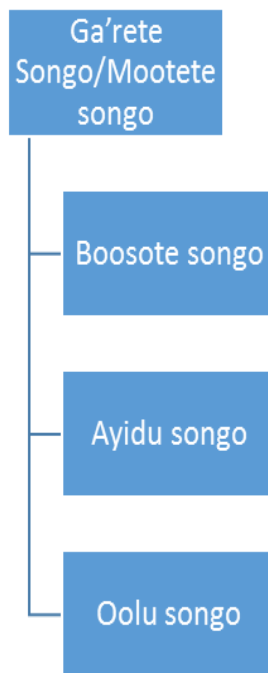
In Sidama, one of the core elements of traditional political leadership is the council system, which is a system of governance in which the elders' councils composed of prominent individuals in the society preside over the socio-cultural, economic and political affairs of communities. Elderhood is highly regarded in Sidama society where those that are experienced and advanced in age always become the object of deference. The elders' council in Sidama is called *songo*. According to Stanley (1966), *songo* is synonymous with council, which is convened at various levels of the political system and the political process. According to Vecchiato (1985), elders' councils act as custodians of the traditions of the society, espouse the norms of proper behavior, and ensure reverence to political and judicial authority.

There are four levels of councils that deliberate and decide on matters of societal concern. These include *ayidu songo*, *Oollu Songo*, *garote songo*, and *mootete songo*. Active members of *songos* are those who had passed through the generational class system and known for respecting values and observing customs and norms of the society. Regarding *Oollu songo* and

²⁸ Interview Woma Bekele Biliso, August 12, 2013, Gorche

ayidu songo, the members of the community and those individuals who are directly concerned with the specific issues to be dealt by a specific *songo* participate in nominating the principal speakers and coordinators. It should be noted that strict observance *halaale* is taken as a key criteria for making individuals to eligible for candidacy in nominating the principal speakers and coordinators of *songos*.

Figure 11: Structure of Songo in descending order of hierarchy



Oolu Songo is the first-tier and lowest level council where most of the substantive issues classified as minor cases are raised and dealt with. At this level, the members of the lineage or kin constitute the council. The numerical size of *oolu songos* is considerable since each and every neighborhood constitutes one *oolu songo*, which is more of an in-house council that mainly focuses on issues and matters of nuclear and extended families, close relatives and neighbors. This council also oversees the overall activities and functions of *jirte*, which denotes a sort of cooperation or self-help association that coordinates the activities of members of the locality/neighborhood in times of death, weddings, house construction, etc²⁹. The council is often presided over by a *nafarigercho*, who is a notable elder recognized as a good speaker and

²⁹ Summary from FGD forums

persuasive in arguments. A *nafarigercho* is required to consult other elders when managing and deliberating on cases (Stanley, 1966). Except some serious issues like murder and inter-clan conflict, all issues and matters are initiated and dealt with at this level. The next level council will not recognize any appeal which is not dealt with at the primary level council unless and otherwise the severity of the matter requires the decision of high level *songos*. Stanley (1966:220) puts the function and limitation of *oolu songo* as follows:

The limits of olla are being drawn with due regard to the capacity to carry out its functions. A membership of about 500 households is the most common. The most important functions of the olla songo are: judiciary, religious and administrative. Whenever quarrel arises a public hearing will be arranged in which all members of the neighborhood can participate as an audience.

Ayidu Songo is the second level council, which comprises more extended numbers of neighborhoods than the *oolu Songo*. At this level, issues and cases that are dealt with but not solved or settled at the level of *Ayidu Songo* requires the pressing of a highly revered and renowned elder of the locality to chair the the council. Those who are active participant in *oolusongo* constitute the *ayidusongo*, which is empowered to look at cases that the first level *songo* fails to resolve. This level of *songo* has no regular gatherings or sessions and convenes whenever there is an issue that is brought to its attention (Markos, et.al 2011).

Figure 12:Neighborhood Gathering



Source: online photo, accessed in Jan 2014

Garote or boossote songo is the third level in the hierarchy of the council of elders. This body is composed of the entire members of the sub-group of the clan and mainly focuses on matters that are substantive to the members. Moreover, this body has the authority to review appeals that are not resolved by the lower level *songos*, namely *ayidu and oolusongos*. In most cases, this *songo* has permanent site and schedule of meeting. It operates at the level of sub-clans, which is wider in terms of number of members and geographical coverage. The chief speaker and coordinator of this *songo* are known as *garo*³⁰.

Mootete songo is the highest level of the *songo* system serving as a clan council comprising all renowned elders of the clan. It is the highest level council with highest authority (Aadland, 2002). It is led by *moot* or *geelo* assisted by individuals known as *woma* and *Gadaana*. The decisions and resolutions passed by this body are final and binding without appeal. Its functions transcend simple administrative and adjudicative matters focusing on complex cases like murder and intra and intergroup conflicts³¹. All important rituals and religious ceremonies including issues concerning clans are dealt with and deliberated at this level. This body is the highest body and meets only on limited occasions. One of such cases is the solidarity of the whole clan especially in dealing with cases that involve other clans (Stanley, 1966).

³⁰ Interview Duchisho Buraqo, July 20, 2010 Jambaru Malle, September 7, 2010, Arbegona

³¹ Summary from FDG forums

No appeal can be made from one *garo* to another since the system is federal and egalitarian as an aspect of the relations between different clans in Sidama. Two or more clans come together to deal with issues that involve their members. Moreover, the leaders of all clans in Sidama come together on very limited occasions to deal with major cultural issues such as celebration of the Sidama New Year (*fichche*) or to deliberate on major issues of concerns associated with Sidama culture including those that involve other ethnic groups in conflict or cooperation. Such cases must always be dealt by the leaders of the people as a whole.

There are different offices and office holders whose roles are more of facilitating the activities of the elders' councils that deal with cases concerning their respective communities. The offices of *woma* and *Gadaana* are not directly involved in managing and leading the *songos* but rather provide support and facilitate for the smooth functioning of the *songos*. There are leaders of different levels of *songos* among which the post of the *mootes* is the highest political office as the highest level *songo* known as *mooto songo*.

Since all clans in Sidama have autonomous *songos*, the naming and use of titles and their respective roles and responsibilities vary. For example, *geelo* is the title given to those who hold such posts in the Hadicho clan of the Sidama. In Sawola clan, *garo* is the highest political office and at the same time the role of *woma* in political affairs is more significant than otherwise expected. Among the Faqisa-Tumano clan, the title of *garo* is given to the leader of the sub-clan.

Figure 13: The clan and sub-clans leaders in Descending Order of Hierarchy



■ ***Mooto/Geelo***

Mooto, which is more of a political position and partly a spiritual one, is a title given to leaders of the clan or group. The *mooto* chairs the highest level of the council of elders known as the *mootete songo* and is generally considered as the father-figure of the clan. The *mooticha* who is the bearer of the title is thus the head of the political and religious structures of the clan.

The *mooticha* is elected by the council of elders of the Sidama subgroups on the basis of certain criteria that include social acceptance, ability to influence, competence to administer, and family background. The responsibilities of the *mooticha* include settling disputes, dispensing justice and punishing offenders (Alemayehu, 1972). Apart from decision making and administrative power the *mooticha* enjoyed some privileges like immunity from engaging in any kind of manual labor including cultivating own land, which is undertaken by ordinary community members. However, the *mooto/garo* had no military power. In times of war, he was not expected to lead his people against the enemy but rather authorize other leaders to do so by giving blessings and prayers for their success. He was more of a father-figure and arbiter more than posing as a political leader (Getachew, 1970). The role of exercising military leadership is given to the *gadana*. In this connection, Stanley (1966:222) explains the role and status of *mooticha* among the Aletta clan as follows:

... The mote on the other hand is the king-priest of the Aleta. He resides permanently in Berra. He performs the rituals connected with animal sacrifices on behalf of Aleta

people. He declares a date for the fiche festival after consulting the astrologists. He is the chief peacemaker and focus on inter-clan unity. He has a divine or magic power to confirm blessings in matter of peace and justice, prosperity, health and fertility. As peacemaker, mote acts with the advice of his songo which is composed of elders of all clans.

The authority of the *mooticha* did not develop into monarchical authority because of restrictions by the council of elders (*songo*) in regard to assuming absolute power. The council of elders consisting of the leading elders called *chimessas* who represented the different communities (Tolo, 1998). If the *mootichais* found guilty of violations, he was liable to be brought before the group's assembly (*seera*) for questioning and possible deposition (Ababu, 1995). One of the surprising features of Sidama's indigenous political institution is that there is neither tribute nor salary to be paid to the leaders. However, the members of the community offer free communal labor service in the plots of the leaders. This is because the leaders at the highest level are not expected to engage in physical labor. Moreover, the members of the community periodically offer clothes and build or repair the houses of the leaders (McCann, 1998).

■ *Garro*

Garro is the title given to the leader of sub-clans. The clan eventually branches out and forms sub-clan leaderships including the sub-clan council known as *garrotesongo*. As mentioned above, *garro* is the leader of *garrote songo* acting as a semi-autonomous body that is partially subordinated to the *mootete*. The wider clan like Fakisa-Tumano has developed different clusters of middle level *songos* and leadership bodies. Some elders equate *garro* and *garrote songo* with *mootete* and *mootete songo* due to their semi-autonomous status and roles. For example, the *garro* in Harbe to the southeast of Hawassa has its own *songo* and leaders. The title and position of *garro* is mainly ascribed and hereditary. However, there are norms that should be observed in order to pick up the right successor among the descendants of the *garro* family. The current *garro* of Harbe sub-clan is Naado Naramo, who is the younger son of his father who served as leader. In spite of being the younger son, Naado Naramo is picked up by his father to succeed

him by taking note of his devotion and commitment to uphold the values, norms and beliefs of the society³².

■ *Chimessa/ Nafari Gericho*

Chimessa/nafarigericho is the title given to a local elder who maintains the norms and cultural values of his community. *Chimessa* is literally the title of any elder who passes through the *luwa* system and gets circumcised in accordance with the norm governing the generational age-grade system. But the common usage of the term is applicable to anyone who deals with community affairs in the locality.

4.2.3. Appointment to Office and Power Transfer

The way power is transferred from the incumbent to the successor is one of the crucial issues that help in understanding the nature and essence of leadership. In Sidama traditional society, it is not common to transfer power while the incumbent is alive and active. There is no limitation on the tenure of office of traditional leaders like *moote*, *geelo*, *woma* and *garo*. On the other hand, individuals are appointed to serve as *Gadaana* every eight years but the office holder informally remains a leader among his peers and members of his age group. There could be more than five *gadan* at a time where the incumbent *Gadaan* presides over the others until new life cycles start and a new one is appointed whereas all title holders of such titles command significant influence and authority among their age groups.

In Sidama traditional society, the question of succession of leadership is raised after the demise of the incumbent. However, there are situations when the members of the community and the council of elders disobey, protest against and even depose the incumbent from office. This is mainly done by marginalizing and alienating the incumbent through different mechanisms. Such acts mainly force the incumbent to relinquish his responsibilities and to transfer power to the successor mainly to one of his offsprings or a member of the wider family who is favored

³²Duchisho Buraqo, July 20, 2010, Arbegona and Yambaru Malle, September 7, 2010, Arbegona

by the community and the council of elders. If the incumbent is not willing to do so, it triggers struggle for power among the members of favored families and sub-clans.

The question is then why and when do the members of the community and/or council of elders start to marginalize or delegitimize the incumbent office holder? According to the elders who served as key informants, there are conditions and justifications leading to disobeying and delegitimizing incumbent office holders. The ground breaking justification in this regard include disregard for the principle of *halaale* and violation of the values, customs and beliefs of the society either in private life or in dealing with the affairs of the community. In this case, the elders as well as the members of the community believe that if someone disregards the principle of *halaale* then he is despised by God. If he violates the values, customs and beliefs of the society, then he doesn't care about the community. Therefore, disobeying him or protesting against him is viewed as legitimate that brings no harm to the community. It is rather considered as defending societal values and *halaale*.

Defending the principles of *halaale* is considered as defending God and God's will. In such instances, the members of the community express their disapproval of the incumbent through different means among which one of the most popular is *qetala*, which refers to dance performed by the youth and elders of the community during New Year (*fichche*) celebrations. There would be series of songs and poems expressed on different occasions that denounce the misdeeds and degeneration of those in leadership positions by describing the wrongs done and indicating the measures to be taken to marginalize and depose the culprit. Then after, it becomes very difficult for the incumbent to exercise authority and influence³³.

However, it is not easy to come to such a conclusion without the notables and elders serving in the clan or sub-clan assemblies discuss and agree on whether the problem exists and deliberate on how to handle the crisis. The elders take series of steps to advise the concerned office holder about the issue at hand and give him the chance to justify his acts or defend himself against allegations through the proper channel. There are also steps that the council of elders takes before jumping into conclusion and resorting to other measures. If the elders find

³³ Summary of FDG discussions

the accused not guilty, then they advise the members of the community to continue to obey and respect him. If he is found guilty and he expresses his regrets and agrees to mend his ways, then the elders' council advises him to compensate for the damages that he might have caused and to carry out ritual procedures and purify himself. After fulfillment of such procedures, the elders' council formally terminates the case and announces reinstatement of the office holder by advising the community to obey and serve him as usual.

Generally, the issue of succession is raised in both cases resulting from the demise of the incumbent and loss of legitimacy of the office holder. In both cases, priority in nominating the successor is given to family and blood ties with the former office holder. The incumbent office holder usually recommends one of his offspring or close family member whom he thinks the elders' council and the community may support. Although some positions like *moot* and *garo* are hereditary, the approval of the elders' council and the community at large cannot be bypassed.

The procedure is that all concerned council members meet, discuss and deliberate on the case and decide on who is to be the new leader based on his link with the family or the clan that traditionally holds the same office including scrutiny of family background, personal traits, ethical behavior, record of good luck, ability and resolve to respect and adhere to the values and customs of the society, as well as physical stature as an indication of strength. It is also possible to appoint the younger son rather than the elder or one out of the immediate members of the incumbent's family. There are also cases of temporary delegation pending the assumption of the office by the new council in order to carry out different rituals associated with the appointment.

In regard to power transferring ceremonies³⁴, big rituals (blessing ceremonies) are held to facilitate traditional transfer of power. The rituals and festivities that are performed when transferring power and the quality of ceremonies and celebrations depends on the capacity of the office holder to afford the associated expenses and the willingness and capacity of his clan

³⁴ Summarized narrative from interviews and FGDs held in four different sites: Chucko (August 23, 2013), Gorche (August 19, 2013), Arbegona (July 20, 2010 and Hawassa (September 16, 2011)

and or family members to sponsor the events by lending support. Traditional circumcision ceremony is also a prerequisite for performing the power transfer ceremony provided that the would-be leader is not circumcised already. The power transfer ceremony known as *malawo* involves slaughtering oxen and preparing food and drinks for all active members of the council and many other invited guests. This is followed by elders' blessings as an aspect of entrusting the elect with power and responsibility, telling others to obey him, and giving advices and guidance to the candidate. The elders bless the elect by making statements like *malawokinfe, maasi'ne: gashshsi, hossisi, masidheillishi, xonteamadi, etc.*, which translates as be blessed, be good governor, lead with good gesture and luck, the blessings you received be real, and let your curse affect violators.

4.2. The Nexus between Indigenous Religion and Traditional Political Institutions

Indigenous religion is recognized as a creed that is different from the commonly known religions professed by different communities. Indigenous religions are integral to the culture of the people. As indicated in the earlier section, the Sidama practiced indigenous religion characterized by unique rituals and other ceremonies. The Sidama believed in monolithic superpower and carryout organized procedures of worship and veneration. The religion of the Sidama had been influenced by multiple factors including the imposition of Orthodox Christianity and expansion of Protestantism. Markakis (1975:69) puts the level of pressure on the indigenous religions of Ethiopia's ethnic groups as follows:

Indigenous traditional creeds represent the third major religious group in Ethiopia. Though gradually yielding to the pressure of the better-organized religious, they still claim a considerable number of adherents and are sometimes tenacious enough to coexist with their rivals-Christianity and Islam- within the same group, as is the case among the Gurage, the Arusi, the Sidama, and other smaller groups. Traditional faith predominates among the Sidama, the Borana Oromo (sic), and among the Nilotic tribes along Ethiopia's southwestern border. In the northern highlands it is an isolated phenomenon, the Kamantagaw near Gondar being its best-known adherents there. Traditional religion is an amorphous force of no political significance in Ethiopia.

Despised by Muslim and Christian alike, it carries the stigma of social inferiority and subjection, and pagan groups living among Christians and Muslims have traditionally been treated as subjects.

There is a direct link between traditional leadership and traditional religion that are mutually interdependent. Traditional religion justifies and even legitimizes traditional leadership. Sometimes traditional religion serves as a source of power and legitimacy for assuming traditional leadership. Traditional leadership often appeals to traditional religion in a bid to manage community affairs and solve conflicts by adhering to religious values and principles. Traditional religious rituals like *fñicha*, *gondorra*, *lago*, etc., are some that are worth mentioning.

There is cooperation and interplay between traditional religion and leadership. Religion rationalizes, justifies and supports the political leadership and vice-versa whereby religious leaders are responsible to carryout rituals and festivities on ceremonies of all kinds of religious occasions including those that are political in nature. Religious leaders also advice and guide the leadership based on the revelations that are allegedly drawn from the spirit of the forefathers. Religion and religious rituals assist the leadership by facilitating for obedience and acceptance on the part of community members. Religion also guides traditional leaders to serve society in a just and proper manner as sanctioned by established norms and values. Traditional leadership guides the community whereas traditional religion serves as abridge between the community and *magano*, the creator. Through traditional religion, the creator is believed to provide the elders with wisdom and guidelines on how to govern and how to overcome problems that may endanger the welfare of the community. Both religion and political leadership support and complement each other for advancing the welfare of the society as they see fit and appropriate.

Whereas, religion focuses on the relation between the people and the creator (*magano*), traditional leadership focuses on regulating the relation in the public realm between groups and individuals. Traditional religion coaches and guides the traditional leadership to expedite this by invoking *magano*'s wisdom and will. Through strict adherence to the principle of *halaale*,

elders are viewed as mediators between *magano* and ordinary mortals. Whenever there are issues related to conflict management, the elders always appeal to the principle of *halaale* and the will of the creator to restrain those who violate the values and norms of the society. The phrases like: *halaale* and *magano* will follow you; if I lie, let *magano* and *halaale* be the judges; etc. show how Sidama traditional religion is highly intertwined with traditional political institutions. Both the institutions of governance and religion are thus believed to be guided by adherence to true justice (*halaale*) as the absolute principle³⁵. In this regard Bruno Maccani (1998:168) states the following:

The word halaale includes truth and justice. God is the source and the custodian of truth and justice. One swears upon the true and just God: maganuhalaleti= for the truth and justice of God. God is against the false and against those who do injustice. One who swears the false invoking God, will be stricken by God: death, disease, for him, for his wife, for his children ... God will withdraw from those who do bad things. God will free the oppressed in due time

It is practically difficult to draw the boundary between traditional religion and traditional political institutions as regards engagement in informal conflict resolution. Traditional religion gives more weight and leverage as well as credibility to the efforts of the elders' council and appeals are made to divine power and to the principle of *halaale* as indicated above.

■ *Woma*

Woma refers to the title given to the leader of a religious institution in Sidama. This office is the second subsidiary office under the *moote/garo*. In most cases, *woma* is considered as the supporter and ritual performer under the *moote/garo* as close associate that engages in providing assistance to the latter in his effort of mitigating conflicts and dealing with other issues of paramount concern. Individuals holding this title (*woma*) are expected to hold high

³⁵ Interview: *woma* Muda Yume, *Woma* Bekele, Gaduda Gabiso, Hailu Dawaqo, Argaw Bantora and summary of FGDs held in four locations, see above

moral ground, values and standard behavior. It is the *woma* who carries out ceremonies associated with sacrifice (*dasho*) made in honor of the spirit of the forefathers as an aspect of ancestral veneration rituals.

The cultural and spiritual affairs of Sidama society are handled by the *woma*. The *woma* system has its own council known as the *womu songo*. The *woma* acts as a cultural and religious leader and usually performs *kakalo* (sacrifices) and other cultural and religious rituals including marriage and circumcision (Wolassa, 2011). Historically, *woma* was the most influential office looking after the affairs of the society. However, at a later stage, the role of the *woma* was limited to consultation in regard to cultural and religious issues and performing rituals and feasts. The level of influence of this office depends on different factors. In some cases, *gana* and *qaricha* demonstrate more visible influence on the society. The practice in the *Wonsho* site of Sidama where traditional religion is practiced clearly indicates that *gana* and *qaricha* enjoy more acceptance than *woma*. This is mainly attributed to individual devotion and preference.

With regard to the appointment of an individual to the *woma* office, there are prolonged procedures and rituals that were involved. The numbers of *womas* depend on the size of population and geographical coverage. Accordingly, in some clans there is only one *woma* that presides in all religious and cultural affairs of the members of the clan whereas in other cases, there are more than one *womas* in one clan branching out to the sub-clans. For example, the Sawola clan has one *woma* whereas in Faqisa-Tumano clan, there are a number of *woma* offices operating in different sub-clans. Accession to the *woma* office is not hereditary. Nonetheless, if there is a son who qualifies for the post by strictly following his father's orders and is favored by the members of the elder's council and the community, the individual can be appointed to the post.

Achieving the *woma* position is highly linked with ritual purity and cultural excellence. According to Hamer (1987), the elder who assumes this position is one that has gone through all five cycles of the generational class system and one that has demonstrated exceptional wisdom, circumspection, and ability to mediate disputes. There are exceptional ceremonies in

appointing the *woma* officer. On the day of an appointment, the would-be official is bathed and his body is covered with butter in a manner a dead elder is prepared for funeral. The message is that the appointee shall be fully committed and devoted to the responsibility of providing spiritual service to the community without espousing other interests than serving the people.

4.4. Legitimacy and Strength of Traditional Political Leadership

The issue of legitimacy is central in dealing with state-society relations. The concept of legitimacy is associated with multiple notions. Legitimacy can be seen as the relationship between the political system and its citizens. In the literature (Grant, 2003), this relationship is associated with the notions of social acceptance, political support, informed consent, trust, moral justifiability, appropriateness, political communication, and the mode and manner of exercising power and authority, among others. Blatter (2005) analyzes the concept of legitimacy from the normative and descriptive perspectives. Whereas the normative approach focuses on understanding the concept based on the issue of democratic recognition, the descriptive emphasizes popular support, social acceptance, and consent as concrete expressions. For the purpose of this study, the issue of legitimacy is treated from the point of view of the descriptive approach since applying normative tools to examine the legitimacy of traditional political institution in Sidama would be very difficult. This is due to the fact that the selected method of data collection is anchored in the application of qualitative techniques.

As discussed in chapter two, African traditional institutions have more acceptance and legitimacy in their respective communities than the formal structures of government. According to APAP (2011), longevity of existence and consent by the community are the basis and source of legitimacy of traditional political institutions. It should be noted that traditional political institutions in Africa endured changes that took place over the centuries due to the fact that their rules and modes of operation were found to be sufficiently reasonable in providing protection and smooth interaction that led to persuasive gaining of obedience and acceptance (Davidson, 1992 cited in Bahru, 2008). However, it is not easy to objectively compare whether the western-style political institutions or African traditional institutions are more legitimate given that the legitimacy and strength of institutions depend on various factors.

In Sidama, traditional political institutions have more support and acceptance among communities that are keen to adhere to established norms and values despite their declining status and the multiple challenges they faced³⁶. Communities expect and prefer traditional institutions to deal with outstanding issues like conflict management and other socio-cultural concerns as compared to others.

There are several instances that prove traditional institutions are expected to deal with specific matters in contemporary Sidama society. One is the geographic location of the areas within Sidama. In most remote and rural areas, the people prefer traditional political institutions to deal with cases of conflicts or pressing problems that adversely affect them in places that are in proximity to the localities of their domicile. This is due to the problem of affordability of access to local government institutions. However, those who reside in the urban areas prefer to bring most of their cases to the attention of local government institutions. In instances when socio-cultural matters, values and, beliefs are involved people prefer to approach traditional institutions to resolve outstanding issues. For example, matters related to dowry payment or marriage within a clan fall under this category. In regard to conflict management, litigants who have no written evidence or witnesses on a given case would prefer to go to the elders' council for investigation and decision making on the basis of *halaaleor* appeal to *magano* to render justice whenever the need arises³⁷.

Regarding the legitimacy of the leadership of the traditional political institutions, one should consider multiple factors that affect the acceptance of the persons who are in charge of handling community affairs. These include socio-cultural background, family background, and the behaviors of the persons in question are some of the factors that determine the acceptance of individuals for a leadership position. As repeatedly indicated the generational class system (*luwa*) prepares future leaders by training and mentoring the youth to take greater responsibility in society thereby serving as a ladder to elevate, capacitate and empower them. Traditional religion also plays significant roles in lending legitimacy and acceptance of leaders. The

³⁶Ibid

³⁷ Interview Woma Bekele Biliso, August 2013, Gorche; Tafese Huriso, August 2013, Chucko

devotion to the principle of *halaale* and adherence to traditional religion on the part of individuals are considered as key to get the recognition and respect of community members.

Moreover, individuals are expected to demonstrate certain qualities like oratorical skills and persuasiveness to get the support of the community and play greater roles in traditional leadership settings. Besides, well built physical conditions and charismatic dispositions are also considered important for assuming leadership. Persons who are very short and thin as well as those with physical disabilities and visible symptoms of weakness are not encouraged to take responsibilities as leaders³⁸.

4.5. Gender, Age and Minority Status in Sidama Traditional Political Institutions

The assumption about traditional political institutions and leadership is that they are undemocratic in terms of involving members and inducing participation of the minority, youth and women. Many scholars (Mattes, 1997; Owusu 1996; Oomen 2000; Molutsi, 2004) including many liberals blame traditional institutions in Africa as being limited in this regard. They argue that indigenous political institutions favor male tribal leaders and neglect the legitimate aspirations and voice of women and youth. In this connection, Bahru (2002:9) describes how the predicaments affecting women and minorities negatively affect the rationalization of traditional governance system in modern democratic processes:

One reason why one should not idealize such customary norms is because, more often than not, they tend to marginalize women and minority groups. The roots of female oppression are to be sought as much in custom and tradition as in economics and politics. Even when women's rights are guaranteed legally, the weight of tradition militates against the full exercise of those rights. And society cannot be said to be fully liberated until and unless women are given their fair share of political and economic space.

³⁸Interview: woma Muda Yume, Woma Bekele, GadudaGabiso, Hailu Dawaqo, Argaw Bantora and summary from FGDs held in Chucko, Gorche, Hawassa and Arbegona

In this regard, the overall situation in Sidama is no exception. However, there are rooms and mechanisms to accommodate youth and women as well as to protect minorities. Like several other African socio-political institutions, Sidama political institutions accord primacy to men and the issues that concern women are subordinated to this framework. The youth enjoy the protection and guidance of the elders until they reach adulthood. The issue of minority rights and protection, however, didn't attract much attention of traditional political and socio-cultural organizations in Sidama due to the fact that issues of identity and property rights are based on descent through the male line (Tolo, 1998). Until recently, Sidama society didn't even recognize land ownership rights of women except under special conditions when the husband dies following the wives can claim guardianship of their children. Male domination is highly pronounced ranging from the household up to the highest social level. This enduring practice in Sidama society discouraged female participation in social activities. At present too, some such trends continue to persist unabated thereby hindering women from acquiring the benefits of today's democratic institutions that encourage their active participation in every affair of the society. One study by APAP (2011:39) describes this situation as follows:

Though women may be considered as encompassed by the institution, running the affairs of the institution is explicitly recognized as a domain of men in which women have no say or place. This is the case in the clan organizations of the Issa, the Sidama and in the Gada system of the Oromo. That does not, however, mean that women do not have any rights, for traditional rules may provide extensive protections to women, too. It only means that women cannot participate in the proceedings of, or assume positions of authority in, the structures of traditional institutions.

Women cannot be involved in decision making and do not get access to power and authority in Sidama traditional institutions. A woman has no direct access to power and authority in the overall socio-economic affairs of the community except exerting limited and indirect influence. Women play limited roles in influencing the views and decisions of individual members of the elders' councils either through entering into oral communication and participating in songs that are loaded with messages. In this manner, women express their

views, preferences, discomforts, complaints, etc., that influence their spouses and male relatives. However, Hamer (2007:5) puts the influence of women only from one aspect but mentions how their voices are considered in the elder's council:

Women can make or break their husband's status within the community by preparing appropriate food for his cooperative work groups and on occasions when elders' councils, assembled for making policy, meet within vicinity of the household. Women do not participate directly in councils, but whenever having a grievance they must be represented before the elders by any spokesman they choose. And just as aging accords a position of honour for men, so it does for women. Old women partake of food with elders and acquire authority among women in the continuity.

The role of women in Sidama traditional political institutions is highly limited to focusing on ensuring their security and safety. Women cannot directly influence decision making in traditional leadership bodies but can have limited participation in traditional institutions especially in *songode* deliberations as witnesses or express their grievances in various ways. In this regard, Hamer (2005:562) made a comparison between men and women in the Sidama power structure as follows:

Though identified with the clan into which they are born, they have no rights of access to clan land and authority in general, whether it be that of their fathers, brothers, or husbands. Moreover, male authority is unusually hierarchical in the sense of a pervasive respect and deference for male seniority. For men this is structured through the life cycle in which men of the fathers' generation are universally conceptualized as fathers or foster fathers regardless of agnatic or affina connections.

Women often participate in facilitating preparations for conducting ceremonies and rituals in the process of instituting traditional leadership bodies and office holders and in turn traditional leaders tend to be always ready to listen to women's complaints and protect them from abuses. There are also women's institutions known as *yaka* to which any woman can appeal against any act of injustice and violence. The women's council (*yaka*) is headed by *qaricho*-the head of the women's council, which is very active in matters that affect members and support the

traditional leaders by solving women's problems, defend women's rights, and bring members together to carry out various tasks related to rituals and festivities that are deemed essential for advancing the good of the society. Without the involvement of women, both religious and political gatherings and ceremonies would be rendered meaningless and hence the role of women is very important in several respects.

Women also have the right to access the elders' council to present their cases. It should also be noted that there are some women who are exceptionally active and play roles that are usually the preserves of males like attending and actively participating in *songo* deliberations. The title given to such women is known as *qaricho*³⁹, which is the highest rank in women's institution. Women holding this rank are called *randicho*, which is often bestowed on elder women as courtesy and respect for their role in recognition of the part they play in facilitating the conducting of different rituals. The *randicho* has ritual and cultural significance in the society. Hence the institutions of *randicho* and *yakaare* are significant in terms of entrenching women's role in traditional leadership. The concept of *randicho* is that the elder sister among the siblings elected to the position is always central in both religious and political gatherings.

There are craftsmen in Sidama society who fulfill the basic material needs of the society in supplying metal products, pottery and clothing. However, the society did not give them due respect (Betana, 1983). Due to this practice, Sidama society could not be viewed as an egalitarian society. This cultural barrier has a negative impact on the development of technical skills within the society. The youth are not recognized as full members of the community until they pass through the age set system through which they transit to adulthood. Hamer (2005:562) comments on their attitudes as follows:

In youth older siblings always take precedence over younger, while in adulthood older men must be recognized and deferred to by younger. Since age is not recorded in this non literate society it is reckoned in terms of sequence of ones' generational class in the order of their promotion to elderhood(sic).

³⁹ Interview with ArfaseFuru June 2010, Dara; AyaneButuna, October 2010 Arbegona

Youth participation in Sidama traditional institutions is highly encouraged. The most important forum for the youth to draw experience and wisdom is the *luwa* system through which they enjoy protection and care from all traditional institutions.

4.6. Indigenous Conflict Management and Justice in Sidama

Conflict is inevitable in all aspects of human interaction and this cannot be totally avoided but rather minimized, resolved, managed or transformed. Conflicts threaten the basic survival of societies if they are not properly managed or resolved. The causes of conflicts are varied depending on the nature of the relationship between the parties to the conflict. Conflict management is one of the major concerns of communities that is associated with the role and legitimacy of traditional leadership. Accordingly, conflict management is the core function of the elders' councils. The role of individual leaders of traditional political institution in conflict management focuses on coordinating the activities of the elders' councils in dealing with conflicts of various natures. It should be noted that in many grassroots communities matters are not simply referred to the police or the formal courts but instead are dealt with by using traditional processes and mechanisms.

All kinds of conflict management activities in Sidama are undertaken on the concept of *halaale* which means supreme truth. The core function of the political and administrative systems in Sidama is managing and resolving conflicts peacefully between and among community members. The conflict management process is closely intertwined with fact-finding investigations to identify the root causes of problems. Decision making emphasizes consensus and majority support in dealing with conflict management and resolution in order to avoid partisan domination. Communities expect obedience and observance of the common good from every member.

There were also other independent socio-economic institutions that reflect a unique egalitarian culture that are at work in Sidama society. Among such institutions, the most notable one is *seera* which is divided into two: the first refers to the broad concept of social constitution that governs Sidama social life based on the principle of *halaale*. In this connection, it would be

worthwhile to cite Aadland (2002:41) who made intensive studies on Sidama politics and culture:

In the Sidama community, a web of relations and interrelations has traditionally been ruled by the sera. Sera is a set of local cultural norms or codes regulating the communal social structure and interaction. Traditionally, sera is almost an ethic and moral codex. It may be seen as an unwritten law, but it constitutes at the same time the morality and the conscience of the individual and the community. Sera also provides social security to the members. It provides the community with a procedure of decision making through consensus. It obliges the individual to accommodate to the majority, to seek harmony and consensus rather than an individual opinion and personalized justice. The sera mainly relates to domestic communal life. It works traditionally at the basis of commonality and consent, rather than individualism. Sera also rules over the social collaboration that is sought from every member (serancho), for example, when a house is built or a funeral is held. It regulates the contributions and obligations within the communal fellowship.

The conception of *seera* refers to a set of sanctions that include ostracism imposed on the violators of the core values and customs of the society and those who fail to admit wrongdoings by failing to comply with the decision of the elders' council (Ibid).

Hamer (2002), an American anthropologist who studied the different aspects of Sidama society, stated that the Sidama moral code *ofhalaale* provides the basis for distinguishing "good" and "evil" as a "the true way of life". If an individual is involved in some kind of wrongdoing and refuses to admit his mistake or pay the imposed fine, this may result in ostracism (*seera*) where the culprit becomes a non-person as people refuse to work, eat or associate with him (Ibid). Although there were no written procedures and enforcement mechanisms regarding *seera*, individuals abide by it for fear of breaking *halaale* and being referred to God, by the elders, as a consequence. With regard to the function of *songos* in managing conflict and exercising the power, Stanley (1966: 220) states the following:

... The accuser and the defendant will then present their case and the elders who form the core of the songo will give their view about the existing customs and laws and

express their opinion. An elder who is a good speaker will preside but the other elders will be consulted. Thereupon, the sentiment of the majority becomes clear. It is the sentiment of the community as formulated through the songo's deliberations that present the effective force compelling the individual to the decision. But the songo has also executive authority where the wrongdoer has not complied with songo's verdict; a legal sanctions ("serra") and fine will be imposed on him, and so long as he does not pay the fine and the "serra" is not removed, he remains a social and ritual outcast.

Halaale is central to administrative jurisdiction and rule adjudication. It refers to the principle of justice and establishing the truth in the process of embarking on investigation and hearing. The members of Sidama communities give high respect to *halaale* mainly because there is a belief that valuing and respecting *halaale* contributes to good life and transgressing the principles of *halaale* adversely affects smooth and acceptable interaction and well-regulated way of life. In this connection, Hamer (2007:4) puts the concept of *halaale* as follows:

Basic to this structure is the overarching moral code of halaale I have translated this term broadly as 'the true way of life'. It subsumes, however, more specific values such as the importance of generosity, commitment to truth in issues of conflict, fairness in apportioning blame and punishment, avoiding disruptive gossip, responsible use of money, respect for property boundaries, avoidance of adultery and sexual promiscuity. No part of the code, but complementing generosity, is the importance the Sidama have traditionally attached to the acquisition of wealth. It is not the accumulation of land, crops, animals, or money that is important, but the esteem one gains through acquiring a reputation for generosity by redistributing these gains in hospitality and support of one's kin.

In the elders' councils, more focus is given to identifying the issue of contention between individuals and groups. According to the elders⁴⁰, justice dispensed by the elders' council is fair and just than that of the modern justice system. Informants⁴¹ claimed that in the modern justice system, decisions are mainly based on the evidences obtained from three witnesses

⁴⁰ Interview with Duchisho Buraqo, July 2010 Arbegona

⁴¹ Interview with Hailu Dawaqo, July 2012, Chucko

whereas in the *songo* system the investigation process is not so long and it involves rituals. In the course of engaging in investigations undertaken through on the basis of the *halaale* principle, the possibility to deny the fact is minimal. This is due to the belief on the part of litigants who are afraid to incur negative encounters and curse resulting thereof. Therefore, it is the values and the beliefs entrenched in societal norms that govern the system than the direct sanctions.

In addition to the concept of *halaale*, there are social sanctions that are meted against culprits as direct punishment for violating the values and norms of the society are applied. These are expressed in different forms as mechanisms of conflict management. The nature of the sanctions is purely social and psychological involving exclusion and ostracism but without entailing physical punishment as such. Social sanctions are of two kinds. The first that is applied on those individuals who comply to the decision of the council is not complex and is more of procedural and focuses on correcting mistakes and compensating the injured. In this case, mistakes will be rectified and injuries will be redressed. The main objective of such a sanction based on due process is to harmonize the social relations between the protagonists and create social cohesion. However, if the case is serious like murder, it will be dealt with at higher level, namely *garote or Mootete Songo*. In this case, it is not only the individuals that are directly associated with the problem but also all members of the group or sub-group that would be held responsible. Compensation payment in such cases is known as '*guma*' (literally blood money), which is expected to be paid by all members of the group or sub-group⁴².

The second type of sanction is more complex and severe than the former. Such a sanction is more serious and the punishment goes beyond imprisonment and is applied on those members of the community who defy decisions made to solve conflicts through peaceful means (Hamer, 1987). Such individuals are considered as deviant and violators of social norms and values. Hence, the punishment is collective and has multiple effects. Members of the community are wary of the resulting social exclusion more than anything else. The social sanctions include:

- Exclusion from social organizations and socio-cultural processes;

⁴² Interview with Woma BekeleBiliso, MuquraBodoye, April 2012, Aletawondo

- Denial of access to social utilities and borrowing of tools;
- Denial of any support and help in time of problems and misfortunes like death, illness, accident, etc;
- Isolation of children of the transgressors from other children in the community⁴³

Such a sanction, however, is applied against the transgressors after series of advises and consultation at different levels of elders' councils are made. Application of this sanction is called 'serooni' or *seera woroni*'. Moreover, the sanction restricts other members of the community from cooperation and collaboration with culprits and obliges them to apply the sanction without fail. The most difficult aspect of *seera* is that the transgressor is reduced to a status of a non-person as people refuse to work, eat or associate with him/her. Such an act mainly leads to confession because non-acceptance by the members of the community brings effective form of shame to the recalcitrant. It also removes the violator from social interaction, which in turn can entail prevention of entering into matrimony within the community. The purpose of applying *seera* is to restore social order and cohesion and thereby ensuring normalcy in communal life. In this connection, Vecchiato (1985:208) explains the impact of *seera* on culprits as follows:

Although theoretically the enforcement of sera could take the form of a total proscription (boha) from society for extreme cases, the prevailing Sidamo attitude toward social deviants is to re-insert them into society, through a reasonable punishment, and the reestablishment of social harmony).

In this connection, Curle (1995:91) puts the African traditional tribunal justice and its core values to transform conflictual relations:

...there are three traditional African values in the transformation of conflictual relations: i) mediators are carefully chosen on the basis of their wisdom and impartiality, and their relevance to particular cases; ii) "both the mediators and

⁴³ Summary from the focus group discussions forum held in four locations between 2010 and 2013.

parties in contention have a deep and unwavering respect for human and the search for harmony,” hence, mediators aim at examining “how the conflict may disrupt the harmony of the community and consider the responsibility of each side in restoring it, “i.e., they do not aim at apportioning blame by noting who is right and who wrong; iii) in the process of transforming the unpeaceful relations, the mediators are patient, thorough, listening and understanding; their goal is to bring both parties into a pact not to restart the quarrel again.

Tribunal justice administered by the traditional institution in Sidama follows different processes and procedures from the ones that take place in formal government structures. The government punishes the criminal by administering physical punishments whereas the traditional leaderships apply sanctions (*seera*) and forces the individual to admit guilt and comply with decisions made thereby creating harmony, compensating for the damage inflicted, and rectifying the wrongs done. Traditional leadership has no prison but the transgressor is confined to his/her house isolated from the society until the case is exhaustively reviewed and settled. There are clear differences between the two whereby traditional systems focus on the culture and way of life of the people and rely on customary norms and practices and established values whereas government structures rely on implementing the law that is already enacted.

Traditional leadership systems tend to have a better understanding of the local context than the formal structures of government. In dealing with conflict management, traditional leadership addresses the root causes of conflicts while government structures are inclined to administering penalties against violators without identifying the root causes of the conflict that could serve as inputs in making decision. Besides, the formal courts lack effective mechanism that could be instrumental in compensating the victims. The possibility of injustices and lack of fairness in the mode of operation of formal government is more likely to occur than is the case with traditional conflict management schemes⁴⁴. Moreover, the processes and procedures characterizing operations of formal judicial systems are more complex, costly, and inaccessible favoring those with modern education and urban lifestyles than rural residents. In this connection, Hamer (1987: 179) highlighted the role, status and advantages of traditional

⁴⁴ Summary from FGD forums in four different areas in Sidama, for details see annex II

institution during the military regime, which is also partly a reflection of existing state of affairs in contemporary Sidama society:

Elders' councils continue to make local policy and settle disputes. This is partially for lack of government resources to control the countryside and partially because the elders are less expensive and more efficient than government courts in settling disputes. Also, while bribery and corruption eased the problems of a resource-deficient central government in compensating local officials, it reduced credibility and made customary institutions of social control seem superior by comparison

In summary, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms are more effective and efficient in handling some cases and strive to restore peace and harmony in the community better. Moreover, the ruling of traditional authorities is unfailingly complied with by litigants.

4.7. Weaknesses of and Challenges against Traditional Institutions in Sidama

In any society, social and political systems strive to demonstrate their efficacy and the benefits resulting from their interventions. However, there are no perfect socio-political or economic systems, ideological orientations or practices yet. As mentioned, pre-colonial African socio-political systems are underpinned by a set of factors as features of their strength and quality as well as their weaknesses and limitations. In the same vein, traditional political institutions in Sidama are replete with several positive attributes and qualities as well as shortcomings and deficits. On the other hand, it is not easy to fully undertake the practices that were common in Sidama traditional society at present given that these are facing multiple challenges resulting from new developments associated with the transformation of cultural values and attendant practices.

The weaknesses of traditional political institutions could be evaluated from the perspectives of democratization and good governance. As indicated in the literature review section, African indigenous political institutions have their own limitations and pitfalls. Scholars like Mattes (1997) who are against traditional political leadership try to capitalize on the weaknesses of traditional political institutions. As already discussed, one of the major problems of traditional

political institutions in Sidama is their exclusion of women and minority and youth groups from direct participation in the decision making process given that the membership of elders' councils is composed of only male elders. The other weakness that is worth mentioning in this regard is their reliance on divine power based on religious beliefs. It is obvious that any political system that relies on divine power could run against the principles of democracy and good governance. In Sidama, the elders appeal to the principle of *halaale* and the creator (*magano*) in their bid to solve conflicts and punish transgressors. Hence, appointment to the office of traditional political institution in Sidama is confounded with factors that are attributed to the divine will. The religious leaders have a decisive say in determining the fate of candidates aspiring for leadership by determining whether a candidate is favored by *magano* or not⁴⁵.

Traditional leadership largely remains the business of members of grassroots and local communities who are not familiar with principles of inclusive democracy. On the other hand, the educated sections of society are not interested to participate in this since the young generation considers it as backward and useless⁴⁶. The inability of traditional political institutions to update and adjust themselves with the ideals of modernization and technological development as well as modern systems of governance affects the prospects of reinvigoration of traditional systems in Sidama and elsewhere. Moreover, lack of well-functioning arrangements and the ever-diminishing sites for preserving cultural legacies including the paucity of thorough empirical studies and written accounts on the subject contribute to weaknesses that affect the future of indigenous institutions in Sidama.

Among the challenges that Sidama traditional political institutions face, fluid changes in socio-political and economic ways of life, intrusion of different denominations of Christianity, and the declining interest of the youth in terms of adherence to traditional values and norms could be mentioned. Change is inevitable in any society and accordingly prevalent socio-cultural practices in Sidama had evolved through a series of stages. According to Kurimoto and Simonse (1998), African traditional socio-political system faltered in the face of growing

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

external influence, modern education, capitalist cash economy, and state intervention. It could thus be argued that the persistence of such trends has undermined the role of traditional institutions in Sidama in the same manner as what took place in other traditional societies. Modern education and the process of modernization orchestrated by the state and its ubiquitous institutions focus in promoting alien ideals and cultures. Until recently, socio-cultural and political values of different nations, nationalities and peoples were not included into the education system of the country thereby facing various forms of marginalization. Due to this fact, the younger generation is discouraged from adhering to and understanding the overall cultural life of the people.

Most often, traditional leadership is guided and promoted by traditional religion. Now-a-days, decline of traditional religion adversely affects the role and legitimacy of traditional leadership. The teachings promoted by the Protestant creed of Christianity have been the major challenges on the overall culture of the Sidama as well as on the traditional leadership and religion. The influence of western religion on Sidama traditional socio-political institutions and cultural practices is stated as follows:

In the case of Sidama, most external influences entered through Christian missionaries, the aid agencies and schooling. The expansion of Lutheran, Evangelical, Roman Catholic, and Adventist churches in the mid-twentieth century allured several social groupings to Christian preaching. The fact that the churches, particularly Catholic and Adventist, were based in the rural areas indicates their keenness to acquire members by demonstrating their usefulness to the needs of the rural population. In most areas, these churches were accompanied by schools and health clinics offering educational and health facilities. While competing with the local values, the churches have also played a complimentary role. Some preached in Sidama language or translated or wrote books in Sidama. In their works, the priests and the churches did not face insurmountable obstacles since the halaale code has message that reinforce that of the Bible yet, the task of interpreting truth shifted from the Sidama wise men to learned priests who were keen to allure the youth, and through them their families to differing ways of life. The end result, either way, was to change worldview of the would-be

followers who no longer resort to local norms and practices including ancestral veneration (Seyum, 2006:68)

The onslaught of Protestantism against the culture and traditional institutions of the Sidama is the major challenge that is also currently experienced. As a result, appeals of and attractions to Sidama's cultural way of life are portrayed as evil and inimical to modernity and civilization. According to national census conducted in 2007 (CSA, 2007), around 83% of the people in Sidama profess Protestantism whereas roughly 3% are followers of indigenous religion. Many Sidama elders are highly worried about the teachings of the Protestant churches that are active in demonizing all aspects of Sidama cultural practices and tradition⁴⁷. Whenever the elders' councils deal with cases aimed at solving conflicts, they face difficulties from the followers of the Protestant Church who despise and undermine them.

This notwithstanding, however, there are some sects of Protestantism and other Christian denominations that try to accommodate and maintain some aspects of Sidama culture and tradition in their teachings. In this regard, the contribution of the Catholic Church in preserving Sidama culture and language is highly acclaimed by Sidama elders who served as key informants for this study⁴⁸. Even the adherents of moderate Islam fully cooperate with traditional political institutions of the Sidama. Regardless of experienced problems, the high turnout of people during *fichee* celebration and the increasing eagerness of the youth to be mobilized around such cultural exercises are indicative of the growing optimism and favorable prospects in entrenching traditional cultural practices.

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Ibid

Chapter V

The Workings of Sidama Traditional Institutions in the Context of State-society Relations in Ethiopia

Before the incorporation of Sidamaland into the Ethiopian empire, Sidama political institutions like elders' councils had been the only legitimate institutions of traditional governance. As indicated in the foregoing sections, Sidama traditional institutions that play major roles in managing socio-economic and political affairs of the society have encountered formidable challenges in the past. This section deals with the nature of the relation between Sidama traditional political institutions and formal political structures of government. The section also briefly deals with contemporary state of affairs in Sidama along similar lines. Moreover, aspects of change and continuity in regard to the workings of the traditional institutions are discussed along with a concise assessment of experienced opportunities and shortcomings.

5.1. Pre-1991 State of Affairs

The main objective that was advanced by the pre-1991 Ethiopian regimes was centered on bringing all the diverse ethnic groups of the polity under one core and monolithic cultural, language and politico-administrative setting. This took effect by downplaying the legitimate aspirations and marginalizing of the different ethnolinguistic groups. As detailed in the third chapter, the problem of state-society relations in Sidama is rooted in the quest of successive Ethiopian regimes in their drive towards realizing goals associated with nation building.

The making of modern Ethiopia, which commenced in the second half of the 19th century, was inspired by what is generally termed as the “nation building process”. This was a project that was aimed at creating one nation out of the multilingual and multicultural conglomeration of diverse socio-cultural and political formations in the polity. This involved political centralization of the incorporated regions as well as imposing effective control in the regional power centres in historic Ethiopia through introducing series of measures associated with modernization (which generally meant introduction of European technology, education,

institutional arrangements, etc.). To this end, Emperor Menelik, who has been rightly considered as the founder of the modern empire state effectively used the authority of the church, the Amharic language, modern education, and modern bureaucracy and army in the effort of building a modern state (Merera, 2003).

The conception of unity in pre-1991 Ethiopia envisioned the need for blending a single culture, language and psychological makeup. Mobilizing the Ethiopian people from all walks of life was aimed at inducing citizens to stand in unity along these lines by presenting foreign threats and imperative of building an integrated nation as the underlying justification. In this regard, Aadland (2002:29) highlights the prevailing political approach during the imperial period as follows:

The Ethiopian state did not attempt to integrate, but to dominate the different peoples in its Southern regions. Hence, the Ethiopian state did not build on the local identities but rather competed against them. Even today, the cohesive elements of nationalism are lacking in large parts of the population. Within the Ethiopian political tradition, the term state, or the equivalent in Amharic, mengist, has slightly different connotations from a modern concept of a democratic state: “Imperial authority”, sovereignty, divine legitimacy, nation building, and a kind of state-nationalism, but also control and domination.

Accordingly, introducing alien values and ideals by marginalizing the indigenous variants characterized the drives of the successive imperial regimes in this respect. The bold move of the military regime that came to power after the demise of imperial rule in abolishing the socio-cultural practices and indigenous institutions faced firm resentment and resistance from the people in many parts of the country. Jon Abbink (1997:320) describes the changes in the political landscape of the southern and southwestern part of the country resulting from imperial conquest in the following manner:

The period of imperial conquest of southern Ethiopia since the 1880s created new patterns of local leadership, often in the form of a combination of direct rule (the state

appointment of military chiefs as governors), and a version of indirect rule (naming local 'chiefs' from an ethnic or regional group as government liaison men). If the indigenous structure did not have an institution that could be called 'chieftaincy', one was imposed from above. Often, local people with a feeble prestige or power basis in their own society were appointed, which led to predictable problems of representativeness and manipulation, known from the Western colonial systems elsewhere in Africa. Hence, the cultural articulation of these two traditions of authority and leadership- the center al and local- was complex and varied across groups. Seen from a political anthropological perspective, Ethiopia was a social 'laboratory' for political-legal experimentation. It yielded continuities in local leadership where elites were maintained though co-opted or where neo-traditional chiefs emerged from the local society, but also ruptures where imposed state administrators and non-indigenous rule were introduced.

Another aspect of state-society relations that characterized the nature and modes of operations of the pre-1991 regimes is their policy on religion. The successive imperial regimes of Ethiopia are noted for their adoption of a state religion through which their legitimacy was justified. Since the very beginning of an expansion to the south, southeast and southwest, Ethiopian imperial regimes had focused in disseminating a state religion. As a result, both the state and religion supported and reinforced each other and this severely undermined the indigenous culture of the diverse peoples inhabiting the different parts of the country. Forced mass conversion and imposition of alien doctrines including Orthodox Christianity thus became detrimental to the culture and way of life of the Sidama people. The Sidama people opposed the move and protested against several practices of the regimes at varying times. This is despite the fact that there are few members of the Sidama elite who embraced the norms and values of the Ethiopian state and benefitted from the arrangements made in this regard.

As indicated in the preceding sections, culture and religion in Sidama are integral parts of indigenous political institutions. In the pre-1991 years, Sidama indigenous political institutions were marginalized as a result of which they were abandoned gradually. During the period in question, some of the indigenous political leaders who were willing to serve the mainstream

political establishment assumed low-level power and authority and acted as liaison between the people and the state by obtaining some privileges for themselves. On the other hand, indigenous political leaders who remained loyal to their people and refused to be co-opted at the expense of the interests and legitimate aspirations of society were marginalized and barred from exercising leadership in their localities. This notwithstanding, however, indigenous leaders had managed to preserve traditional institutions and core values of their societies. In this connection, Abbink (1997:320) mentions the way the people of Southern Ethiopia managed to maintain the core elements of the traditional ideas of authority and local governance:

Many ethnic groups in Ethiopia saw significant, often dramatic, transformations under the empire state. Nevertheless, core elements of their traditional ideas of authority and local governance were often maintained, in ideology and collective memory, if not in actual form then often in dormant state.

When one looks at the impacts of the expansion of the Ethiopian state on the socio-political life of the societies, primarily the gerontocratic political system of Sidama society lost influence. This was, among others, due to the fact that the duties and responsibilities of the council of elders were replaced by the newly introduced court systems and administrative setups. The elevation of some traditional chiefs to the position of *balabbats* in-line with the new arrangements caused the loss of the legitimacy of the council of elders and traditional leadership in Sidama society.

With regard to the legal system that regulated multifaceted relations among communities on the one hand and between the state and society as well as between government structures on the other, Ethiopian successive regimes made utmost efforts to introduce highly centralized modern legal and administrative structures. Whereas the colonial powers imposed alien rule on African societies, Ethiopia imposed western laws on itself. At a later stage, the post-independence African states made efforts to improve the legal system by incorporating aspects of customary law whereas Ethiopia had opted for a blanket modernization approach in its legal system through the introduction of codes (Tuori, 2010). The imperial regime had tried to use modern laws and legal infrastructure to unify the country. In line with this, Emperor

Haileseilasie I (1964: v) noted that, “Law is a unifying force in a nation: one of the goals sought to be attained by the enactment of modern codes and other legislation is that the law be uniform throughout the empire” (cited in Touri, 2010:50).

Under imperial rule, the codification process of Ethiopian civil law stood as an example of the dangers of legislative hubris for it wasn’t applied in practice in most of rural Ethiopia (Brietzke, 1975). Moreover, the process did not accommodate traditional legal practices in different communities and also gave no room for the inclusion of customary laws. The Civil Code was introduced in 1960 followed by the Commercial and Maritime Codes in 1961 and the Civil Procedure Code in 1967. The Civil Code explicitly rejected all practices governed by customary law. To this end, art 3347(1) of the Civil Code of 1960 stipulated that: “*Unless otherwise expressly provided, all rules whether written or customary previously in force concerning matters provided for in this Code shall be replaced by this Code and are hereby repealed.*”

Such a provision, therefore, proscribed application of customary laws of different ethnic groups in Ethiopia (Abera, 2012). According to the same author (Ibid) customary laws are an integral part and a reflection of tradition and lifestyle and belief system of the community where they are applied. Arguably, one can not, by the stroke of a pen or by adding a paragraph in a new code, repeal these laws. Some scholars (Brietzke, 1975; Touri, 2010) argue that the introduction of new codes into the country’s legal tradition without harmonizing it with the existing customary practices was the failure of the regime to make the law be adhered to and upheld by the society. Hamer (1987) argued that the Civil Code of 1960 provided for the retention of certain aspects of customary law based on restitutive sanctions, which are similar to those imposed under various forms of customary law. The same author (Ibid) asserts that Article 20 of the 1960 Civil Code recognized the validity of traditional forms of reconciliation and arbitration, which are similar to the procedure followed by the elder’s councils.

The military regime that supplanted imperial rule had shifted its approach and expressed firm opposition against all kinds of religion including the Orthodox Church resulting from its leftist ideological orientation. In Sidama, the officials of the military regime banned indigenous religion and destroyed religious sites and facilities. Hence, religion became one of the aspects of the interface between state and society that had adversely affected the relation between

power holders and society in the pre-1991 years. The military dictatorship also persisted with the policy of marginalizing the traditional assets of ethnic groups in its drive for control and homogenizing the nation. National unity and centralization aimed at building a strong and unified polity was the main justification behind suppression of cultural and linguistic diversity and other forms of multiculturalism. The regime had no intention of listening to the diverse voices of the people and opted for the use of coercive instruments to suppress legitimate aspirations of society. Immediately after the revolution, the military regime embarked on all-rounded campaign against already existing autonomous or semi-autonomous arrangements. Hamer (1996:548-49) reflects on the situation during the period as follows:

The revolution of 1974 and the subsequent post-revolutionary period of the 1980s have done much to undermine the social complementarity between elders and youth, as well as between genders. Consensual authority of elders, unless practiced clandestinely, virtually ceased to exist except in conformity with government edicts. Officially, however, the government encouraged the self-help associations to take over local judicial and administrative functions, but were actually recentralizing control and eliminating all creative autonomy.

One of the justifications made in abolishing and outcasting all forms of traditional political dispensations was the cooperation of some of the leaders of traditional political institutions with the imperial regimes and other forces of domination and oppression. This was similar with the situation in post-colonial African states that was characterized by the abolishing of traditional political leaderships and chiefdoms on the pretext that they had cooperated with the colonial powers. In this regard, Hamer (1980: 99) highlights the feelings of the people regarding their relations with the new system that contradicts the major underpinnings of established values and norms:

The new causes of disharmony continued to need reinterpretation by the elders to fit the old moral code of halaale. At the same time a new form of council emerged in the voluntary self-help associations (mahber). In these new organizations, consensual authority was transferred from elders' councils to executive committees, but the emphasis remained upon rational discourse in resolving everyday conflicts of living.

As mentioned, the military regime marginalized traditional leaders alleging that most of them had collaborated with the imperial regime and thereby helped to perpetuate feudalism in the country. The collaboration of some traditional leaders with the imperial regime and their consequent ascendance to the status of lower-level ruling elite contributed to justifying this on the part of the military regime. In this vein, the government organized peasant associations that were charged with the task of managing community affairs at grassroots level under the direct control of the government. In Sidama, such disposition of the government in managing conflict and dealing with social problems failed to bring about peace and harmony among the community and placed the *halaale* principles of fairness and harmony at risk (Hamer, 1987). Despite this imposition, Sidama society continued to adhere to traditional values in dealing with multifaceted socio-political matters at the grassroots level.

5.2. Contemporary State-Society Relations and Modes of Governance in Sidama

The nature of politics in African traditional society was in conformity with customary conventions that had primarily the aim of ensuring the continuity of social cohesion through adherence to the principles of harmony and mutual interdependence mediated by socially-sanctioned structures. As mentioned in the preceding sections, cultural alienation and state dominance weakened Sidama's traditional values, customs and institutions. It is to be recalled that the imperial and military regimes pursued the same policy of cultural and linguistic homogenization. Moreover, the role of indigenous institutions in regulating socio-cultural affairs of society is shrinking and losing significance due to strong control of the state (APAP, 2011).

As indicated above, one of the concerns and issues behind the unfolding of the Ethiopian Student Movement, which eventually led to the 1974 revolution, was national oppression perpetrated by the ruling elite and the quest for self-determination by various nationalities. The adherents of this line of thinking recognized the quest of the oppressed nations and nationalities for self-determination, which was reinforced by the increased radicalization of the Ethiopian Student Movement and the subsequent rise of increased numbers of ethno-regional liberation movements (Kidane 2008). Waleign Mekonnen, who was one of the prominent leaders of the Ethiopian Student Movement, stressed the need for a new dispensation in which all

nationalities equally participate on the basis of equal opportunity to preserve and develop their own language and other elements of culture where domination of any form can be eliminated (Vander Beken, 2009).

In the years that accompanied the ouster of imperial rule, the military regime failed to accommodate diversity and used the issue of the national question only to weaken the bases upon which the imperial government flourished. The military regime's authoritarian disposition and its unpopular policies like entrenching a centrally-planned economic system, sanctification of one party rule and suppression of free opinion and legitimate dissent weakened its social base and contributed to the proliferation of ethnic-based insurgent movements in the different parts of the country.

Following the ousting of military rule in May 1991, the problem of failing to address issues surrounding cultural differences, claims for preserving national identity, and use of local languages appeared as the core issues in post-1991 Ethiopia. The Transitional Period Charter that formed the basis for the establishment of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) clearly put the principle of accommodating diversity thereby changing the enduring quest for nation building endeavors of the past. In this connection, Van der Beken, (2007: 36) noted that:

...The Charter is particularly important because of its provisions which devote considerable attention to Ethiopia's multiethnic population composition. These express the clear ambition of the drafters of the Charter to break with the past and to develop a new Ethiopian state which is based on the recognition and the equal treatment of all ethnic groups.

The Transitional Charter also detailed the protection of universally recognized human and democratic rights and feasible instruments for liberalizing the economy underpinned by the principles of fostering market forces. Later, most of the provisions of the Charter were incorporated into the 1995 FDRE constitution, which laid the ground for the current shape and the formal structures of the Ethiopian polity.

One solution that was envisaged to address the problem of cultural differences emphasized the need to recognize and extend cultural groups with rights that would enable them to hold on to their particular customs and traditions. According to Kymlicka (cited in Benhabib, 2012),

recognition of ethnic rights to self-rule helps to protect cultural rights in the liberal nations. Besides, a deliberative model of democracy offers better alternatives to deal with cultural differences and institutional arrangements from the perspective of a universal moral and political theory. In this vein, federalism is gaining currency as an appropriate political and constitutional mechanism to ease and prevent tensions and conflicts as well as accommodate diversity that are linked to the multi-ethnic nature of a given country's population. The proponents of federalism argue that it can lead to 'unity in diversity'; meaning that in a federal state, the stability and unity of state and society will be based on the recognition and institutional accommodation of the ethnic diversity of the state's population (Van der Beken, 2009). According to Riker (1975: 101) "Federalism is a political organization in which the activities of government are divided between regional governments and central government in such a way that each kind of government has some activities on which it makes final decision"

The federal system that is currently at work in Ethiopia has been designed in recognition of cultural and linguistic plurality of the Ethiopian polity and the problems associated with past failures in addressing them. It appears that the incumbent EPRDF regime has drawn lessons from the mistakes of its predecessors who failed to accommodate the diversity and the competing claims and demands of the diverse socio-cultural and economic formations. In this vein, accommodating diversity is supposedly made to be one of the core elements of the current constitution. Constitutional provisions for upholding the rights of 'minority' ethnic groups to practice their respective cultures, languages and religions is sought as one of the means aimed at preserving indigenous institutions that are under multiple pressures and challenges posed from different quarters.

Moreover, indigenous ethnic cultural practices became central and got recognition and protection by the new constitution following the demise of the military dictatorship. Based on this, different ethnic groups started to make use of their languages as medium of local administration and education. Moreover, the federal constitution provided that regional governments are given the power to manage their affairs. Accordingly, the constitution explicitly provided for the protection of cultural minorities encouraging them to preserve and promote their cultures and languages. Hence, the Ethiopian constitutional framework contains

extensive mechanisms for protecting and promoting the rights of ethnic groups (Vander Beken, 2009).

The Sidama took advantage of this opportunity as a result of which several achievements have been registered in terms of preserving identity, promoting culture and developing the Sidama language. However, there is no clearly stated provision that deals with the need for reinvigorating traditional political institutions as instruments for addressing political and socio-economic concerns of grassroots and local communities. Informant elders⁴⁹ who were asked to make comparison regarding the ramifications of government structures and traditional political institutions at present opined that the former often undergo changes whereas traditional institutions are more intact, stable and predictable. They linked changes in the formal structure with the fluidity of policies and alterations in ideological orientations of political regimes over the past century due to a variety of causes. Moreover, frequent change of local officials within a short period of time also contributed to the lack of institutional memory and durability of formal structures. A regional official⁵⁰ admitted that regional and local governments had made use of traditional institutions including elders' councils to deal with volatile ethnic conflicts that occurred in various localities within the region. The use of traditional institutions thus resulted in restoring peaceful and harmonious relations between previously conflicting groups. There were many instances of conflict in the country in general and the study location in particular, which had been resolved through traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. The conflicts in question included those between Guji Oromo and Sidama, Borana Oromo and Somali, Burji and Guji, etc.

According to informants⁵¹, there are areas of cooperation and conflict over jurisdiction between the traditional political institutions and formal government structures. Conflicting and competing overlaps over jurisdiction is an area where contradictions and confusion between the two arise. Areas of cooperation between the two pertains to solving group or ethnic conflicts and mobilizing people for realizing development goals as well as resolving civil cases of litigation. Traditional leaders/elders consult and advise government officials on issues associated with resolving conflicts and dealing with crisis situations in the process of which

⁴⁹ Interview: Bekele, Chokole, 2013 Gorche

⁵⁰ Interview: RO3, , January 2013

⁵¹ Interview Zekarias Loodo, August 2013; L02, July 2011 Hawassa; LO4 September 2010, Gorche

they serve as a bridge between the government and the public. Conflict management and community mobilization are the main areas of cooperation despite the existence of spots of conflict characterizing the relations between formal structures and traditional mechanisms⁵².

For example, the members of a local community who fail to comply with the decision of the elders' councils and who violate the norms and values of the society appeal to the formal courts and get different decisions in their favor which adversely affects the legitimacy of the traditional leaders. Another example of conflict between formal structures and traditional leaders relate to instances when officials use elders and community leaders to advance their unpopular policies. This creates confusion and erodes the acceptance of the elders among the wider public. In such cases⁵³, some leaders of the traditional institutions stand against undue government intervention, which put their relations at odds though traditional leadership is needed by the government to properly function among traditional communities. Hence, in order to manage and effectively resolve conflicts, traditional leadership is still more preferable.

The question then is whether the government recognizes the role and importance of traditional institutions for undertaking various activities at the grassroots level. According to informants⁵⁴, there is no formally established legal or institutional framework that lends official recognition to traditional leadership. However, government officials try to use traditional leadership for the success of their endeavors on different occasions due to the limitations in their outreach to and acceptance among rural communities. Activities related to conflict management and community mobilization are the major areas that often prompt government structures to recognize the decisive role of traditional leadership. Due to this, local officials entrust traditional leaders and community elders with the task of resolving local problems. This is mainly driven by the quest for convenience because it is practically difficult for the government to identify the source of problems and address them effectively⁵⁵.

⁵² Summary from FGDs held at varying times.

⁵³ During the field work, most informants composed of both local and regional government officials and community leaders agree on this. But some informants from among the community leaders believe that they are working with the government because of their recognition by the local and regional governments. Some local officials also believe that the existence of a federal structure itself is a sufficient condition for recognizing traditional institutions.

⁵⁴ Interview: RO2, September 2013, Hawassa; LO1, July 2011, Hawassa

⁵⁵ Interview: RO3, January 2013, Hawassa, RO2, September 2013, Hawassa; LO2, July 2011, Hawassa

Regarding the query on how the government should manage conflict of interests between traditional institutions and government, local officials have varied views. The first group of informants⁵⁶ stated that the power of persuasion is instrumental in convincing the leaders of traditional institutions to recognize and to continue working with government. The same sources indicated that traditional institutions and the elders' councils have helped the regional and local government to settle complex conflicts among different ethnic groups which otherwise could have had dire consequences. There are also instances when formal government structures played minimal roles as a result of which traditional institutions became crucial in addressing pressing societal problems. Informants are of the view that some kind of arrangement that recognizes and empowers traditional institutions working in line with the federal dispensation that is currently at work is needed. Another group of informants⁵⁷ espouse some kind of stubborn approach on the issue and tend to invoke the supremacy of the constitution and other laws to force the traditional institutions to comply unconditionally with the formally established rules and procedures.

On the other hand, leaders of the traditional institutions and notable elders⁵⁸ argue that the workings of traditional institutions could complement government efforts in several respects in as long as the government straightens its political and administrative behaviors and practices. In the absence of such trends, they argue that it is incumbent on community elders to enter into regular consultations and negotiations with the government to solve impending problems. One recent case in Hula District of the Sidama Zone exhibits the existence of conflicts between the elders' councils and the government where the local court has ordered the arrest of traditional leaders who applied *seera* (sanctions) against an individual who was found guilty of some offenses. It was stated that following the appeal of the elders to the regional government regarding the issue, the case was resolved through negotiations⁵⁹.

Regarding the query on the importance of traditional authority, all elders and most government officials who were interviewed agreed that traditional institutions are important mainly because the people accept the leaders whom they highly respect and recognize as legitimate actors.

⁵⁶Interview: RO3, January 2013, Hawassa, RO2, September 2013, Hawassa;

⁵⁷ Interview: LO8 November 2012, Dara; LO9, December 2012, Dale

⁵⁸ FGD, Chucko, 2013 and Hawassa, 2011

⁵⁹ Interview: Alamu Adamo, August 2010, Hula; GE2, September 2013; GE7, August 2010, Loka Abaya

According to the elders, traditional institutions have been in place for centuries engaged in guiding and coaching the members of society over the years without interruption unlike the situation where frequent changes affect the durability of formal structures of government. Hence, traditional leadership and institutions shape and stabilize inter and intra-societal relations by creating favorable conditions for the smooth operation of government structures⁶⁰.

The interviewed elders opined that traditional institutions are important for the continuity of government administration by gaining the support of traditional leaders and community elders. They are of the view that in spite of the fact that the government commands formidable powers, solving problems affecting communities through traditional mechanisms is preferable given that many people inhabiting the rural areas of Sidama heavily rely on traditional institutions. This is due to the fact that community members believe in the potency of traditional leadership on the one hand and seek to avoid incurring the high costs involved when trying to seek redress in government agencies that are located far away from their places of domicile and productive activities. Besides, community members believe that the formal structures of government cannot effectively deal with all cases that arise in the villages, neighborhoods, and homesteads⁶¹. Local government officials and urban residents believe that traditional institutions are very important in dealing with several issues in the past but in contemporary times their role is mainly limited to handling specific cultural matters. In the light of this, therefore, governance and development issues can be dealt with by the government rather than through application of traditional mechanisms.⁶²

With regard to areas of cooperation between traditional and modern governance systems, promotion and preservation of culture, improving good governance and mobilization of people for development at grassroots level could be mentioned⁶³. Informants further suggest that the community would benefit if traditional and modern governance institutions work together harmoniously, which helps to promote and develop the positive aspects of traditional socio-

⁶⁰ Interview: Argaw Bantora, Chucko August 2013 Tafesse Huriso, Chucko August 2013; GE2, September 2013, Hawassa; GE8, August 2013, Gorche; AC1, September 2013, Hawassa.

⁶¹ Interview: Woma Bekele Biliso, August, 2013, Gorche

⁶² Interview: LO8, November, 2012, Dara; LO9, December, 2012, Dale; LO11, July 2013, Aletawondo; GE9, August 2010, Dara GE 10, August 2013, Aletawondo

⁶³ The summary of focus group discussions organized in four different areas between 2010-2013 and comments from regional officials RO3, January 2013, Hawassa, RO2, September 2013, Hawassa

economic and cultural assets because traditional institutions are more accessible to the people at grassroots level and fill the gaps that are neglected or cannot be dealt with by government structures⁶⁴. In view of this, informants suggested that the government should empower traditional institutions to manage pertinent matters affecting communities by recognizing the sanctity of traditional sites and practices and preserving and maintaining them. Hence, the government should cooperate with traditional leaderships rather than limiting itself to enlisting them for purposes of mobilization for implementing some unpopular policies alone, which often results in the loss of the legitimacy of the elders and traditional leaders⁶⁵.

Informants from the regional and zonal government offices⁶⁶ suggested that there is a need for greater cooperation and consultation with elders' councils for better achievement in terms of improved governance and development projects. In the light of this, the government should consult with traditional institutions and design means and ways of deploying them in activities where their roles are significant for addressing societal problems by enacting legislations to this end. Most informants agreed that traditional institutions can play greater roles in terms of entrenching good governance, peace, stability and development in grassroots communities. However, they admit that nowadays the role of traditional institutions have declined and confined only to areas of conflict resolution and community mobilization.⁶⁷

5.3.Aspects of Change and Continuity in State-Society Relations

In the wider African context, episodes associated with colonialism and the slave trade have tended to transform the overall political economy landscape of the continent. In most post-independence African countries, traditional institutions were either totally abolished by the colonial powers or their potency and effectiveness have been weakened. The reaction of post-independence African leaders towards their respective traditional institutions was varied. Some rejected the possibility of cooperation with traditional institutions by citing their collaboration

⁶⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵Interview: GE3 August 2013, Hawassa,; GE6 August 2012 and summary from focus group discussion forum held in Chucko August 2013.

⁶⁶ Interview: LO1, July 2011, Hawassa; LO2 July 2011, AC2 September 2013 Hawassa, Addis Ababa; RO1 September 2013 Hawassa

⁶⁷ Interview: GE5, LO1, LO2, LO9, LO10, LO11 see the annex for details.

with colonial powers whereas others viewed them as backward and obsolete in a manner that contradicts the notion and imperatives of modernization and socio-economic development.

In some countries in southern, central and western Africa, post-colonial regimes were inclined to blend some aspects of the *modus operandi* of traditional institutions and customary practices with those of the formal structures. Critical issues of governance in post-independence Africa necessitated re-examination of traditional political systems and revitalize them in a manner that makes them pertinent for contemporary application (Bahru, 2008). In this regard, it would be in order to mention few cases. The constitution of Botswana provides for the establishment of the National House of Chiefs through various acts of parliament that detailed the role of the House and its functions. Accordingly, the House of Chiefs is made to play advisory roles to the executives and the legislatures (Sharma, 2004). The Constitution of Ghana also provides for the establishment of the National and Regional Houses of Chiefs that have more or less similar functions undertaken by the National House of Traditional Leaders in South Africa. The Constitution of Ghana recognizes customary laws and traditional courts as part of the country's judicial system (Mijiga, 2005). The Constitution of Somaliland recognizes the role of clan leaders and established the House of Chiefs, which deals with cultural and religious issues as well as general affairs of the territory⁶⁸ whereas the Namibian Constitution provides for acknowledging the institution of traditional leadership and customary law. In the majority of the aforementioned cases, however, the constitutions of the countries in question require traditional institutions to support government policies (Ibid).

During the expansion of the Ethiopian state at the turn of the 19th century, the government of the day marginalized those traditional leaders who resisted alien rule and domination whereas others who submitted were used as intermediaries between the state and indigenous societies. At a later stage of the expansion drive, Emperor Menelik recognized and promoted submissive regional lords like Mohammed Ali, later *nigus* Michael of Wollo and the Sultans of Afar and Jimma including many local leaders in the Somali Region of Eastern Ethiopia, among others,. In Sidama, the Emperor Menelik had recognized Balicha Worawo, the *moote* of the Yanase clan who initially opted to resist but later compromised and cooperated with the occupation

⁶⁸ The constitution of Somaliland self-declared state of Northern Somalia, 2011

forces. Balicha Worawo died in Konso after leading the force deployed to pursue Menelik's policy of expansion further south (Markos, et.al, 2011).

Emperor Haileselassie persevered the policy of his predecessor by coopting local leaders and rewarding them for their cooperation and services. However, the Local Administration Decree 2/1942, which became the main instrument for centralization of power under the Emperor, narrowed the political space for the regional lords and traditional leaders who exercised unbridled powers and enjoyed several privileges in the past. Following the coming into force of the Decree, most traditional leaders in Sidama were elevated to the status of representatives of the centralized state thereby abandoning their traditional roles and customary responsibilities. For example, the *moot* of Alatta clan was converted to Orthodox Christianity, took Amhara name, and was granted the imperial title of *Kegnazmach* and thus began to act as the representative of the Emperor in Alatta area of Sidama.

Under military rule, traditional leaders and institutions were abolished altogether branded as collaborators of the imperial regime and dubbed as reactionaries and the enemies of the people. During this period, the elders' councils were replaced by peasant associations and the regime embarked on intensive campaigns against traditional institutions and societal cultural practices, norms and values.

In post-1991 Ethiopia, the FDRE Constitution provided more room for revitalizing traditional institutions and cultural practices by lending recognition to ethnic and socio-cultural diversity the totality of which is taken as the elements that makeup the polity. This is concretely expressed by creating federated ethnolinguistic constituent regions with laws and judicial systems that reflected regional specificities in terms of respective attributes and other defining features. It is nonetheless worth mentioning that there is no explicit statement in the current constitution regarding the role of traditional leadership and the need for upholding the viable aspects of societal norms and values. The Constitution stipulated that regional states have equal powers and duties, which is indicative of the symmetrical devolutionary feature of Ethiopian federalism. Accordingly, all regional states are legally entitled to draft and ratify their own constitutions, enact legislations, form their own organs of self-government, etc.

One of the benefits of federalism to the revitalization of traditional institutions is that federating states enjoy formal and constitutionally guaranteed autonomy. For example, Article 63 of the

Constitution of Afar Regional State stipulated that clan leaders have significant roles to play by actively participating in the deliberations and associated processes of the councils of elders. Besides, Article 65 of the regional constitution also gives due recognition to the traditional and religious courts and conflict management schemes as well as customary laws that are officially recognized. Similarly, Article 73 of the SNNPRS constitution states that "... religious and customary courts that enjoy state recognition and functioned prior to the adoption of the Constitution shall be organized on the basis of recognition accorded to them by this constitution". Article 56 of the Somali Regional State's Constitution provides for the establishment of councils of elders and clan leaders.

One of the major areas in which variations are observed in the approaches of the governments and the traditional institutions is that the latter lend more focus to managing and resolving conflicts through informal channels. This takes place in the absence of clear legal and institutional framework that empowers and promotes informal ways of conflict management and resolution. The federal constitution gives recognition to the settlement of disputes through customary laws and religion-based adjudication mechanisms on matters arising between individuals. On the other hand, the formal criminal justice system that the government employs to solve and manage conflicts has limited effect in dealing with localized and routine conflicts occurring in localities inhabited by grassroots communities due to various reasons. Cognizant of this, the government encourages alternative dispute resolution mechanisms for civil cases and ethnic or group conflicts that take place at this level.

Article 34 of the Federal Constitution allows the parties to the conflict to seek alternative dispute resolution mechanisms to resolve marital, personal and family disputes based on mutual consent. Moreover, the courts allow informal dispute resolution arrangements to deal with some civil cases prior to channeling them to the formal tribunals. This is in line with the current justice reform scheme anchored in what is known as Business Process Reengineering⁶⁹. With regard to the formal justice system, the local courts hold ultimate formal power without giving room for alternative mechanisms of adjudication. According to Macfarlane (2007), the formal criminal justice system is not a major player in terms of addressing and dealing with criminal cases. The same writer (2007) concluded that the formal

⁶⁹ Local official from Hawassa special zone, telephone conversation in January 2014

criminal justice system has little impact on the management and resolution of criminal cases. As indicated in the preceding chapter, most informants with the exception of key informants comprising local government officials prefer informal conflict management mechanisms for various reasons associated with expedience and effectiveness.

The modern political system in Ethiopia and the policies of the state favored integration and assimilation at the expense of diversity and mutual and reciprocal accommodation. Nevertheless, successive imperial regimes followed modest and flexible approaches that are commensurate with local conditions to harness support and legitimacy from different regional actors including some of the leaders of traditional institutions. This is with a view to past drives of subordinating diverse cultural values and practices to the dominant and mainstream dispensation. The military regime opted to abolish all forms of traditional institutions by labeling them as backward and ‘reactionary’. In contrast, the current political system spearheaded by EPRDF lends due attention to cultural diversity. @However, the historic trademark of centralizing political power had persisted unabated even after the introduction of federalism where the central government had remained a robust institution enjoying formidable prerogatives. This is expressed by the behaviors and practices of federal and regional state officials that are not responsive to the legitimate aspirations of indigenous peoples for meaningful empowerment.

5.4. Opportunities and Shortcomings

In this section, attempt is made to shed light on the opportunities and shortcomings relating to the empowerment and revitalization of traditional leaderships and institutions. This is with a view to properly understanding prospects for making use of the tenable aspects of traditional norms and values including cultural assets for entrenching smooth state-society relations and viable governance arrangements.

5.4.1. Opportunities

As indicated in the literature review section, many African countries are working towards recognizing the role of the traditional leaders by incorporating customary practices in their political and legal systems. Several countries such as Mozambique (Meneses, 2005), Botswana

(Sharma, 2004; Nyanjamo, 2003), Ghana (Mijiga, 2005), South Africa (Ntsebeza, 1999), Cameroun (Nyanjamo, 2003), etc., are some that are worthy of mention in this regard. Besides, African indigenous systems are increasingly becoming the focus of African studies and scholarship (Owusu, 1991, 1992; Ayitty, 1992; Sharma, 2004; Meneses, 2005; Evans, 1995; Oomen, 2000; Asmerom, 2006; Logan, 2008; Nyanjamo, 2003; Ntsebeza, 1999; Mijiga, 1999; Hamer, 2007; Aadland, 2002). Based on the different experiences in the continent, the growing focus of scholars on traditional institutions and leadership as a major underpinning of mainstream African studies lend optimism for further enrichment and application of traditional mechanisms and practices in the continent in general and Ethiopia in particular. Moreover, a number of studies affirmed the legitimacy and relevance of African traditional institutions in the socio-cultural, economic and political lives of Africans (ECA 2007).

Another opportunity that provides better prospects for reinvigorating traditional institutions and customary practices as means of dealing with basic issues of societal concern relates to the introduction of federalism, which is flexible and accommodative in several respects. The current federal arrangement in Ethiopia also avails opportunities for policy options and choices in dealing with concerns and issues of state-society relations. In this regard, it should be noted that the Afar and Somali regional states have incorporated provisions in their constitutions that allow traditional institutions to function parallel with formal structures of government. Such trends can be viewed as positive indicators in the drive towards making use of traditional institutions for entrenching traditional governance at grassroots level. Although the constitution of SNNRPS is short of lending formal and official recognition to traditional institutions, the green light given for providing space is hoped to further boost the rich practices embedded in the workings of traditional institutions existing in the region. Moreover, the institutional mechanism that is currently at work aims at mobilizing the public to address various problems can be taken advantage of by traditional institutions operating at grassroots level.

In addition, the exhibited willingness of the local officials to work with traditional leaders and vice-versa could be viewed as another opportunity that could help in further harnessing the tenable elements that underlie the mode of operation of traditional institutions. As already

mentioned, regional and local officials are making use of the power and influence of elders and community leaders in resolving localized conflicts, mitigating socio-cultural problems, and mobilizing grassroots communities. At this juncture, it is worthwhile to raise one instance of an attempted cooperation between the government and traditional institutions. The Sidama Zonal Government was a bit worried about the issue of ever-increasing dowry payments that entailed hosts of socio-economic problems affecting the youth and other sections of society. The Zonal Administration and the regional government decided to partner with leaders and institutions of traditional communities to deal with this problem. Following this, notable elders from all localities gathered in Aleta Wondo and deliberated on the issue for about three days and finally put a maximum affordable limit for dowry payment⁷⁰. Though this was largely accepted and implemented, the practice was not adequately sustained due to closely intertwined factors that include lack of persistent follow-up in implementing the decision and the pitfalls surrounding the imposing of the decision without consulting all stakeholders and forging consensus on the matter.

5.4.2. Shortcomings and Drawbacks

Notwithstanding the aforementioned windows of opportunity, there are still lingering challenges affecting the credibility of informal mechanisms of managing and resolving conflicts that could not be sustained due to a variety of factors. These include: lack of capacity of community leaders, absence of acceptance of traditional institutions and customary practices on the part of various social forces like the educated, the youth, followers of different Protestant denominations, and urban dwellers. This is in line with Macfarlane's (2007) statement that the educated urban dwellers consider traditional mechanisms in Africa as embarrassing vestiges of tribal society that have no place in a sophisticated post-colonial continent. The same writer suggests the need for redistributive justice in view of the fact that it addresses the profound disconnect between formal and informal systems of dispute resolution.

The other shortcoming and drawback that is being currently experienced relates to the quest of government structures to continue using traditional leaders as their mouthpieces and deploy them to be engaged in advocating official policies and programs including those that are

⁷⁰ Interview: Hailu Dawaqo, Gaduda Gabiso, RO2, RO1, LO1, LO2 see index I for detail.

unpopular. One government official⁷¹ equated lending institutional and legal recognition to traditional political institutions to reverting back to obsolete systems of the past by arguing that community elders cannot be genuine representatives of constituencies due to their opportunistic stances of trying to please government officials by hiding their real intentions. According to informants⁷², local and grassroots officials at district and *kebele* levels are suspicious of community elders and traditional leaders for fear that they can pose threats of competition against formal structures of government by vying for space and popular support.

Traditional institutions in Ethiopia in general and Sidama in particular are criticized for being insensitive to pressing problems affecting women. In this vein, the inability and unwillingness of Sidama traditional institutions to promote the rights of women and minorities could be cited as some of their shortcomings. Although some of the basic rights of Sidama women are represented and protected through a separate institution known as *yaka*, they are excluded from major decision making processes that take place in the elders' councils. At times, traditional institutions are also viewed as instruments for violating minority rights. As already discussed in the preceding chapter, Sidama indigenous political institutions have continued to marginalize minorities despite the several improvements that are being observed since recently⁷³. Moreover, traditional norms and customary laws and values are viewed as being indifferent to or perpetrators of harmful traditional social practices like female genital mutilation, polygamy, abduction, etc⁷⁴.

⁷¹ RO4 September 2013, Addis Ababa

⁷²Interview: Zekarias Loodo, September 2013, Chucko; Hailu Dawaqo, September 2013, Chucko.

⁷³ Interview: GE9 August, 2010, Dara; LO8, November 2012, Dara

⁷⁴ Interview: LO 3, LO4, LO5 and LO6 see Annex I for details

Chapter VI

Conclusion

There is renewed scholarly interest of exploring the workings and ramifications of African traditional political systems and governance institutions. Besides, increasing number of African countries have embarked on the task of adopting mechanisms for incorporating the tenable attributes of traditional political systems into formal and official structures in order to ensure efficient and effective delivery of services at the grassroots level. In this connection, several instances and cases where traditional institutions are in the process of being empowered by obtaining politico-legal backing and recognitions abound in several African countries like Botswana, South Africa, Namibia, Ghana, Tanzania, Mozambique, Cameroun, etc. It should thus be noted that traditional institutions and mechanisms in these and other countries are in the process of being accorded different levels of politico-legal support aimed at lending effectiveness in dealing with community affairs and ensuring their participation in national socio-economic and political processes. The case of Somaliland is also another recent example expressed in the constitution of Somaliland that fully established the House of Elders as the second chamber of the legislature, which is vested with the power of reviewing legislation passed by the House of Representatives and charged with the responsibility of enacting laws relating to religion, tradition (culture), and security. Hence, new developments that transpired in many African countries attest that traditional institutions are in the process of being made to operate alongside formal structures with a view to improving the state of governance at local and grassroots levels.

In the same manner that took place in many African countries, state formation process in Ethiopia emphasized the need for adopting modern systems and structures in the course of which all features and manifestations of traditional dispensations were abandoned as backward and obsolete. Such an approach had adversely affected and shaped the nature of state-society relations in the country including the study area. Moreover, the civic and political education system and the process of political socialization are devoted to the drive of entrenching adherence to the imperatives of western modes of administration and political engagement. As a result, there were limited attempts in terms of conducting empirical researches aimed at

documenting the ramifications of traditional institutions, norms, and customary practices in the context of diverse socio-cultural formations in Ethiopia. The failure in harnessing the positive attributes of traditional political institutions and modes of governance is becoming one of the challenges that militate against efforts for institutionalizing democratic governance in the country in general and Sidama in particular.

In spite of some positive initiatives that are currently taking place in several African countries with regard to integrating traditional institutions into the formal structures of government, political regimes have persevered with the urge for subordinating customary practices and traditional institutions to mainstream formal structures. In view of this and notwithstanding the government's unbridled control and regulation of socio-economic and political lives of citizens through its institutional machineries, the issue of state legitimacy is often rendered questionable. This is partly due to the unfavorable behaviors and actions of the holders of power at the local level in their dealings with traditional institutions and mechanisms contrary to what is stipulated in the spirit of the constitution of the country that is currently at work. Accordingly, government monopoly of and control over the major domains of governance and public administration persists unabated by excluding other legitimate players including traditional institutions and mechanisms. In this connection, it would be proper to state that the study has established that many informants in the ranks of those interviewed in the study locations in Sidama prefer to obey and be loyal to traditional institutions and customary norms.

The divergence between the drives of formal structures and traditional leadership and mechanisms is evidenced by the fact that the government entrusts its loyal members who are largely inexperienced and illegitimate with the responsibility of managing and regulating societal affairs in a manner that is contrary to what is traditionally acceptable. This is compounded by the behaviors and practices of government officials whose dispositions are characterized by disdain and disrespect for traditional values, norms and cultural practices, which often result in their failure to persuade, mobilize and even reach out to people at the grassroots level and conduct the basic and essential businesses of government that require proactive popular participation.

It is also worth noting that the Ethiopian politico-legal system anchored in the principles of federalism allows for wider accommodation of diversity and preservation of cultural identities thereby providing some room for reviving and nurturing traditional modes of governance in the country in general and Sidama in particular. This is expressed, among others, by the existing modality of local and grassroots participation in the lower level legislative assemblies (councils) composed of representatives of the populations of rural communities. It could thus be argued that if such and similar other arrangements are properly geared towards cementing a smooth state-society interface, the nature of local participation at the lowest levels of the country's administrative hierarchy can serve as fertile ground on which traditional systems of governance can thrive. In this connection, it is stated that traditional governance systems allow for more meaningful popular participation than many of parliamentary democracies of today (Bahru, 2002).

The existing participatory approach employed in practice is top-down in nature and hence inadequate for addressing the socio-economic, political and security needs of Ethiopian citizens (Kifle, 2007). As documented in the preceding chapter, the traditional governance institutions in Sidama are suitable for ensuring community participation and mobilization of community members for furthering development efforts. Besides, there is growing consensus that informal or traditional ways of conflict management are less costly, more flexible and efficient in identifying and implementing remedial measures and addressing the root causes of problems by reconciling parties to conflicts. It is to be recalled that until recently, the government was limited to encouraging communities to deal with family matters and civil cases between litigant individuals through less formal conflict management mechanisms without giving room for engaging in issues that are larger in scope and intensity. Cognizant of the advantages that could be forfeited by failing to cooperate with traditional institutions, the government has recently begun working in tandem with the former in order to deal with pressing problems and concerns affecting local and grassroots communities. Though this appears to be a move in the right direction, it could be argued that the trend should be sustained by institutionalizing the process through recourse to legal-constitutional reform that could extend official recognition to traditional institutions and mechanisms that are marked with proven attributes of best practices and viability.

Traditional governance institutions are rooted in the cultural values and norms of society as a result of which they tend to be acceptable and contribute a lot to cohesion, stability and security in spite of the changes that occur over time. It is in line with this that traditional institutions in Sidama have contributed to stability and harmonious relations between community members as shown in the findings of this study. Hence, there is a need on the part of the government to extend due recognition to cultural practices and norms whose potency persist unabated. Multiple instances that are detailed in the main body of the text indicate that the government is currently employing and utilizing traditional governance institutions and their leaders to resolve violent conflicts arising between individuals and groups and address socio-cultural and economic problems of various sorts. Nevertheless, this takes place without extending official recognition to traditional institutions and mechanisms on the basis of binding legislative frameworks. Based on a limited assessment undertaken in some localities in Sidama, it can be argued that the positive attributes of the traditional institutions could be put to use for the betterment of the state-society relations provided that they are properly harnessed.

The findings of the study also indicated that traditional institutions can cooperate and closely work with formal structures of governance in contemporary Ethiopia. Experiences of many African countries and some modest initiatives in Ethiopia like in Afar and Somali Regional States as well as limited attempts in the study area attest this. The study has established that members of local and grassroots communities in the study area espouse positive dispositions towards indigenous institutions. In conclusion, it could be stated that indigenous institutions in Sidama that deal with conflict resolution, peace building, community mobilization, entrenchment of traditional values and customs, etc., can be adopted by and incorporated into the existing practices of the formal Ethiopian political system. Hence designing feasible arrangements to this end is hoped to contribute to the taking shape and consolidation of democracy and improved state-society relations. This also helps in boosting efforts aimed at combating harmful practices and rectifying the inadequacies of traditional institutions particularly with regard to failures in tackling issues surrounding the predicaments of women and minority groups. In the light of this, harmonizing the two sets of institutions, namely

formal structures and traditional institutions requires introducing reform measures that would lead to coherence and integrated system of governance (ECA 2007b).

As indicated in the findings, the study has achieved its objective aimed at examining the nature of state society relations by identifying the major attributes that could be put to use in tandem with engagements of the modern and formal modes and structures of governance. To this end, analysis of the ramifications of indigenous knowledge and practice of governance, political systems, and cultural traits of the Sidama on one hand and the formal and modern modes of governance on the other is undertaken as a basis for providing suggestions on how the two can be intermarried and complement each other. Based on the findings of the study that are provided in the preceding sections, it is established that the tenable aspects of indigenous and traditional governance arrangements in Sidama can be adopted and incorporated into the existing practices of the formal Ethiopian political system without posing challenges underpinned by anomaly.

Finally, the hypothesis advanced on the need for incorporating appropriate and feasible attributes of traditional institutions into the formal structures of the Ethiopian state in order to promote multiculturalism and accommodation of diversity is very much in line with the findings of the study. The study also attested that the link between the two modes of governance would result in convergence and compatibility of interests and lead to improvements in the nature of state-society relations in the country in general and the study area in particular.

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Appendix I

Profile of informants

Sex	No	Age range (yrs)	No	Place and Residence	No	Education	No	Occupation/ status	No	Religion	No
Male	68	16-24	3	Urban	29	Can't read and write	16	Government Official	17	Protestant	26
Female	6	25-36	15	Rural	37	Read and write	13	Government Employee	15	Orthodox	7
		37-50	16	-	-	High school complete	11	Community leader/elder	33*	Islam	3
		51+	33	-	-	Diploma	16	Business person	8	Traditional	22
				-	-	BA and above	12	Farmer	25	Catholic	5
				-	-		6	Student	2	Not identified	11
				-	-			Others	7	-	-
Total	74	-	67	-	66	-	74	-	107*	-	74

*Community leaders/elders are also classified as farmers and this is why the sum exceeds the number of the study population.

Appendix II

List of Key Informants and FGD Members

NO.	Name	Sex	Age	District	Date of Interview	Remarks
1.	Bekele Biliso	M	47	Gorche	July16, 2011 and August12, 2013	Woma and head of Gadira shrine
2	Duchisho Buraqo	M	66	Arbegona	July 20, 2010	Elder
3	Barasa Biliso	M	65	Dale	July 8, 2010	Moote of Aleta Clan
4	Kifile Akana	M	77	Bursa	June 3, 2010	Community leader
5	Higisa Gacheno	M	82	Boricha	July 6,2011	Community Leader
6	Matewos Ligamo	M	53	Wondogent	July20, 2011	
7	Zekarias Loodo	M	73	AletaChucko	September 18, 2010, July 28, 2012 and August 14,2013	Former government official and community leader
8	Tunsisa Genefe	M	73	Bensa	September20, 2010	Elder
9	Tafese Huriso	M	48	AletaChucko	August 14, 2013	Government employee
10	Alemu Ebiso	M	68	Wondo Genet	September 13, 2010 and July 20, 2011	Elder
11	Mukura Bodoye	M	87	AletaWondo	April 12, 2012 and September 8, 2013	Elder
12	Geelo Gebremichael Wachefo	M	72	Dara	October 12, 2010	Geelo/ Leader of Hadicho clan
13	Hailu Dawaqo	M	69	Chucko	September 18, 2010, July 28, 2012 and August 14, 2013	Elder/former official
14	Arfase Furu	F	67	Dara	June10, 2010	Qaricho
15	Woma Mude Yume	M	70	Bursa	September 8, 2010	Traditional leader

16	Gaduda Gabiso	M	78	Hawela Tula	July 16, 2011 and August 9, 2013	Community leader and Ayanto
17	Ayane Butuna	F	42	Arbegona	October 20 2010	Qaricho
18	Meta Hesa	F	62	AletaWondo	November 10, 2012	Qaricho
19	Bekele Tise	M	85	Malga	July 7, 2010	Elder
20	Yambaru Male	M	73	Arbegona	September 7,2010 and August 29, 2011	Elder
21	Argaw Bantora	M	49	AletaChucko	October 20, 2012 and August 14, 2013	Elder
22	Dukamo Mare	M	75	AletaWondo	October 2012 and August 2013	Elder
23	Amelo Deqemo	M	82	AletaWondo	August 2013	Elder
24	Adiso Yumuka	M	47	Wonsho	June 2012	Local official
25	Galfato Basha	M	48	AletaChucko	May 2012	Community Leader
26	Tesfaye Heliso	M	65	AletaChucko	May 2012	Elder
27	Adato Bifato	M	99	Loka Abaya	June 2012	Community Leader(passed away in 2012)
28	Lamiso Erbamo	M	49	Loka Abaya	June 2012	Community Leader
29	Talo Lamiso	M	65	Loka Abaya	June 2012	Community leader
30	Wesito Dasa	M	84	Dara	May 2012	Elder
31	Lagide Shone	M	74	Dara	May 2012	Elder
32	Najo Buraqo	M	66	Bona Zuriya	September 2010	Elder
33	Tawe Tuke	M	63	Arbegona	September2010 and August 2011	elder
34	Talo Butano	M	64	Boricha	September 14, 2010	Elder
35	Dika Bune	M	66	Shebedino	September 2010	Elder
36	Alamu Adamo	M	73	Hula	August 2010	Clan Leader

37	Chokole Agafaru	M	62	Gorche	August 12, 2013	Elder
38	Assafa Mukura	M	49	Aletawondo	Various time between 2012 to 2013	Data collector
39	Takele Baredo	M	45	Chucko	Various time between 2012 to 2013	Data collector
40	Abnet Zeleke	M	31	Hawassa	July to September 2013	Data collector
41	Abnet Assefa	M	24	Hawassa	July to September 2013	Data collector
42	Local Official 1	M		Zone Admn	July 2011	Politician (LO1)
43	Local Official 2	M		Zone admn	July 2011	Politician (LO2)
44	Local official 3	M		ChuckoWoredaadm n	August 2013	Politician (LO3)
45	Local official 4	M		GorcheWoreda	August 2013	Politician (LO4)
46	Local Official 5	M		AletawondoWore da	November 2012	Politician (LO5)
47	Local official 6	M		ShebedinoWoreda	Novemeber 2012	Politician (LO6)
48	Local Official 7	M		ArbegonaWoreda	July 2012	Politician (LO7)
49	Local official 8	M		Dara Woredaadm n	November 2012	Politician (LO8)
50	Local official 9	M		Dale woreda	December 2012	Politician (LO9)
51	Local official 10	M		WonshoWoreda	Decmebr 2012	Politician (LO10)
52	Local official 11	M		Aletawondo	July 2013	Politician (LO11)
53	Regional Officials 01	M		Regional Admn.	September 2013	Politician (RO1)
54	Regional officials 02	M		Regional Admn	September 2013	Politician (RO2)
55	Regional Official 03	M		Regional Admn.	January 2013	Politician RO3
56	Regional Official 04	M		Regional Admn.	September 2013	Politician RO4

57	Local Official 14	F		Tula	July 2012	Politician (LO2)
58	Local official 15	M		Hawassa	July 2012	Politician (LO15)
59	Businessman 1	M		Hawassa	July 2012	Businessman (BL1)
60	Business woman	F		Hawassa	July 2012	Businesswoman (BL2)
61	NGO official	M		Hawassa	July 2012	NGO official (NG1)
62	Businessman	M		Hawassa	July 2012	Businessman (BL3)
63	Academia	M		Hawassa	September 2013	Academia (AC1)
64	Academia	M		Addis Ababa	September 2013	Academia (AC2)
65	Government Employee 1	M		Hawassa	September 2013	GE1
66	Government Employee 2	M		Hawassa	September 2013	GE2
67	Government Employee 3	F		Hawassa	August 2013	GE3
68	Government Employee 4	M		Arbegona	August 2010	GE4
69	Government Employee 5	M		Chucko	August 2012	GE5
70	Government Employee 6	M		Aletawondo	August 2012	GE6
71	Government Employee 7	M		Loka Abaya	August 2010	GE7
72	Government Employee 8	M		Gorche	August 2013	GE8
73	Government Employee 9	M		Dara	August 2010	GE9
74	Government Employee 10	M		Aletawondo	August 2013	GE10
	FGD			Arbegona	July 20, 2010	

	FGD			Hawassa	September 16, 2010	
	FGD			Chucko	August 23, 2013	
	FGD			Gorche	August 19, 2013	

Appendix III

Reference questions and Checklist

1. Personal information

- I. Sex Male Female
- II. Age 16-24 25-36 37-50 above 50
- III. Settlement Urban Rural
- IV. Level of Education Illiterate Read and write
high school complete College graduate First Degree and above
- V. Occupation government employee late business owner Farmer
student
- VI. Religion Protestant Christian Orthodox Christian Catholic
- Traditional religion Islam
- VII. Social status government official Community Leader
Religious leader

2. Unstructured questions (In depth Interview administered on key informants community leaders/elders)

- I. What is the historical evolution of traditional modes of governance in your locality?
- II. What is the source of power for the traditional authority in your locality
- III. Explain the structure, nature, roles and duties and responsibilities of traditional authority

- IV. Explain the nature of relation between the traditional religion and traditional modes of governance
- V. Explain the major problems/challenges that the traditional modes of governance is currently facing
- VI. Explain why the traditional authority is compulsory in your locality? What is the source of its legitimacy
- VII. What is the role and status of women in traditional political system in your locality
- VIII. How the power is transferred in the traditional political system
- IX. What are the criteria and attributes to assume traditional authority in the traditional political system
- X. Describe the procedures and ceremonies in transferring power in traditional political system
- XI. Explain overall attitude of the those people who mainly adhere traditional modes of governance in your locality
- XII. What is your suggestion on how the government and the traditional authority should cooperate? Are there any advantages in cooperation between two entities?
- XIII. What are the problems and weaknesses of traditional authority in general?
- XIV. What are major challenges of traditional authority in your locality?

XV. What is the peculiar characteristics nature of traditional modes of governance in your locality comparing with government system?

XVI. Any additional comments on overall relation between State and Society in your locality?

3. Unstructured interview questions (administered on government officials as key informants)

I. Do you think that the existence of traditional authority is important for the overall life of the society? How?

II. Given the current federal government system, what are the modalities to accommodate the role of the traditional authority in your local context?

III. In your view, what is the role of traditional authority in your locality?

IV. What kind of relation does exist between the traditional leaders and government officials?

V. To what level the local government recognizes the role of traditional authority in the affairs of the locality?

VI. How the local government manages conflictual interests that exist between traditional authority and government policies?

4. Checklist for Focus Group Discussions

I. Sidamugeerigashshotuannanoqarramayanoqolenowoyabinofarcoaateaanansah eedomaati?

Elders comment on ongoing problems between traditional governance and the

formal system and on arranging better options in order to provide better justice to the people at the grassroots level?

II. Sidamu manni songoteni qarra tidhdhate mageshsha halchano?

Expectation of the people from the songo and level of willingness to bring their case to the songo system?

III. Gashshootu manni songo sidamu qarra tirate aana mayi heedo afidhino?

Government officials' and educated urban dwellers' opinion on the traditional conflict management schemes vis-à-vis the formal one?

IV. Buudu gashshooti dhawaano gede ma assa woyitano?

How to improve the role and capacity of the traditional governance in Sidama?

V. Xaano geeru xaphphomu songo assirate xa'mo shiqishani no, togoo songo mahajja aana hasabe ma qarra tiritano yine hendani?

Sidama elders are still requesting the government to support them to organize zonal kind of songo. What role is expected from this songo? How could it function?

APPENDIX 4

Appendix 4

Explain the role of traditional institutions in the State's authority in the province and the reaction of the State against consequences of the event.

TRA 35



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የኢትዮጵያ ጠቅላይ ሚኒስትር
Min. of Int. - Public Security Dept.

ለከበር ደንበኞች በተለ በየት

የሲኒማ ጠቅላይ ገዢ አገረጋ

ደርገ ዓለም

ከባር ሆይ

የሲኒማ ጠቅላይ ገዢ በየዓመቱ የሚያደርጉትን ፍቺ የተባለውን ላይ
ወት በሳላቸውን መዘንደት በማድረግ ወገን በመለየት አይሰጡ በርባቸው በ
ጠርፍ በቀጠሎ አገላለጽ በሽል አገልግሎት አየተቀጥቱ በህግ ተቀው አጠባበቅ
በኩል ከባድ ችግር የፈጠረ ወሆኑን በግልጽ የጠቅላይ ገዢ ፖሊስ
ዋና አዘዥ በተቀር ለ2/2/7957 ጊዜያዊ 19/51 ላይ የሚፈራገጥ
ት ገልባጭ; ከወገኑል ምርመራ ፖሊስ ዋና አዘዥ በተቀር ለ23/7/66
42-7/7/51 ላይ በተቀረጸ ደብዳቤ አጠባባይነት ደርሰን ተ
መልስ ተሰጥቷል። ለአሁኑ አሰራር ለውጥ በከገባቸው ተፈጻሚ ወይሆኑም ያህሉ
ዓይነት ስሜቶች የሚተርጉሙ ሆኖቻቸውን አስተያየት በአስቸሳይነት
ገጥሞቻችን በግልጽ አስተውሏል።

Handwritten notes and signatures in Amharic script, including dates like 24.9.51.

ገልባጭ ለወገኑል ምርመራ ፖሊስ ዋና አዘዥ
አዲስ አበባ

Handwritten notes and signatures at the bottom left, including a date 24.9.51.

72.4.316
84.9.51

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ከደምር፡ ወደም፡ ስሪቶ ጸመንግሥቶ፡ ርገሥቶ፡ መሆኑ፡ ተውቆ፡ የተገመተና፡
 የታወቀ፡ መሪቶ፡ ከደምር፡ ወደም፡ የገገሮቻቸው፡ ገዳ፡ ተከራካሪ፡ በክሰራካጊው፡ ፍር
 ድ፡ ጦቶ፡ ሣዩክስ፡ የሲዳሞ፡ ጠቆካዩ፡ ግዛቶ፡ መሥሪያ ጦቶ፡ በራቆ፡ የመን
 ግሥቶ፡ ግብር፡ ሄደከራ፡ በጭቶ፡ የሚገኘውን፡ ርገሥቶ፡ ያክክግብ
 መሪቶ፡ በቀካድ፡ ተክክቶ፡ ምናልባቶ፡ ቸርፍ ሲገኝ፡ ከገራውክቶ፡ የሰጠው፡
 ሲኩ፡ ችወዛዝ፡ ክብር፡ የሲዳሞ፡ ጠቆካዩ፡ ግዛቶ፡ ክንዲራሌ፡ መሰጠታቸውን
 ንግግሩ፡ ምንጣ፡ ስከሰማን፡ ከክብራቸው፡ ወይክብርናቸው፡ መጣን፡

ከከረሀ ክህን፡ ተክቶ፡ ገሥጠንግዳ፡ በሰላም፡ የምናሰባገጥረው
 በቀካድ፡ ተክክቶ፡ ከክብሩ፡ ጦቶ፡ መንግሥቶ፡ ከተወሰኑባቸው፡ ሰዎቶ፡ ጓጣፍ
 የሰጡ፡ የተገሰጡ፡ በክብራቸው፡ ወረዳ፡ ያከው፡ ክንዲ፡ የሆኑ፡ ክፍል፡ ክልንበረም፡

ሲያሰራጩ፡ ክንዲ፡ መንግሥቶ፡ ጠቆካዩ ግዛቶ፡ በሙሉ፡ የክንዲ፡ ስራ
 ገዛዝ፡ ጊዜ፡ የሕዝቡ፡ ሲከገ፡ ተክክቶ፡ ቸርፍ ክንዲ ሲገኝ፡ ወደም፡ በግዛ፡ ወ
 ደም፡ ግብር፡ በመቀጠል፡ ክፍሉ፡ ከምንስተዳድርባቸው፡ በስተቀር፡ ክፍሉ፡ ክንዲ
 ወይክንዲ፡ መሪቶ ያነሰን፡ በመሆኑ፡ መንግሥቶ ገደሙ ክቆይ መሠረቶ ክከ
 ካ ገሥጡ፡ ርገሥቶ ጠያቂና ሌካጊ ስከሰማ ክህን፡ የሆነው ሆኖ፡ በሀገር ካጸ
 ያልመጣው፡ ዳግብ በሆኑ ስራ ግራግ፡ ስከሰማ የገገንና በከተከሰሰንበቶ
 ም፡ ነገር፡ ርገሥቶ መክካቶ ስከሰማ የገገው፡ ችወዛዝቶ፡ ክንዲ ያነሰቶ
 ሚ ችወዛዝቶ፡ ከሲዳሞ ጠቆካዩ ግዛቶ፡ ክንዲራሌ፡ ክንዲ ጭፍፍን በማግባት
 ክፍሉ ክንዲ ተክክቶ

ክመጣቸው ስራ ገደብ ስም ሆነን፡

- 1 ት፡ ሄደክራ ስራ
- 2 ት፡ ኪቲቶ ምናልባቶ
- 3 ት፡ ሁሌት ክብር
- 4 ት፡ ገራግ ገደብ
- 5 ት፡ ገደብ ገደብ

ከሆሊዮስ ገደብ
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የኢትዮጵያ ፌዴራላዊ ዲሞክራሲያዊ ገዢ ገዛት	የሥራ ገዢ ስም
የሥራ ገዢ ስም	የሥራ ገዢ ስም
የሥራ ገዢ ስም	የሥራ ገዢ ስም
የሥራ ገዢ ስም	የሥራ ገዢ ስም
የሥራ ገዢ ስም	የሥራ ገዢ ስም

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