

**THE EXPANSION OF PROTESTANTISM AND CULTURE CHANGE AMONG THE  
SAYYOO OROMO, WESTERN OROMIA**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES, ADDIS ABABA  
UNIVERSITY**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

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**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

**DECLARATION**

I, the under signed, declare that this thesis is my original work done under the guidance of Fekadu Adugna (PhD), and has not been submitted for a degree in any other university. All sources materials used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

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## Glossary

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| Aadaa                | Culture/Custom  |
| Abbaa Duulaa         | War leader in the Gadaa system  |
| Abbaa Muuda          | Father of the anointment  |
| Abeetuu              | A title given to local rulers in Sayyoo, after the collapse of the <i>gadaa</i> system and before the incorporation to the modern Ethiopian empire. |
| Afaan Oromoo         | Oromo Language  |
| Araqee               | Homemade liquor, alcoholic drink  |
| Aseennaa             | A form of traditional marriage  |
| Ateetee              | An exclusively female's ritual celebrated to pray to goodness of fertility  |
| Baddaa               | Highland  |
| Badda-Daree          | Semi- high Land   |
| Bokkuu               | Scepter   |
| Budaa                | Evil Eyed   |
| Buna-qalaa           | Fried coffee beans mixed with spices and butter   |
| Butii                | Abduction, a form of marriage   |
| Buttaa               | Feast prepared on every eight year of <i>gadaa</i> presidential election  |
| Caaccuu              | Ritual object used only by women as a symbol of female fertility  |
| Caffee               | A long type of grass, growing around humid area. It was also a name of a traditional Oromo parliament.  |
| Coqorsaa             | A type of grass, grows the whole seasons  |
| Dajazmatch (Amharic) | Commander of the Gate; general, provincial governor   |
| Dhibaayyuu,          | Sacrificial ritual in Oromo traditional religion  |
| Eela                 | A big borehole in which mineral water used as medicine for cattle is found  |
| Faaruu               | A kind of traditional song  |
| Farsoo               | Local beer  |
| Gadaa                | The traditional Oromo democratic institution  |
| Galma                | Prayer house/hall in Oromo traditional religion   |
| Gammoojji            | Lowland   |

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Garba           | Slave  |
| Geerarsa        | A kind of Oromo traditional song usually sang by men   |
| Hammachiisaa    | A child naming ceremony as one of rites of passage ritual                                    |
| Hora            | Mineral water  |
| Irreecha        | Traditional Oromo thanks giving ceremony   |
| Jila            | Name for any cultural ceremony/ Journey of group of people                                   |
| Kaabbaa         | Oromo traditional cemetery before the introduction of modern religions                       |
| Kadhata Huumsaa | Group prayer in the Oromo indigenous religion  |
| Kallacha        | A respectful metal object, used for blessing by <i>Gadaa</i> leaders on different ceremonies |
| Laguu           | Taboo  |
| Muuda           | Anointment   |
| Qaalluu         | Religious Leader in Oromo traditional religion   |
| Ras (Amharic)   | Head, duke, governor   |
| Salgan          | The ninth day ceremony of birth and funeral rituals  |
| Safuu           | Moral and ethical order  |
| Shanan          | The fifth day celebration in marriage and birth rituals                                      |
| Siiqqee/Siinqee | A tin ritual stick used by women   |
| Yaa Rabbii      | Thanks giving festival at the end of harvest season  |
| Ulfii           | Glorious, Another name for God   |
| Uumaa           | Creator, Another name for God  |
| Waaqa/Waaqayyo  | God  |

### ***Abstract***

*The study is about the expansion of Protestantism and culture change among the Sayyoo Oromo. It attempts to document the coming of branches of Christianity and their methods of expansion and the conversion of the people. Special emphasis is given to examine the impacts of expansion of Protestantism on the Oromo traditional culture and explaining the current everyday religion of the people. The research employed qualitative paradigm; primary data were collected by formal and informal interview, observation, document analysis, the use of oral tradition and secondary sources.*

*The research reveals that Christianity arrived among the Sayyoo, before a century ago. Protestantism expanded in the area by convincing method of donations and often by impressive pressures made particularly through attacking the traditional Oromo religion with its rituals. The then general contextual background: political oppression, low economic status, lack of infrastructures, the event of influenza epidemic and other world historical incidents have contributed to the peoples' active conversion to Protestantism. The mass conversion of the people resulted in creating new spiritual orientations, which brought holistic change, including the missing of indigenous cultural practices. Accordingly, the Sayyoo indigenous culture was changed in many aspects: social customs, material cultures, oral literature and verbal arts, oral performance known as the social drama in anthropological term.*

*Lastly, the study focuses on religion and everyday life of the Sayyoo by looking at how Protestantism penetrated into daily life of the people mainly by using marriage as one of rites of passages. The study discloses that religion is in every activity of the Sayyoo. It is argued that in the last one century, the Sayyoo developed a complex form of marriage ceremony that integrates protestant church principles and omitting many of customary marriage values in favor of taking advantage to fit in to the Protestant Church.*

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background

Protestantism arrived in Qellem - the study area- during the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the work of its missionaries (Benti Ujulu, 1999:46). The first protestant mission that reached the area was the United Presbyterian Church of North America Missions (UPCNAM)<sup>1</sup>. For the purpose of preaching and bringing the religion to local people, they trained the first local converts through few years of education and few months of church training. Because of their limited trainings of the local converts, they did not know the elements of their culture that could be compatible or not with Christianity. This could be a reason for their contribution in the ‘destruction’ of some aspects Oromo cultural traditions, with its rituals and customs (*Ibid*).

With this insight, the study examines the relationship between expansion of Protestantism and culture change; how Protestantism reshapes everyday life of the people of Qellem, converting them and influencing the traditional culture. Thus, it comprises the historical overview of the arrival of Protestantism in the study area, conversion of the people and mainly centered at the role of the religion in changing the indigenous culture of the people and reforming the contemporary everyday societal life of the people of *Sayyoo*.

The study was conducted in Qellem Wollega zone. Qellem Wollega with its capital at Dembi Dollo is one of the eighteen zones of Oromia National Regional state in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. There are around eleven districts in the zone. I purposely, selected two of them: Sayyoo and Hawa Galaan. Therefore, the study focuses on the Mecha Oromo living in these two districts of Qellem Wollega zone of Oromia regional state.

### 1.2. Statement of the Problem

According to Eller, David (2009:281), despite the fact that there are variations between theirs’ and the natives’ culture, Protestant missionaries expanded Protestantism throughout the world. Yet, whether all cultures all over the world adapt to Christianity or Christianity adapts to all

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<sup>1</sup>There were two Presbyterian Protestant Church Organizations in USA: the United Presbyterian Church of America (UPCSAM), which was functioning in the Southern part and the United Presbyterian Church of North America (UPCNAM), which functioned mainly in the northern part of USA (Benti, 1999:30).

cultures are questions that should be answered in line with its expansion towards diverse cultures. A broader question is that as the culture and tradition in which Christianity emerged was single (Jewish culture), how Christianity could totally fit the diverse cultures of the world? Could all cultures of the world assimilate Christianity, or Christianity assimilates all cultures, regardless of the diversity? These issues were controversial<sup>2</sup> in the early history of expansion of Christianity and conversion of people in line with the issues of culture (Shenk, W. David, 1999:259).

Therefore, the early church struggled with the problem of cultural identity. According to Shenk, the first Christians who were Jewish practiced the Jewish customs, but Gentiles did not assume many Jewish customs, because of the incompatibility between the religion and the cultures of non-Jewish in some cases (*Ibid*). The issue of incompatibility developed to become so intense and very controversial whether the Christian churches should be monocultural or multicultural.

In fact, Benti (1999:2) pointed out that this reality is accurate also in the context of the Oromo conversion to Protestantism as well. He argues that because of the ethnocentric views of protestant missionaries during the time when they converted the Oromo to Protestantism, Church is blamed for destroying their indigenous culture. In relation to the 1991 Ethiopian political change that brought the idea of cultural revival, members of some protestant Churches started to ask how they could accommodate their cultural practices in their Christian private and communal daily lives (Benti, 1999:2). Reverend Etefa Gobena (1997:4), the Director of the EECMY<sup>3</sup> Gospel Ministry Department, clearly pointed out this reality, in his speech at the symposium on ‘*Church, Culture and Ethnicity in Present Ethiopia*’ that was held in Addis Ababa in October 1997. He noticed that ‘the 1991 political change in Ethiopia brought not only the downfall of the super-culture ideology, but it also brought a renewed spirit for reviving cultural values, the use of one’s own language and a whole discovery of one’s own ethnic identity’. Many young and educated Oromo have started to work on their cultural values. However, they found themselves struggling with their Christian values and cultural values,

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<sup>2</sup> Shenk (1999:259) states that the issues became so intense that a conference was convened in Jerusalem, which was ended by forwarding a remarkable decision. The apostolic leaders decided that the only criterion for inclusion in Christianity is commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and his ethical teachings. Other cultural practices, such as dress or circumcision, were irrelevant to the essence of the faith. The decision was risky, because when such diversity is assumed, it is difficult for church to maintain cohesion and unity.

<sup>3</sup> Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus.

because they found the two incompatible in some aspects. This has become an open discourse in Qellem in the post 1991 periods. In the political sphere, too, attempts were made to revitalize the *gadaa* system. However, Christians were in dilemma whether the customary politics is harmonious with Protestantism (Ittefa Gobana, 1997:4, quoted in Benti, 1999).

Among other Oromo groups, for instance, among the Borana, Guji, Bale, Arsi and Shewa, elements of cultural institutions like *gadaa*, *siiqqee*<sup>4</sup>, and some components of Oromo indigenous religion like *muudaa*<sup>5</sup>, *irreechaa*<sup>6</sup> and *hammachiisaa*<sup>7</sup> are practiced. To the contrary, in today's contemporary society of Wollega in general and Qellem in particular, it is common to hear that indigenous cultural practices such as Oromo indigenous religion (*waaqeffanaa*<sup>8</sup>), and *ateetee*<sup>9</sup> are overflowed by the practices of Protestantism.

Consequently, in Qellem, several significant features of Oromo cultural institutions have been outdated and the ways of life of the people have changed (Benti, 1999:1). Accordingly, many of the *Sayyoo* people have an unprecedented interest in cultural identity. They feel that their local uniqueness is threatened by the expansion of Protestantism and other forms of influence from the outside. Similarly, being a native Oromo I did not know about the above-mentioned Oromo cultural practices and institutions, before studying Oromo Folklore at under graduate level. This posits a question into my mind 'why I did not know well about these cultural practices and institutions?' My curiosity forced me to suppose, 'it might be because of the setting in which I grew up' - a place where Protestantism flooded over traditional cultural practices, and inspired me to study the issue passionately.

Few studies have been conducted on this issue. Some of them are worth mentioning here: "Some of the Consequences of the Christian Mission Methods and Contextual Evangelism among the

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<sup>4</sup> In Oromo society, women had the *siiqqee* institution, a parallel institution to the *gadaa* system that functioned hand in hand with *Gadaa* system as one of its built-in mechanisms of checks and balances (Kuwee, 1997: 119 quoted in Asafa).

<sup>5</sup> Asmarom, (2006:101), Oromo pilgrims from far and wide to take part in ritual called Muuda the anointing.

<sup>6</sup> In Oromo traditional religion, *irreecha* is a religious ceremony held twice a year: one is thanks giving ceremony held riverside in September and the other is prayer on mountain in March.

<sup>7</sup> It is one of rites of passages ritual, during which the families take their children to *qaalluu* for naming ceremony as the first step in socializing them, like baptism in Christian (Dejene, 1999:42).

<sup>8</sup> See Jeylan (2004:104). Before the expansion of Islam and Christianity, the Oromo had their own traditional religion called *Waaqeffannaa*, the belief in *Waaqa* (the supreme God).

<sup>9</sup> *Ateetee* is exclusively women's ritual performed annually in the Oromo traditional religion (Benti, 1999:83).

Oromo of Ethiopia” by Benti Ujulu (1999); “Protestant Mission in Wollega” by Daniel Ayana (1984), “Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia: Origins of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus” by Aren, Gustav (1978), “The Introduction and Expansion of Orthodox Christianity in Qellem Awraja” by Negaso Gidada and Crummey, Donald (1972) and “Oromo Religion” by Lambert Bartels (1983).

Daniel did a reputable work on the history of the arrival and activities of missionaries in Wollega. Methodologically, concentrating on interview, his focal points are historically outlining how Protestantism was introduced there by harnessing the traditional religion, the history of church plantation and comparing it with similar historical developments in other parts of Africa where missionaries introduced Christianity. He neither did analyze factors of conversion of the people nor considered the religion in everyday life of the people.

Benti (1999) also made an excellent effort. His focus was critics of the inadequate methods of evangelism by missionaries and proposes ‘contextual’ evangelism that makes Christianity feel at home in the culture of the Oromo people. Benti also discussed what he called inadequate methods of evangelism in making the majority of the Oromo people to reject Christianity and have become Muslims. In addition, he rationalizes that the recent crisis within the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus was because of the kind of evangelism it has undergone. What he called crisis is the “Conflicts triggered within her two congregations: Gulalle and Entoto in Addis Ababa, where the churches refused to allow the Oromo Christians to worship in Afaan Oromo.” He concludes that Oromo Christianity lacks an indigenous character, because of the missionaries’ usage of inadequate methods of conversion (Benti, 1999:99-130).

Benti’s work is library based, and it is a kind of historical reconstruction of the period between 1880 and 1974. This means that he also did not look at how the religion is working in the everyday societal life of the society during the time of his study, because his main interest was to look at the first missionaries’ methods of evangelism. Thus, his intensions were to investigate appropriate ways through which Protestantism could live long and might possibly expand further, by putting aside exploring the direct outcome of the religion on the traditional culture.

Aren, Gustav (1978) had done a fascinating study on the introduction of Christianity in Wollega. He focused on the key agencies in the Christianization/ evangelization of the Wollega Oromo.

These agencies were the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), the Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM), the United Presbyterian Church of North America Mission (UPCNAM) and the Hermannsburg Mission (HM). The origins of these agencies, their brief historical background, how they came to Wollega and their achievements were discussed deeply in Aren's (1978) work. His work was interested in describing the introduction of Christianity in Wollega. However, the issues of the relationship between culture change, everyday life and religion were not examined.

The work of Negaso and Crummey (1972) highlights the introduction of Orthodox Christianity in Qellem by focusing on factors that were contributed to the expansion of the religion (Negaso and Crummey, 1972: 107). This work is the opening material to understand the beginning of Christianity as a general in Qellem. However, like the above-mentioned scholars, these intellectuals too did not see the impacts of Christianity on the traditions of the people and its role in the everyday life of the *Sayyoo*.

Furthermore, Lamberts' (1983) work was related with different agenda, i.e., Oromo traditional religion, which poles apart with objectives of my study. His work was aimed at documenting the nature of the Oromo indigenous religion, the rituals and ceremonies, and the different concepts in the religion. Thus, it has little to do with examining the relationship between Protestantism and traditional cultures of the people, which is my theme.

In general, no one among these authors considered factors of the conversion of the people; what happened to the life of the society after the arrival of Protestantism and how Protestantism has been recognized and used in the daily life of the people.

To the contrary, my intentions are not to document the missionaries' methods of Christianization. Rather, I emphasize first, describe the expansion of Protestantism/ conversion of the people. Second, analyze the changed aspects of traditional cultures, and how the remaining cultures are accommodated together with the new religion. Third, the study analyzes Protestantism and the everyday life of the *Sayyoo* Oromo. Thus, by employing anthropological approach, this research fills the existing gaps in the study of the relationship between Protestantism and local culture. These gaps are methodological as well as substantial- process, factors and consequences of conversion on the everyday life of the people of *Sayyoo*.

## **Research Questions**

The study attempted to answer the following research questions.

1. How did Protestantism expand in *Sayyoo* and what were the factors that contributed to the mass conversion of the *Sayyoo*?
2. What is the relationship between the *Sayyoo* traditional culture and Protestantism? How did the new religion approach the indigenous culture and what aspects are changed because of expansion of Protestantism?
3. What aspects of the *Sayyoo* everyday life are reshaped in the context where various aspects of their traditional culture are lost and Protestantism is expanded?

### **1.3. Objectives of the Study**

#### **1.3.1. General Objective**

The general objective of the study is to describe and analyze the role of the expansion of Protestant Christianity in affecting people's cultural traditions and reshaping the ways of life among the *Sayyoo* Oromo residing in Qellem Wollega.

#### **1.3.2. Specific Objectives**

The study is believed to meet the following specific objectives:

- to examine strategies by which Protestantism expanded and to analyze causes, processes, and consequences of conversion among the *Sayyoo* Oromo.
- to examine how Protestantism approached the local culture of the Oromo and to analyze the changes that have come because of the church teachings.
- to investigate how the religion reshapes and works in the contemporary societal life of the people of the study area.
- to explore if/how the people accommodate the Christian and cultural practices together.

### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

The finding of this study provides a brief and reliable account on the role of Protestantism in changing the culture of the society. Since there are no sufficient academic studies on the issue, this study is believed to serve as a useful material for those individuals interested to carry out in-depth studies on similar topics.

In the applied sphere, it can also help the people of the area, church leaders, the followers and cultural experts to know how to handle the two: culture and religion; and mitigate the tension between the two.

### **1.5. Scope of the Study**

Geographically, the study is delimited to cover the *Mecha* Oromo group living in Hawa Galan and Sayyoo districts of Kellem Wollega zone of Oromia regional state. It is purposely delimited and focused on two of the eleven districts of the zone. Sayyoo district is selected because it is a place where Protestantism arrived for the first time and practiced broadly. On the other hand, Hawa Galaan is selected for its proximity to *Sayyoo* district that makes it easy to access.

Thematically, the study is delimited to causal analysis between expansion of Protestantism and culture among the *Sayyoo*. Its focal points are mainly three: first, exploring the strategies of expansion of Protestantism and analyzing conversion of the people to the religion, second, assessing role of protestant Christianity in changing traditional Oromo culture and thirdly, considering how it reshapes the contemporary life of the people of the area.

### **1.6. Research Methodology**

#### **1.6.1. The Research Design**

With the purpose of giving qualitative explanatory insights to the issues under study, to meet the suggested objectives and answer the above listed research questions; I employed a qualitative research paradigm. The reason why I chose to use qualitative approach is that “qualitative research explores attitudes, behavior and experiences through such methods as interviews; it helps to get an in-depth opinion from participants” (Dawson, Catherin, 2007:16). As explanatory designs seek to establish cause-and-effect relationships and primarily focuses to determine how events occur and which ones may influence particular outcomes (Hancock and Bob, 2006:33), the study seeks to understand the effects of Protestantism on the Oromo traditions.

As the topic of this research is interested in understanding larger-scale, macro-level phenomena, i.e. how the expansion of Protestantism did bring a major cultural/societal change over time in Qellem and what resulted from the change, I mainly used historical method together with ethnography. This is because of two things. First, research work of this kind, which is interested in causal analysis, must show the independent variable (expansion of Protestantism) precede the

dependent variable (culture change) in time, which forces us to see the historical happenings of the expansion of Protestantism<sup>10</sup>. Second, as ethnography is interested in writing about the contemporary life of certain people, this research seeks to understand the current life of the *Sayyoo* that resulted from the change from the anthropological point of view. Therefore, by employing the historical method, this study seeks to understand the event of expansion of Protestantism in the past and its connections and influences in the present *Sayyoo* life. The ethnographic method is used to explore the observable and learned patterns of behavior, customs and ways of life of a culture-sharing group- the *Sayyoo*. Typically, it involves long interaction with the group, during which the researcher is deep in the day-to-day lives of group members. The product of this effort is a holistic description of the group that incorporates both the views of group members and the researcher's perceptions and interpretations of the group's functioning (Hancock, 2006:31). Secondary sources have played significant contributions to verify and validate the research with conceptual guiding framework regarding the relationship between culture, everyday life and religion.

### **1.6.2. Sampling Techniques**

Qualitative research do not simply use sample as representatives of the population under study; rather it works with small sample of people, cases, or phenomenon nested in particular context (Bryman, Alan, 2004:323). As a result, I used purposive sample technique. Even though, I did not plan the research sample in advance, I have identified them during fieldwork. Dawson (2007:49) pointed out that qualitative researchers do not worry to generalize their work to the whole research population. They describe what is happening within a smaller group of people, which they believe, may provide insights into the behavior of the wider research population. Accordingly, following Hancock's and Bob's (2006:39), argument, I have identified key participants in condition whose knowledge may provide important insights regarding my research questions. Thus, to meet my objectives, I selected ten key informants by the purposive sampling method and interviewed in detail.

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<sup>10</sup> According to Ruane, M. Janet (2005:78), in causal analysis research, three conditions must be fulfilled: The independent variable must precede the dependent variable in time, they must have relationship with each other and the relationship between the two must survive any.

### 1.6.3. Methods of Data Collection

- **Oral Tradition**

Research works of this kind need to reconstruct the history of the society. Without reconstructing the past life of the people and comparing it with the present, it would not be possible to judge the changes at present. Historical reconstruction of certain topic of oral community requires a close assessment of oral tradition with the use of available written sources. Dereje Hinaw (2012:82) argues, “*All human history is oral in origin.*” Since the 1960s in Africa and in Ethiopia, significant uses of oral traditions have made the reconstruction of people’s past possible. Therefore, the current importance of oral tradition in the studies of African people in general and the Oromo in particular attests the relevance of oral sources. Asafa Jalata, (2012:134) stated that the Oromo transmit their historical, cultural knowledge and every day information through oral tradition. In this research, the available oral traditions such as songs, poetry and folklore are used as sources of data in reconstructing the *Sayyoo* history.

- **Interview**

As a means of collecting information from various research communities, interviews can range from the highly structured to semi-structured and unstructured (Crang, Mike and Cook, Iran, 2007:60). In this research, I employed the semi structured and unstructured interviews. In the semi-structured one, I prepared predetermined interview questions and asked my respondents in a specific order. In the unstructured one, I set some broad parameter for a discussion with my respondents.

I conducted 20 interviews with my respondents, including the purposely-selected key informants who have direct relationships with the issues undertaken by the semi-structured one. I selected ten key informants from religious personnel, church leaders and elders to better understand the required information to meet my objectives. Among the ten selected key informants, even though they were not present at the time Protestantism arrived, two of them were able to provide me the oral testimony of the event. Information from such individuals is considered as secondary sources among historians. Through unstructured interview, I have included other ten informants who offered me some general background information, for example, on the current relationship between religious institutions in Qellem. There are also informants who provided me details of some specific cases, for instance, on events in marriage ceremonies and everyday activities.

Three of these informants were workers in the Culture and Tourism office of the zone. Generally, in this research, I have interviewed twenty informants, from which ten were my key informants.

Regarding gender composition of my respondents, all of my key informants were male. However, though none of them was my key informant, I have interviewed five female respondents. In regards to their age composition, as I selected informants in condition whose knowledge may provide important insights about the issues of the study, most of my respondents were young people and elders. In addition, since I assumed people of adult age would give better information, I have also included this age group. Data about marriage procedure of the contemporary *Sayyoo* society have been gathered mainly from this age group.

- **Observation**

Throughout different anthropological works, observation has been viewed as an essential method to grasp first-hand information from natural settings. It is used in ethnographic fieldwork to get rich information and the forgoing conditions as it is in actual natural setting (Bernard, Russell, 2006:344). It draws on the direct evidence of the eye to witness events (Denscombe, Martyn, 2003:192). Accordingly, being immersed in the society for three months, I observed the daily life of the society in the study area, the interaction between culture, religion and ways of life of the people, which helped me to get comprehensive insight on the relation between these variables. With this method, I gave more emphasis to capture the experience of members of the society, particularly by participating on social occasions such as marriage ceremonies, funeral ceremonies, church worshipping and spiritual conferences. Wedding and funeral ceremonies are occasions that helped me to observe the intersections of the indigenous cultural practices and Protestant religious life.

- **Documents Analysis**

Documents that are relevant to the expansion of Protestantism were consulted and analyzed. These documents were drawn from the library of Gidada Bible School, which is found in Dembi Dollo. Historians used document analysis as one source of primary data, which is written testimony of eyewitnesses. In this research, I have reviewed two original documents that are related to the arrival of Protestantism and history of conversion of the people. Among these

documents, one is personal autobiography and diary of one of the first local converts Gidada Solan. The other is church document that was prepared on the ninetieth anniversary of the arrival of Protestantism among the *Sayyoo*, which was celebrated in 1999. The document briefly clearly puts the history of Protestantism in Qellem.

- **Secondary Data**

Secondary data from different books, published and unpublished dissertations and thesis, bulletins, journals, articles and other relevant materials were reviewed in line with the study's objectives. The data from these secondary sources supplemented my fieldwork information and enabled me to recognize the gaps in the study. This method then also helped me to cross check the data obtained through several data gathering methods.

#### **1.6.4. Data Collection Procedure**

As soon as the Department of Social Anthropology approved the topic, literatures related to the topic were reviewed. Then, research questions and objectives of the study have been identified. Detailed interview guide was prepared and data was collected mainly focusing on the role of the expansion of Protestant Christianity on the traditional culture among the *Sayyoo*. The data collection instruments were prepared in English and translated into the peoples' language, *Afan Oromo*. Since I realized that it is necessary, I asked the Department of Social Anthropology to write a support letter that helped the participants to understand who I am and what the purpose of the study is. Interviews were made by going where the respondents are, offices and homes. After asking the willingness of these respondents, I made an appointment based on a personal visit. Thus, the interview sessions were arranged based on the convenience of the respondent.

#### **1.6.5. Method of Data Analysis**

Since there is no appropriate set of rules of analysis or simple guidelines, which guarantee good results, the main difficulty I encountered was what to do with the data after it has been collected. However, following Sapsford's and Jupp's, (2006: 251-2) suggestion, the first task I did was assigning data to categories and developing the categories at the same time. The process entails mutual fitting between data and categories; then. The dynamic process focuses on the links between the problem, research design, strategy, research techniques and theories (Bryman, Alan and Burgess, G. Robert, 2002:2). As making sense of information is a continuous process with

the researchers' investigative progress (*Ibid*), I used a multidirectional interaction between the conceptual and empirical world, deduction and induction occurring at the same time in the processes of data analysis. I continuously examined and interpreted the data in order to reach conclusions by focusing on the research questions. Thus, I employed major idea analysis or thematic analysis techniques and content analyses by involving necessary element of creativity. Data are displayed using qualitative descriptors and provide quotes from respondents throughout the report. In the process, I followed every data collection by analyzing concurrently by starting data analysis immediately after data was collected. Reflection was made on every response through interpreting. In summary, the design and methods discussed allowed a holistic approach towards the study.

#### **1.6.6. Ethical Consideration**

Prior to participation in the study, it is important for all participants to understand why the research is being done and what their participation will involve. Selected participants were given explanation about aims of the study, eligibility to participate in the study, possible benefits of participating in the study, and concerns with regard to data keeping and confidentiality issues. All of them were informed that participating in the study is voluntary and secrecy of their responses would be maintained based on their personal interest.

#### **1.7. Limitations of the Study**

One may experience many difficulties in conducting a research work of any kind. Particularly, the major problem I faced in studying this topic is the confusion, where I should start the study of culture changes among the *Sayyoo* Oromo before directly embarking on the intended objective. Because, this obviously required me to reconstruct the social, cultural, political, and religious life of the society that was previously lost and difficult for me to accomplish at this instant.

In addition, the shortage of time was the major problem. I only had three months fieldwork, which is too short time for an anthropological study of this nature. The inaccessibility of transportation between the sites of the study was the other serious challenge. The inaccessibility of the area, together with the shortage of time, forced me to limit the study only on two sites. If I

had managed to cover more sites, the data would have been richer and the analysis would have been deeper.

In addition, many people were also reluctant to discuss the issue of religion in relation to culture. Only those who are aware of my objectives have shown willingness for the discussion. There is a tendency to see the study of cultural traditions ‘culture’ as anti-religion<sup>11</sup>. Hence, these constraints forced me not to claim my study is complete, exhaustive and comprehensive. However, I hope, my effort establishes adequate ground for further research.

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<sup>11</sup> Other scholars have recognized this challenge. Among five external challenges that church is facing by now, indigenization; a tendency to go back to traditional religion propagated by scholars and considering Christianity as foreign religion are the most serious problems. Therefore, they see scholars’ effort to the study of culture as an act of anti Christianity. (See: ‘An overview of the Mission work of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY)’): a paper presented by Wakseyoum Negeri, on the Ethiopia network Annual Conference of Mekane Yesus with International Mission Society (MYIMS) held at Pittsburg in April 2010.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

This chapter is aimed at reviewing relevant anthropological literature on the expansion of Protestantism, conversion and culture change. Different theoretical approaches to conversion and its consequences, the relationship between religion and culture and the role of religion in the everyday societal life are also reviewed.

#### **2.1. Historical Overview of Christianity**

This subtopic highlights an overview of Christianity as a whole; its origins and its family denominations. There are three main families of Christianity denominations: Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant Christianity (Shenk, 1999:262). Orthodox Christianity, being the oldest church traces its founding to the era immediately after Christ. The Orthodox Church is further classified into three: Syrian Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox or Russian Orthodox. These Orthodox churches have taken deep root in their respective cultures. The second and the largest Christian denomination is Catholic. Because of the division within Eastern Orthodox Church, Catholic Christianity emerged in 1054. Its origin traces back to the apostolic witness of Peter, one of the disciples closest to Jesus. The Roman Catholic pope, head of this church, claims to be the spiritual descendant of Peter. The third form of the Christian family is Protestant churches (Shenk, 1999:262).

After the establishment of Roman Catholic as the only official and truth religion in Rome, all other opinions about religion have been rejected. One did not choose one's own views and truths but received them from authority. This brought disagreements about those truths, but those disagreements were always settled by and in favor of authority (Eller, 2009:57). As a result, unsuccessful reform had been repeatedly attempted over the centuries. However, Martin Luther's movement escaped that fate. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Protestant movement that was led by Martin Luther happened in Europe. Luther claimed that the Catholic "Church was wrong about many of its beliefs and was actually anti-Christian." He called the Pope and all Catholics agnostics to confirm his argument using the Bible as a source (*Ibid*).

The members of the movement believed and taught that the Catholic Church was departing from New Testament faith. Consequently, a terrible and sometimes violent collapse occurred between

the Catholic Church and the group, which ‘protested’ what they believed to be departure from Biblical faith (Shenk, 1999:262). The Protestant Reformation introduced a division into Christian Europe and religious wars slashed apart Europe for years. After the thirty years (1618-1648) compromise and millions of deaths, new peace recognized three religions – Catholicism, Lutheranism and Calvinism in Europe (Eller, 2009:57).

## **2.2. The Expansion of Protestantism**

Various scholars have produced many documents on the history and practices of Protestantism. According to Bryant, M. Darrol (1999:178), as the members of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant reformation had a strong commitment; they began to develop a missionary idea during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Continually, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries Protestant missions have led to the formation of Protestant churches around the world.

To this point, it is helpful to understand the beginning of the expansion of Protestantism. Protestant movement of the sixteenth century marks the multiplication of denominations or different faith families (Shenk, 1999: 262). In recent times, there has been a huge expansion of Christianity in many parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America with the renaissance of charismatic and Pentecostalism forms of Christianity. The expansion of Protestantism involves a number of key features. These include: “...an emphasis on conversion and salvation through Jesus Christ and belief in his second coming, admitting the Bible as a unique source of authority; an affirmation of nuclear family, and more importantly, an emphasis on possession by the holy spirit and spirit-healing” (Morris, Brain, 2006:146).

During their expansion to Asia and Africa, these missionaries have often linked imperial ambitions and western cultural values (Bryant, 1999:177). Through the implementations of ethnocentric beliefs and attitudes, the activities of missionaries are one of the prime examples of instances of acculturation. According to Eller, D. Jack (2009:281), though many of them often did good works, for example, medical, school services and other donations, however, the ‘mission’ behind these works was always to change the society in all encompassing ways. Missionaries would often do introduce foreign beliefs into the society by ridiculing, condemning or even punishing the ‘traditionalists’. In the conversion effort, they used to control the natives’ resources, and even used physical punishment or destroying native religious artifacts and

buildings. The missionaries often imposed Western values and practices in the areas of kinship, gender roles, language and economics on the local people, forbidding, for instance, polygamy or child marriages or nakedness or gender equality or nomadism (*Ibid*).

Generally, Huber, T. Mary (2010:417) states that Christian missionaries have long appeared in the anthropological record as agents of social and cultural change. They typically engaged in different people, preached in a moral critique of local culture and society, encouraging broad change in beliefs and practices. Huber's idea could fit the case of the Qellem, because the arrival of Protestantism has brought multidimensional changes among the *Sayyoo*, as it will be elaborated in chapter five.

### **2.3. The Arrival of Protestantism in Qellem**

Before dealing with arrival and expansion of Protestantism in Qellem, it is important to see the introduction of Christianity as general in Qellem. According to Negaso and Crummey (1972), the last two decades of the nineteenth century in which the *Sayyoo* were submitted to Menilk marks a turning point, not only in the political administrative of the people, but also in religion, which was greatly characterized by the expansion of Orthodox Christianity. As the first branch of Christianity that arrived in Qellem, Orthodox religion was introduced in the year 1886. However, there are significant ideas that suggest the introduction of Orthodox Christianity in Qellem dates earlier to 1886. For instance, 'official patriarchate list drawn up in the 1967 contains dates preceding 1886'. The record shows there are the oldest churches found in the eastern part of Qellem (1972:104). The scholars further categorized the early expansion of Orthodox Christianity into three periods: 1886-1918, 1919-1936, 1937- 1941. Accordingly, twelve churches were founded in the first period, thirty-one churches in the second and only seven churches in the last period (1972:107).

The United Presbyterian Church of North America (UPCNAM) is a Protestant Church Organization with headquarter in Philadelphia (Benti, 1999:30). With the intention of preaching the Gospel to the whole world, it opened up the Board of Foreign Missions. The Board began to send out missionaries to different parts of the world: Asia, Europe, Latin America and Africa. These missionaries were trained pastors, teachers and medical professionals. These missionaries began their activities in Egypt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Ethiopia attracted the attention of the United Presbyterian Churches of American Missionaries in 1868, during mission field in Egypt. During that time, Krapf<sup>12</sup>- a German missionary was also in Egypt. Long before 1868, he had been in Ethiopia from May 31, 1839 until 1842, doing missionary work. While he met the missionaries in Egypt in the year 1868, Krapf invited the missionaries to expand their mission work to Ethiopia. They accepted the invitation and requested permission of the General Assembly of missionaries' organization through the Board of Foreign Missions (Benti, 1999:30, Fite, 2012:254). Even though the Assembly resolved Ethiopia as additional focus of their mission in 1869, the then political situation in the country that does not leave space for other religions except the Orthodox Church hindered resolution to be realized. While waiting for an appropriate opportunity to enter the Oromo land, the missionary in Egypt extended its work to the Sudan and opened a station at Nassir, Sudan in 1913 (*Ibid*).

In 1918, Influenza epidemic erupted in Qellem. This forced *Dejazmach Birru Wolde Gabriel*, the governor of *Sayyoo* to ask the British consulate based in Gambella for medical help in 1918. With the help of the United Presbyterian Church of America, which had its mission at Nasser, Sudan, the consulate arranged and sent a medical team headed by Dr Thomas Alexander Lambie (1885-1954), who reached Dembi Dollo on July 11, 1919. Together with his team, he served in *Sayyoo* as medical professional, and later carried out mission work (Mitiku Tucho, 1999: 5). This was the beginning of the work of the United Presbyterian Church of North American Mission in *Sayyoo* in particular and in Ethiopia in general. The incident later led to the beginning of the Evangelical Church Bethel as a national Church in 1947 (Dabala Birri, 1997:4 in Benti, 1999).

Daniel Ayana (1984:89-90) state that the missionaries did not have followers/attendees at first apart from the patients and daily laborers who were working the missionaries' construction. As a result, missionaries organized a weekly preaching for the beggars in the area. They gave some amounts of gift in kind or cash to induce them to attend the preaching. These local converts have the responsibilities of expanding the religion from Dembi Dollo up to Gambella.

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<sup>12</sup>Krapf was a German missionary who used to work for an organization called 'Britain Church Missionary Society', and came to Ethiopia on May 31, 1839. He undertook missionary work in Ethiopia for four consecutive years and left the country in 1842. After he left the country, being in Germany he was doing bible translation in *Afan Oromo* until 1866 (Asafa, 2009:56).

To avoid opposition from local clergy, delicate doctrinal issues were not raised in the preaching. Particularly on Sundays, some of the missionaries and local converts attended Orthodox Church services. It was after attending Orthodox Church services that the missionaries gave sermons in their stations (Aren, 1978:441). Up to 1936, the followers of protestant Christianity buried their dead at the graveyard of the Orthodox Church in Dembi Dollo. In this, regard, there was no marked difference between the local converts and the Orthodox followers. This was because the first local converts had no their own independent religious institution up to the year 1936. However, there was a tendency to discriminate the local converts, because of their social background. It was after Italian invasion that, the first protestant church was established in the area (Daniel, 1984:89-90).

According to Mitiku Tucho (1999:7), since the works of the missionaries including evangelism were established with the support of *Dejazmatch* Birru (the local governor), the Orthodox Church had not openly opposed the mission work. However, after the Italian occupation in 1937, both the Italians and the Orthodox Church moved against the followers of the new faith. The local converts were refused the right to bury their dead in the graveyard of the Orthodox Church. When they were refused the burial land, the followers of the new religion requested the Italian governor to give them graveyard. Then the governor suggested that they start their own church building and their own burial ground. The land was dedicated, in the year 1937 the first missionary church was established in the area.

#### **2.4. Conversion**

Conversion as it is a broad issue in the study of religion has no single definition; many scholars have defined it in different times differently. Gooren, Henri (2010:1) defines conversion as “a comprehensive personal change of religious worldview and identity.” Others define the term as dramatic and emotional religious experiences in relation to Christianity. Conversion, as a means by which some religions were expanded, has a long history particularly in Christianity through missionaries as agent of expansion (Bryant, 1999:177).

Further, Lamb and Bryant (1999) argue that though there are various meanings of conversion both across the religious traditions and even within a given religious tradition, conversion generally is seen in religious context; it has come to refer to the broad idea of religious change. It

is part of joining one or another religious community; it involves converting from one religious tradition to another, changing from one group to another within a tradition or the intensifying of religious beliefs and practices (Lamb, Christopher and Bryant, M. Darrol, 1999:12-16).

The issue of conversion is well relevant to my research topic. Whenever we speak about expansion of a particular religion, we are speaking about conversion of people from other religions to the growing religion. Because, it is only when conversion of people happens to the religion that, we can say the specific religion is expanding. Therefore, the two are supposed to be different faces of the same coin. Therefore, in relation to the context of this study, I have seen conversion from the general notion of religious change among the *Sayyoo* Oromo from other different religions and secular life to Protestantism. In this regard, by using conversion approach, I will discuss how the *Sayyoo* have been converted to Protestant Christianity. I will also examine the factors, process and the consequences of conversion of the people to Protestantism.

## **2.5. Culture and Religion**

Culture never stands static; rather it moves and changes constantly and continuously. Just as a living body does not stay the same throughout its lifetime, culture change is a constant and expected quality of culture. It is not something that appeared only in recent years with colonialism and globalization. This is why the processes of culture change is talked many times under the more general headline of 'cultural dynamics' meaning: movement, growth, and generation. Any culture is complicated and sometimes contradictory combination of continuity and change, composed of every day human practices including religion (Eller, 2009:272). In this regard, Eller's idea could capture the dynamic and multidimensional culture change of the *Sayyoo*.

Christianity, according to Huber (1996:118-20) is the great world religion that has highly influenced the social and cultural lives of many of the peoples anthropologists have studied. These studies of Christianity have explored the complex ways in which global and local religious institutions and great and little traditions have been mutually constructed, contested and transformed. Issues about the social bases of religiosity, the dynamics of religious change and the character of transnational institutions and cultural reforms are raised after the expansion of the religion.

During these times, there are tensions between the orthodox and the local in non-Western societies where Christianity has been introduced. In many of parts of the world, expansion of protestant Christianity brought the reformulation of social relations, cultural meanings and personal experience. It has demonstrated a remarkable ability to take on different cultural shadings in local settings and has often been reinterpreted to express local preoccupations and to address political, economic and social concerns. Therefore, religion and cultures are intermixed because of this reformulation of the ways of life of the people and the two cannot be identified from each other (Huber, 1996: 118-20). Accordingly, religion and other ways of life are interrelated to one another; religion is not a single entity that can live alone excluding itself from other societal aspects. Mind, body, society, culture, nature and supernatural are all dimensions of an integrated system, and there are always connections between and reflections of each in the others. The myths, rituals, beliefs and values of a religion are in one way or another related to the kinship, political, and even economic practices and institutions of the society (Eller, 2007:148). This pushes us to discuss Geertz's (1993) idea of religion and culture. He describes 'cultural systems', which encompasses both secular ideologies and religion and sees religion as an example of culture. Together with common sense, art, science, and ideology, religion constitutes a cultural system (Geertz, Clifford, 1993:100). Cultural systems, as systems, are not just parts of culture but organized parts, composed of beliefs and practices, they serve the same functions as culture as a whole: they both make sense of life and convey the sense made. For Geertz, all humans need to make sense of life. This is because, the patterns of thought, the worldviews, and the meanings that are attached to the activities of a particular society forms their cultural system. From this point of view, we can understand that religion is a part of peoples' culture and ways of life. Hence, when people converted from one religion to the other, they leave some parts of the previous faith and accept the practices of the 'new' religion, which forms another cultural system for the society.

Therefore, in case of the *Sayyoo* Oromo, one could possibly argue that the old cultural system of the people that was there before the arrival of Protestantism has been changed. The new cultural system of the people is constituted by incarnating Protestantism as a building block in the contemporary life of the society. Hence, here is a peak at which one can find the focuses of this research. If I can restate my research problem in Geertzian language, I ask; what are the roles of

Protestantism in influencing ‘the old cultural systems’ (the system before Protestantism) of the *Sayyoo* Oromo and in producing the new (the current) cultural systems of the people?

## **2.6. Approaches to Conversion**

Gooren (2010:19-40) have evaluated thirteen approaches to conversion with regard to their scope, range, claims, methods, subjects, underlying assumptions, internal consistency and critique. In the following section, based on their relevance to my research topic, I discussed six of the conversion approaches, among the thirteen.

### **2.6.1. Conversion as the Disruption of Identity**

This approach originates from the notion that our personal histories are constantly remade under the influence of interaction within shared system of social meanings. He distinguishes between two kinds of personal transformation: alternation and conversion. Alternation is simple membership or affiliation. It is easily accomplished changes of life, which do not involve a radical change in universe of discourse. Conversion involves the complete disruption of an older identity, in which converts strive to make their new identity central to all interactions. It is the adoption of all-encompassing identity, which rests on a change from one universe of discourse to another (Travisano, 1970: 594 in Gooren 2010). According to Gooren (2010:24), the approach summarizes two factors of conversion: individual choice strongly shaped by personality, as a primary factor and the influence of social networks as secondary factor. Even though its conceptualization is quite individualistic, the approach provides a useful way to define the identity change that is crucial to conversion, but it does not address the causes of this change.

### **2.6.2. Active Conversions by Religious Seekers**

The sociologist L. Straus’s (1976, 1979) approach to conversion focuses on individual action: how a person comes to be a seeker and then how the seeker goes about finding a more adequate world of everyday life. The approach is known as ‘brainwashing model’. It describes the convert as driven into the arms of a group that influences him or her to exact behavioral commitment to its belief system and institutional structure (Gooren, 2010:25).

Straus outlines four distinctive patterns of religious seekers. The first pattern is described as pre-affiliation. The converts actively find indications through social networks and mass media. After they identify their nature of search, they contact with certain religious groups as vehicle of

individual alteration. The second prototype is affiliation, step at which the converts learn the appropriate language and set interpretation systems. Thirdly, the bridge action, conversion takes place. The final product is confession; where the convert become core member or sometimes becomes an agent of the group seeking new converts (*Ibid*).

### **2.6.3. A Socialization and Social Networks Approach**

Greil, Arthur (1977:120) was able to answer the question why certain people become religious seekers, by attempting to combine socialization with a social networks approach. He argued, “*Since man is a meaning-seeking creature, those whose identities have been spoiled become ‘seekers’ who search for a perspective to restore meaning*” (Greil, 1977:127). Driving the concept, spoiled identity is happened under the influence of significant others through social networks. This takes place when that perspective is perceived as not dealing with the problems that the individual encounters in everyday life. This leads to a dissatisfaction and occurs especially in times of ‘rapid social change’. An individual in a condition of social tension will be attracted to those movement perspectives whose rational style is compatible with the cognitive style of the social group in question (Greil, 1977: 124. The Greil’s main contribution is in conceptualizing and modeling the importance of religious socialization in the conversion process and in linking it to spoiled identity and seekers ship (Gooren, 2010:27). In this approach, conceptualization of the individual would seem to determine the importance of the factors in conversion. Moreover, the model does not deal with the influence of stages in the life cycle such as adolescence, which harshly limits the scope of the model (*Ibid*).

### **2.6.4. Conversion and Commitment as Specific Types of Socialization**

Long and Hadden (1983) remind that all conversion models emphasize on two central aspects of socialization process: brainwashing model and drift model. The first model explains the religious group work hard to mold new members and the second model shows new members’ journey toward affiliation with the group (Long and Hadden, 1983:2, cited in Gooren: 2010).

By looking at the cultural and social organizational aspects of membership and analyzing the sorts of activities of the participants, the authors define socialization as the social process of creating and incorporating new members of a group from nonmembers, carried out by members. Three activities constitute the tools for religious organizations to operate. These are

incorporating, creating and shaping activities. Incorporating actions include engaging novices, certification and placing novices in certain church positions. Creating activities include displaying the requisites of membership for novices and shaping novices by the application of sanctions. They conclude that following beginners' requisites for membership as showed by members; core members shape novices by applying sanctions; and the various forms of recruiting, certification and placing (*Ibid*).

By distinguishing and analyzing various types of creating and incorporating activities, the approach allows an integration of the more psychological brainwashing model and the sociological motivational model. Even though, Bromley and Shupe (1979) stress that recruitment precedes belief and commitment, they did not address the original motivation for conversion; thus, it is impossible to identify the factors that cause religious change (Gooren, 2010:29-30).

#### **2.6.5. The Convert Role within a Specific Universe of Discourse**

Rejecting older models because they lack empirical evidences, Snow and Machalek (1984) briefly assess six causes of conversion. They point out that the term 'religious seekers' does not explain much; because the question remains how people become seekers. Though they recognize important situational factors that induce tension, these are difficult to investigate empirically. The most important factors in conversion are the social influences: social networks of family and friends, affective and intensive interaction, and role learning (Gooren, 2010:30).

The authors discuss four key properties to identify a convert whose universe of discourse has changed. These are biographical reconstruction, adoption of a master attribution scheme, suspension of analogical reasoning, and embracement of a master role or the convert role. On the first property, defining conversion as a complete division is established in the twinkling of an eye between the old life and the new. They argued that some aspects of the past are abandoned, others are redefined and some put together in ways previously inconceivable. The second key property, the adoption of a master attribution scheme, since personal transformation is the goal of most religious groups, moving a shift from an external to an internal locus of control seems to be a necessary step in conversion to such groups. The third characteristic of the convert as a social type is tendency to avoid analogical metaphors and preference of iconic metaphors like 'God is love' or describing themselves as "born again", which can establish the uniqueness of the group

and its world view. The fourth indicator of conversion is the embracement of a master (that is, convert) role, discernable in both the behavior and the rhetoric of converts, which gives rise to the inferior identity that flows from the master role of the convert (*Ibid*). They reject common conceptions of conversion, especially, demonstration events like giving testimony, and group membership or participation. They never specify the stages of the life cycle of the convert (Gooren, 2010:31).

### **2.6.6. Holistic Approach**

As will be explained in the following section under ‘theoretical formwork’ of this paper, Rambo’s holistic theory rejects other universalistic approaches, he sees conversion as a unique process through time, contextual, and influenced by multiple, interactive, and cumulative factors. Rambo identified four components ‘cultural, social, personal and religious systems,’ that have varying weight in each particular conversion (Gooren, 2010:38).

The need to employ this model in this study is essential, because all conversion approaches clearly suffered from disciplinary biases. Psychologists focus on personality and crisis, sociologists stress social networks and institutional factors and anthropologists explore social and cultural factors. However, Rambo attempted to combine approaches from various scientific disciplines (Gooren, 2010:41). The detail about the holistic approach would be explained in the following section.

## **2.7. Theoretical Frame works**

### **2.7.1. The Stage Model Theory**

Rambo coined stage model theory in the 1990s. He provides a holistic and an interdisciplinary model of open-ended stages that combines insights from psychology, sociology, anthropology and theology. He argued that every theory/model offered by various disciplines must understand the metaphors and images of the expected transformation and describe the methods used by the given religious community to recognize its goals (Rambo, R. Lewis, 1999:37). The proponent used the assumption that converting is a process; a stage model is useful in portraying phases of a process that takes place over time and useful as a map of the features of change over time (Rambo, 1999:23). Accordingly, they propose seven stages in this model.

**Context:** - The context is dynamic and energetic force grounds, the setting in which converting takes place. Here, context is not a stage but is the total environment of religious change. The context consists of three interconnected spheres. The macro context includes such large-scale domains as political systems, religious organizations, multinational corporations, relevant ecological considerations and economic systems. The micro context focuses upon the more personal world of the individual, such as family and friends, occupation, and other aspects of a person's life, which have a direct impact on the person's thoughts, feelings and actions. Finally, the meso context includes those aspects of the context, which mediate between the macro contexts and micro contexts, such as local government, regional politics and economics, and local religious institutions (Rambo and Charles, 1999:24-25). In this research, I examined the general contextual background that forced the *Sayyoo* conversion. I looked at how the then *Sayyoo* political system, religious institutions, economic factors and environmental considerations contributed to the conversion of the *Sayyoo* Oromo.

**Crisis:** - This stage is catalyst for change and it focuses on the means that initiate for the religious change. The catalyst for religious change includes both internal and external forces. Externally, there may be contacts with outsiders; missionaries, colonial forces; internally, political crisis, poor economic life, mystical experiences, events like disease, and lack of infrastructures. At this stage, the intensity (degree of severity), duration (length of time), scope (degree of pervasiveness), and source (internal/external) of the crisis are crucial features to be considered (Rambo and Charles, 1999:25-27). In relation to my research topic, I analyzed catalytic factors that began conversion of the *Sayyoo*. I considered how the external factors such as the *Sayyoo* contacts with missionaries, Menilik's soldiers and internal factors such as political crisis, poor economic status, and the event of influenza epidemic initiated the *Sayyoo* to be converted.

**Quest:** - The quest stage is a stage at which, the people start searching for salvation. It includes different ways in which people respond to crises and or the way in which people orient themselves to spiritual life. The response style (actively or passively), structural availability (accessibility of the quest), and motivational patterns (emotional, intellectual and religious features) needed to analyze at this stage. This stage is based on the assumption that, people seek to maximize meaning and purpose in life. People like to fill the void and enrich life. Other

motivations like the desire to satisfaction and avoid pain, increase self-esteem, establish and preserve relationships, obtain power, or experience transcendence or a combination of these motives may motivate an individual or group to seek religious change (Rambo and Charles, 1999:27- 28). Regarding to this study, I explored how the *Sayyoo* were inspired to escape from the crisis and converted to Protestantism as better option. I also looked at the way they responded –passively or actively to the missionaries’ demand. In addition, I have examined the reasons behind the response style of the *Sayyoo* conversion to Protestantism.

**Encounter:** - The encounter stage is engaging new options and it describes the contact between the potential convert and the advocate. This initial contact can cause crisis, look for new solutions, hurried the converting process. The encounters or the advocates, the potential converts, and the setting of the encounter are three major components. In relating to the religious advocate, one should understand whether conversion is their central mission, whom they want to convert (individuals or mass), and their strategies of conversion (it includes meeting the potential convert publicly or privately, personally or impersonally). The second feature to consider at this stage is what he or she perceives as the benefits of the conversion for the potential convert, which may vary according to the individual needs. Benefits provided because of conversion may be a system of meaning, emotional gratification and techniques for living, leadership and power. Finally, the setting of the encounter provides the background for conversion. Religious group members encounter individuals in a public setting, gather at public locations and distribute literature, use of huge public gatherings, private one-on-one encounters and personal intimacy that enables the conversion process (Rambo, 1999:28-29). At this stage, I investigated the ways by which the *Sayyoo* encountered the missionaries and the benefits they gained by the virtue of the encounter.

**Interaction:** - interaction is a stage at which the converts create a new social identity. Rambo (1999:29) explained that, after the individual or the group meets the religious group, the interaction intensifies and new identities created. Then the converting person or group learns more about the teachings, lifestyle and expectations of the group, and is required to begin making a decision for devotion.

The converting person or group immersed into the new religious group by four features: relationships, ritual, rhetoric and roles (*Ibid*). First, the relationship serves as networks of

transformation. It is a way by which they learn more about the new religion. The closer the relationship between the advocate and potential convert the greater the likelihood for creating new identity. Second, participation in ritual practices enables the converts to experience the religion. At this level, they started to participate in different activities: baptism, singing in church choir, reading of Bible, and prayer, participating in communion, contributing money and other offerings for church. These actions combine the converts and group, which inspire sense of belonging. Third, the converting person begins to employ the specific rhetoric of the religious group; at this level, they become priest, pastor, known singer, church leader and the like. Finally, converting persons learn the expected roles and conduct required before as a Christian. Changes will encompass different levels of the personality: self-behavior, values and attitudes (Rambo, 1999:29-31). Regarding to this research, even though the *Sayyoo* are still aware of their ethnic identity, I investigated how they created new social identity by the virtue of conversion to Protestantism.

**Commitment:** - At this stage, the person, or the group is fully Christian and consolidates new spiritual orientations as well as expected to hold some sort of public demonstrations. Common methods for publicly displaying are personal testimony, a narrative of the convert's life before and after conversion. For example, a deep sense of sin, crisis and surrender to Christ, are stories marked frequently in Evangelical Christian testimonies. Testimonies, integrating the convert's and religious community's narratives, serve to reconstruct biographical information. It is supposed to help strengthen the believers' faith and invite other non-Christian people to accept the religion. These kinds of conversion narratives, especially, very important personalities like athletes, politicians and musicians can be published to reach a wider audience. Thereby solidifying their commitment in the public arena, the stories published in the popular press in the form of magazine and newspaper articles, books and testimonial tracts (Rambo and Charles, 1999:31-32).

**Consequences:** - this stage concerned with assessing the effects of converting. The nature and extent of conversion depend in part on how many aspects of the convert's life are affected and how comprehensive these changes are. Therefore, assessment of conversion process is a complicated manner.

Many scholars believe that conversion is an ongoing process of transformation and change is crucial in the long process, because, converts change aspects of their life according to the prescriptions and proscriptions of specific religious communities. The individual and mass religious change can stimulate profound changes within social and political arenas and deeply affect the social, economic and political life ways of a nation. Thus, should be multidimensional while assessing the consequences of the change; the dimensions include affective, intellectual, ethical, religious, and social or political spheres. They should be aware of their own values and the criteria from their particular scholarly discipline.

In this regard, I have assessed and examined the profound cultural changes brought by the mass conversion of *Sayyoo* and the expansion of Protestantism in the area. Aspects of indigenous Oromo cultures that were changed because of the expansion of Protestantism and mass conversion have discovered the changed ways of life of the people.

I employed the model for accurate analysis of how Protestantism was expanded among the *Sayyoo* Oromo associating it with conversion of the people. The analysis of the people's conversion to Protestantism helps us to understand how the religion was expanded there. I believe that the stage model can serve as a framework in which the nature of the converting processes the *Sayyoo* Oromo can be seen more adequately. Therefore, the model is more elaborated in the succeeding section for better understanding.

### **2.7.2. Everyday Religion**

According to Debevec, Liza and Schielke, Samuli (2012:1), a key question for the anthropological study of religion has been how to explain the complex duality of religion as an everyday practice and a normative doctrine, the question concerning the relationship of grand schemes and ordinary life. In other words, the way to understand the tension between how the institutional church and its doctrines interrelated to the packages of beliefs pulled together by ordinary members and vice versa. Even though, many scholars have attempted to answer the question, however, the issue was waiting for other ways of thinking. As a result, scholars of religion began searching for new ways to think about religion in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they come up with the idea of 'Lived Religion' or 'Religion and Everyday Life' (Neitz, Jo Mary 2011:45).

The concept of every day religion perceives ‘the daily practice of religion as the starting point, looks at the actual lived experiences and its significance for the people involved’. The idea suggests the indefinable nature of religion as part of a complex ordinary life can be better understood through the notion of the everyday (Debevic and Schielke, 2012:3). Everyday religion is “constituted by the practices people use to remember, share, enact, create and combine the stories out of which they live. It comes to being through the ordinary practice people use to transform these meaningful interpretations into everyday action” (McGuire, B. Meredith, 2008: 98). In short, it focuses on see the ways in which contemporary religions, by refusing to be limited to formal religious institutions, penetrate everyday life (Ammerman, Nancy, 2007: v). Therefore, in the context of this thesis, the concept of everyday religion is used to understand the role of religion in the changed daily life of the *Sayyoo* Oromo from the perspective of socio-cultural activities.

### **2.7.3. The Holist Theology**

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus had developed the concept of holistic theology as ‘an effort in rediscovering total human life’ in the 1975 (Gudina Tumsa, 2008:70). Gudina Tumsa<sup>13</sup> had developed the concept of holistic theology offers a response to the question of identity that was occupying the minds of many people including theologians and church leaders in the time of the 1974 Ethiopian revolution. In fact, church officers made the church actions and decisions; but Gudina was the chief intellectual force behind those decisions and actions (Eskiel Gebissa 2014: 40ff). Gudina writes, “Contextual theology is making the message of the Gospel of the risen Lord meaningful and relevant to our life situation, economic life, political life and social life as whole. In our case theology must grow out of the concrete daily experiences, from our dealing with ordinary affairs of life as we experience them in our situation, in our cultural setting, in our economic life, in our political experience and in our social practice” (Gudina, 2008:69).

According to Eskiel (2014:32), Gudina’s holistic theology was informed and shaped by his understandings of the theology of Christian realism of Niebuhr, Reinhold that dominated theological debates earlier in the 1960s. Niebuhr, Reinhold was an American Protestant pastor, an outstanding theologian and social activist of the twentieth century (McClay, 2002, cited in

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<sup>13</sup> Gudina Tumsa is the former general secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, who was martyred in 1979. For brief life history and works of Gudina Tumsa, see Eskeil Gebissa (2014:29-58).

Eskiel, 2014). Christian realism is a theology that ‘seeks to bridge the gap between the Biblical vision of God’s Reign and the realities of modern society’ (Eskiel, 2014: 34). However, Gudina’s theological inspiration is not exclusively the Niebuhr’s Christian realism (*Ibid*). Gudina’s holistic theology is an attempt to deal with the human social conditions politics, economy and other aspects social and cultural life. For instance, in his ‘Pastoral Letter’<sup>14</sup> he wrote in the time of Ethiopian revolution, he wrote, “Ethiopia finds itself in transition. The old regime has gone. Ethiopian socialism has been proclaimed. New economic policy have been announced, hopes and expectations have been awakened. However, as the structures of the old society have not been fully replaced, confusion, uncertainty and hesitation are widespread” (Gudina, 1975: 81).

Generally, Gudina’s holistic theology claims that church and church leaders should be adaptive to the constantly changing situations of human life. In his known document, “*On the Interrelation between Proclamation of Gospel and Human Development*,” Gudina respond to the dilemma presented by the development bias of western church. The response was based on the scholarly ‘analysis of local, continental and global events and processes’ (Eskiel, 2014:45). The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus in the 1960s was growing aimed numerous economic, political, cultural and theological changes were happening nationally and internationally. These problems were not technical, which could be solved by the existing know-how; rather they were adaptive challenges required new ways of thinking and working, and required significant shifts in habits, status role without which people cannot make the adaptive bound necessarily to flourish in a new setting. The church leaders and Gudina were succeeded in demonstrating competent leadership in those chaotic times (Eskiel, 2014:48).

On the other hand, Benti (1999) argues that lack of enculturation is one of the basic challenges that the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus is experiencing currently. It is an internal and external challenge for her future service among the Oromo people. Because of the idea of cultural revitalization, the educated Oromos are organizing traditional festivals and calling many people to participate in the traditional practices. Some followers of traditional religion requested the church for membership without abandoning their cultural practices. However, the church is in a dilemma because she is not ready to answer to such challenges (Benti, 1999: 95).

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<sup>14</sup> “Some people described this letter as a highly political document” (Hoffman, 2003, cited in Eskiel, 2014:37).

Thus, from the two ideas one can simply observe there is a gap between the promises of the holistic theology and the real life situation of the people. However, through this research, I am not promising to analyze the gap; theologians should conduct researches to root the critical analyses and studies of the gap within its socio-political and cultural context. Rather my intention is to address the Sayyoo's culture change and to explain how some aspects of traditions are able to co-exist with Protestantism in the everyday life of the people.

In the context of this paper, by integrating the three concepts I have made the theoretical framework in which the study is facilitated. The first concept, stage model theory is used to analyze how Protestantism was expanded or how the people were converted to the religion and its consequences on the traditional culture. The second notion, everyday religion functioned to examine how the people of *Sayyoo* perceived the religion and how the religion influences their daily life. The third concept, holistic theology helped me to conceptualize how some remnant components of the Oromo traditional culture are combined with church teachings and co-exists in everyday life of the 'Christian society' of *Sayyoo*.

Generally, the review of relevant anthropological literature could make possible understand some major points on the origin and expansion of Protestantism, different approaches to conversion, the relationship between religion, culture and everyday life. Shenk (1999) provides the historical overview of the origin of the families of Christianity: Orthodox Christianity, Catholic Christianity and Protestant Christianity (Shenk, 1999:262). Both Eller's (2009) and Shenk's (1999) idea on the causes and processes of the 16<sup>th</sup> century protestant reformation support each other. Bryant (1999:178) points out that the beginning of the missionary activities in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and expansion of Protestantism throughout the world, which brought the multiplication of denominations or different faith families. Morris (2006:146) further indicates that the recent times expansion of Protestantism has connection with the renaissance of charismatic and Pentecostalism forms of Christianity. Thus, all these scholars idea about the protestant reformation and its expansion in the world support one another and they are useful to picture out the historical events happened the religion.

However, both Bryant's (1999) and Eller's (2009) idea that explain the missionaries characteristics during their expansion to Asia and Africa is not fairly applicable in the case of the

*Sayyoo* Oromo. Both scholars argue that the missionaries have often linked imperial ambitions and introduced foreign beliefs into the society by ridiculing, condemning or even punishing the custodians of traditions. As we will see in chapter five, missionaries in Qellem did not introduce Protestantism by ridiculing, condemning or punishing the custodians of the traditions of the *Sayyoo*. Even, these activities are incompatible with what they had actually done in Qellem, such as medical and school services that were matching with their religious teachings. They did neither used to control the *Sayyoo*'s resources nor did they use physical punishment. The missionaries never imposed Western values and practices in the areas of kinship, gender roles, language on the *Sayyoo*. However, in some cases, Eller's idea seems appropriate. For instance, the missionaries in Qellem destroyed some of the *Sayyoo*'s religious material cultures and forbade polygamy. In fact, Eller's argument could be completely true for the then Orthodox Church missionaries in Qellem.

Huber's (2010:417) idea could fit the case of Protestantism in Qellem, because the arrival Protestantism has brought multidimensional changes among the *Sayyoo*. Of course, missionaries in Qellem appeared as agents of social and cultural change, they preached by criticizing the *Sayyoo* local culture and encouraged broad changes in the people's belief systems and practices. In relation to this, review of the works of scholars such as Benti Ujulu (1999), Daniel Ayana (19984), Fite Birri (2012) and Mitiku Tucho (1999) laid a useful ground stone on the arrival of Protestantism in Qellem.

Regarding to conversion, Gooren's (2010:1) definition of conversion that says "a comprehensive personal change of religious worldview and identity" could raise another question; how could conversion change one's own identity. Bryant's (1999:12-16) definition seems appropriate to analyze the conversion of the *Sayyoo* to Protestantism. He defined conversion in the broad idea of religious change, joining another religious community, and converting from one religious tradition to another. Thus, the second broader definition is fitting initial point to elaborate the *Sayyoo*'s conversion to Protestantism.

Regarding to the different conversion approaches examined under this chapter, Rambo's (1990) stage model theory is appeared to be the most applicable than others. Other approaches are found to be suffered from disciplinary biases. Psychologists such as Travisano (1970), Snow (1084)

and Machalek (1984) focus on personality and crisis. Their conceptualizations are quite individualistic and they give more attention to ‘identity change’ as a crucial to conversion. Sociologists such as Roger Straus’s (1976, 1979), Greil Arthur (1977) and Long and Hadden (1983) stress social networks and institutional factors. However, Rambo’s (1993, 1999) holistic approach that combines approaches from various scientific disciplines. It helps to examine the *Sayyoo*’s conversion as a unique process through time, in its own context, with its multiple, interactive, and cumulative influential factors.

Regarding the relationship between culture and religion, Eller (2009:272) argues that culture is composed of everyday human practices with constant complicated and continuous changes. Huber (1996, 2010) argues that Christianity has highly influenced the social and cultural lives of many societies. These scholars’ ideas the dynamic characteristics of culture and the influences of Christianity on cultural life of many people support each other. Thus, it could capture the dynamic and multidimensional culture change that Protestantism brought in Qellem. As Huber (1996) clearly point out, the expansion of Protestantism brought the reformulation of the *Sayyoo* social relations, cultural meanings and personal experience. Thus, the reformulation intermixed Protestantism and traditions that cannot be identified from each other. Eller (2007:148) argues this fact; religion and other ways of life are interrelated to one another. Accordingly, among the *Sayyoo* individual activities, family life, social interactions, ethics, morality, elements of traditions and religious life are all dimensions of integrated system. These ideas could be summarized under Geertz’s (1993) who argues religion as a cultural system. The concept of everyday religion is helpful to understand the intersection of Protestantism in the everyday life of the *Sayyoo* as one component of their contemporary cultural systems. The ways in which such scholars as Debevec and Schielke (2012), Neitz (2011), McGuire (2008) and Ammerman (2007) looked at religion in people’s everyday life is highly significant to map out the role of Protestantism in the contemporary everyday life of the *Sayyoo*.

## CHAPTER THREE

### DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

#### 3.1. Geographical Location

The *Sayyoo* Oromo live in Qellem Wallaga zone, which is one of the 18 zones of Oromiya. It borders Gambella regional state in the west, West Wollega zone in the east, Beneshangul Gumuz regional state in the north and Illu Abbaa Booraa zone in the south. The capital of the zone is Dembi Dollo, which is 652 km far from Addis Ababa. According to available oral tradition, Dembi Dollo got its name before 1928 from two words Dembi and Dollo. Dembi is a name of a perennial tree. This tree was planted on the burial ground of a person called Dollo. Dollo was a famous person in the area<sup>15</sup>.

According to CSA (2000), the population size of the Zone is 388,884, out of which only about 5 percent of the people were urban dwellers. The sex combination of the population is 55% male, 45% female; their age classification shows 28% below twelve years, 38% thirteen to forty-five, 34% were forty-six and above. However, there is no genuine data that shows the ethnic composition of the population in number.

According to government communication affairs office of the zone, the total area of Qellem Wollega is 978,845 hectare, from which agricultural products cover 588,959 hectares of land, 126,594 hectares is forest area and water bodies cover 204,560.81 hectare. The remaining hectares, 58,731.19 (6.1%) is covered by towns and residence areas of the people. The zone's landscape consists of both highland and lowland areas. The climatic conditions also differ accordingly. Climatically, it is classified into high land (*baddaa* 16.5%), semi-high land (*baddadaree* 53.3 %), and low land (*gammoojjii* 30.2 %) zones. Qellem Wollega with semi highland and low land climatic condition has annual rainfall of 1000-2400 ml. The zone has four separate annual seasons' namely spring, winter & summer in which it gets more than five months rainfall coverage in a year. The soil types of Qellem Wollega were loom soil, clay soil & sand soil. The texture and structure of its soil is at most in good conditions, because of the existences of naturally decomposed material like moister and green manure.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Qellem Wollega zone, Government Communication affairs office.

<sup>16</sup> Data from written document: government communication affairs office of the zone.

### **3.2. The Historical, Political and Socio-Economic Background of the Sayyoo Oromo**

The need to look back at the historical background of the *Sayyoo Oromo* is very crucial. It has dual purpose. On the one hand, it explains the current general background information on the life of the contemporary *Sayyoo*. On the other hand, it gives the overall information about the *Sayyoo Oromo* before the arrival of Christianity and the incorporation of the area into the modern Ethiopian empire. Both mark the multidimensional changes that have occurred in the society.

Reconstructing the past life of the society helps for better understanding of the main corners of changes that occurred among the society. Even though, the particular aim of the paper is to describe the role of expansion of Protestantism in changing the indigenous culture of the *Sayyoo*, the reconstruction provides the outline to answer various relevant questions. For instance, what were the changed traditions of the Oromo; factors that caused the changes, what roles did Protestantism play in the changes, how the changes took place and what the changed life of the society looks like.

Hence, reconstructing the traditional Oromo culture needs revising the historical, cultural, political, philosophical, religious, linguistic and geographical foundations of the society (Asafa Jalata, 2012:130). Though it is difficult to fully achieve it, thus, the aims of this part are to glance at some of the religious, political, social and historical developments of the *Sayyoo Oromo* to support the whole spirit of the paper.

#### **3.2.1. The Oromo of Qellem**

The residents of Qellem belong to Mecha Oromo groups, who occupy the territory from today's West Shewa Zone in the east to Qellem Wollega Zone in the west. Mecha is further divided into *Daadhii*, *Jaawwii* and *Tum'e* clans. Particularly, the people in Qellem are descents of *Daadhii*. *Daadhii* is further divided into *Sayyoo* and *Leeqaa* sub-clans. The majority of the people in Qellem Wollega trace their descendents from *Sayyoo*, who has six *balbala* (lineage). For this reason, the people of the area are known as the *Jahan Sayyoo* (the six sons of *Sayyoo*). They are *Daallee*, *Laaloo*, *Garjeedaa*, *Alakuu*, *Galaan* and *Awuu* (Fixe Birri, 2012:19, Negaso Gidada, 2001:3).

According to my key informants, the people have never wanted to call themselves as Oromo of Qellem. They prefer to be called the *Sayyoo* Oromo, because Qellem is a name of a place, whereas *Sayyoo* is the name of their sub-clan. The name Qellem was an imposition made by Jote Tullu, one of the local rulers, during Menilik's regime. The name never stood to describe the *Sayyoo* before that. Qellem was a small place where Jote lived during his rule<sup>17</sup>. Hence, following the preference of the people, I chose to use the 'Sayyoo Oromo' instead of 'the Oromo of Qellem, because the people are the *Sayyoo* Oromo who live in Qellem<sup>18</sup>.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that only the *Sayyoo* Oromo inhabits the current Qellem Wollega. The data from the zone administration shows that because of resettlement schemes in Ethiopia, and other socio-economic factors, there have been flows of population to the area. In 2004 and 2005 Oromo groups, the *Ittuu* and *Humbannaa* from eastern and western Hararghe were resettled in Qellem. However, the resettlers from Wallo that were resettled in 1984 remarkably increased the population diversity of Qellem. There are also continuous voluntary migrants to the area. Hence, in addition to the Oromo, there are another four ethnic groups in the area: *Amhara*, *Guraghe*, the *Majangir* and the *Tigrian*<sup>19</sup>.

Looking back to the history of the *Sayyoo* is fundamental, as it shows the ways of their life that were changed, because of the arrival of modern religions and other factors. It is relevant to this research since the expansion of Protestantism in *Sayyoo* is interrelated with various historical events of the people.

### **3.2.2. The Gadaa System**

The socio-economic, political and religious lives of the Oromo were highly intertwined, which would be incomplete without investigating the *Gadaa* system. This is the reason why reconstructing and understanding the life requires understanding the essence of *Gadaa* itself (Dereje Hinaw, 2012: 82). Though the term *gadaa* has different contextual meanings, as a system it is an organization, which directs every aspect of the Oromo life: politics, economics, social, religious and cultural activities. Asmarom Legesse (2000:30) explains *Gadaa* system as a variety of democratic political organization that the Oromo have investigated and practiced at

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Mitiku Tucho on Wednesday, April 09, 2014, Dembi Dollo.

<sup>18</sup> Other scholars also used the *Sayyoo* Oromo to describe the people of Qellem Wollega. See Nagaso Gidada (2001).

<sup>19</sup> Qellem Wallaga zone, Government Communication affairs office.

least for the last five hundred years. It is a system of sections of generation (*gadaa* classes) that succeed each other every eight years in assuming political, military, judicial, legislative and ritual responsibilities (Asmarom 2006:30-31). Asafa (2012: 131) summarizes Asmarom's (2006) definition of *gadaa* as three interrelated meanings: 'a grade during which a class of people assumes politico-ritual leadership, a period of eight years during which elected officials take power from the previous ones, and democratic institution of Oromo people'.

The history of the *gadaa* in the *Sayyoo* Oromo traces back to the sixteenth century Oromo expansion. Makko Bili headed the expansion towards the western part of Oromia<sup>20</sup>. He amended law that is known as '*Seera Makkoo*' meaning 'laws of Makko' around the year 1589 (Asmarom, 2000:241). The laws of Mako played a significant role in the mass movement. Dejene Gemechu (1999:26) explained that Makko declared laws and established the *gadaa* centre for the Mecha Oromo group at Oda Bisil. Negaso (2001:31) also states that Mako was the *Abbaa Bokkuu* of all the mecha Oromo Group. It was located in the upper Gibe basin between Gedo, Bilo and Gibe River. Even though, the area was used as a strategic place for further expansion to the areas they finally dominated, the place no longer served as a common *gadaa* center for the group. Instead, different local *bokkuu* centers were established with the advance expansion of the Mecha group. Nevertheless, this does not mean that they established a unique system of governance, "...the central principles of the system remained intact" (Asafa 2012: 134). Makko's laws served as the foundation of the different *gadaa* centers for the mecha Oromo group. Asmarom (2000:209) explained "...in some parts of the Oromo country the tradition of great lawmakers<sup>21</sup> who are believed to have formulated some of the laws that served as the guidance of moiety systems."

According to my informants, the laws were derived from the basic fundamentals of Oromo worldviews and the people understood the laws orally. Therefore, the life and works of the people of *Sayyoo* also was generally guided based on the laws of Makko. Until the collapse of

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Tesfaye Megersa, Mon., April. 07, 2014, Dembi Dollo.

<sup>21</sup> Makko Bili of Mecha was of the two well-known great lawmakers of Oromo with Daawwee Gobboo of the Borana. Makko who lived in the second half of the sixteenth century played a role as model for the conduct of future legislators. These men were who single handedly made up laws and handed them down to the people, as Moses is supposed to have done when he descended from the mountain with his tablets after his encounter with God. The legendary Oromo lawmakers are not bearded old patriarchs with divine inspiration, but gifted parliamentarians known for their wisdom and /or eloquence. They may also be very influential men who are neither wise nor eloquent but bring about change by the sheer force of their personality." (See: Asmerom, 2006:209). Laws they made could have been accepted or rejected and were recognized by the assembly.

the *gadaa* system, *tumaa Makko* (Makko's law) was a source of essential cultural principles by which each activities of the society were governed<sup>22</sup>.

Among the *Sayyoo* Oromo, there are some evidences that show the *Sayyoo* were practicing *gadaa* system. Asmarom (2006) states that the great law maker of Mecha, Makko Bili have re-established the system of ten *gadaa* classes, the eight years duration of term in office, the forty years generation intervals and rules governing the Borana-Gabaro<sup>23</sup> relationships (2006:222). In this regard, Negaso (2001) states that Makko Bili was given the role of an instructor; he was said to be the *Abbaa Bokkuu* (father of the scepter) and some argued he was *Abbaa Duulaa* (war leader), further some regarded Makko as the founder of the Mecha *Gadaa* system (Negaso, 2001:32). It should be stress that Makko Bili did not spontaneously make the law for the Mecha; he re-proclaimed what his predecessors had formulated (*Ibid*). Even though, it seems to have been forgotten, my informants are aware that the *Sayyoo* Oromo was ruled by the system for the long time until it was collapsed in last two decades of 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to my key informants, the place for *Jila gadaa* i.e. centre of the *gadaa* was located in *Yamaalogii Walal* on mount *Walal*, which is still known as *bakka tumaa seera jahan sayyoo* meaning 'the place of the six Sayyoo assembly'<sup>24</sup>. This could be one evidence that justifies the *Sayyoo* was ruled by the Oromo indigenous political institution, *gadaa* system before the incorporation to the modern Ethiopian empire.

The informants further added some of the processes of '*jila*', (*gadaa* ritual) of the *Sayyoo*. '*Abbaa bokkuu*, head of the *gadaa* classes had gathered there at the end of every eight years to declare new laws and to amend the old laws. The law includes and concerns all corners of the people's life. Everything has laws; there was *seera uumaa* (laws of creator), and *seera namaa* (laws of human beings). Gemetchu Megerssa (1993: 20-23), in his discussion of knowledge and identity, classified the Oromo knowledge of society and the world in to two: customary knowledge known as *beekumsa aadaa*, and knowledge of laws known as *beekumsa seeraa*. This knowledge helps them understand their cultural identity, relation to nature and existence of powerful force that regulates the connection between nature and society. The laws are further

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Tesfaye Megersa, Mon, April 07, 2014, Dembi Dollo.

<sup>23</sup> Borana-Gabaro is the two halves of the Mecha dual organizations. The two halves are said to be senior and junior. Borana is senior and Gabaro is junior, because the latter involved its position as a component of the dual organization during the great expansion. See Asmarom (2006:140).

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Tesfaye Megersa, Monday, April 07, 2014, Dembi Dollo.

subdivided into *seera Waaqa* (the laws of God), and *seera namaa* (the laws of human beings). The laws of God are unchallengeable, and the laws of human beings can be changed through democratic means. Oromo customary knowledge is a public and common knowledge that guides and regulates the activities of members of society; some elements of this customary knowledge can develop into rules or laws depending on the interest of society.

My key informants shared similar idea and gave some features of the laws. According to them, laws of God, which regulates the relationship between God and human beings, are related to the Oromo traditional religion. It deals with religious ritual responsibilities such as *irreecha*, *yaa rabbii*, *ateetee*. Laws of human beings are associated with the issues of social life, which includes individual ethics, family and neighborhood relationships and responsibilities, respecting social orders, customs, norms and values, participating in social organizations and so on. It also regulates wise uses of natural resources that consist of taking care for communal properties, respecting the rights of animals, caring for plants and water bodies and the like<sup>25</sup>. Asmarom (2006:208) also argued that contrary to many Africans, where customary laws are taken for granted and handed down from generation to generation and rare deliberate tradition of lawmaking, in the Oromo culture laws are known as '*seera*' and customs as '*aadaa*' and they are subjected to deliberate change.

However, according to Mitiku (1999:3), some times before 1886, the system weakened and faded out through gradual process and in this year, the system is outdated for good among the *Sayyoo*. According to my informants and available secondary sources, the main reason why the *gadaa* system declined was protracted conflicts within and with neighboring people that preceded subjugation of the *Sayyoo* under Menilik<sup>26</sup>. According to Negaso (2001), the land acquisition in *Sayyoo* and maintaining its possession was the matter of conflicts from the beginning. The Mecha groups such as Sayyoo, Leeqaa and Tumme considered one another as *fira* (friends), free and *birmaduu* (equal) and cooperated in their military actions to deliver the land from the control of the *diina*<sup>27</sup> (enemy or aliens). For instance, they fought with

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Gemechu Tasesse, Monday, April 07, 2014, Dembi Dollo.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Mitiku Tucho, Wed., Apr.09, 2014, Dembi Dollo.

<sup>27</sup> The Mecha considered others (non-Oromo) whom they were not familiar with their languages as *diina*- enemies or aliens (Negaso, 2001:102).

*Shaanqillaa*<sup>28</sup> and delivered the land from their control. After they delivered the land from the control of the *diina*, the different clans of and regional groups began to fight each other. For instance, Sayyoo against Leeqaa, garjeedaa against Daallee, Daallee against Laaloo fought one another. The disputes became more violent as more individuals, lineage and clans came to the region from outside. Thus, the settlement process aggravated the conflicts and contradictions; then it was accompanied by the demarcation of boundaries between different clans and lineages, which completed in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. (Negaso, 2001:102-103, 166-177). Negaso further described the consecutive periods as follows:

*Beginning from the 1780s, individual families tried to expand their recourses, increase the number of their members and enhance their sphere of influence. Thus, those who were physically strong, experts in fighting, who had political wisdom were successful both in surviving and in expanding their power and wealth. In the period between 1780 up to 1830, an administrative and military hierarchy and enforced order were established in different areas of Sayyoo. The Sayyoo describe this period as jabana gaalamootaa fi jabana eeboo (the age of lawless and the age of the spear).*  
(Negaso, 2001:168)

These individuals were mainly the *Abbaa Duulaa*'s (war leaders) whose main responsibility was assisting the *Abbaa Bokkuu* during the time of war (Asafa, 2012:135). They stayed on their position more than allowed time and later the war leaders declared themselves as *mootii* (kings) and became clan leaders in different areas of *Sayyoo*. For example, *abeetuu Jote Tullu of Gidami*, *abeetuu Burayu Abbaa Gosaa of Awu*, *abeetuu Abbaa Dhaasaa of Galaan*, *abeetuu Gumaa Oshoo of Sadi*, *abeetuu Abbaa Gimbii of Busaasee* were local rulers of the *Sayyoo* Oromo before the Menilik conquest 1886<sup>29</sup>. However, after the year 1886, these local rulers paid tribute to the central government through Gobana, Menilik's general, and was enjoying relative autonomy up to the coming of *Dajazmach Biru Wolde Gabriel* in 1896 when *Sayyoo* lost its autonomy completely (Mitiku, 1999:3-4, Benti, 1999: 15, Negaso, 2001:168).

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<sup>28</sup> *Shaanqillaa* "was the way the Oromo traditionally referred to the Kwama, Kwegu and others non-Mao peoples" (Negaso, 2001:112ff).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

### 3.2.3. Oromo Indigenous Religion

According to Morris (2006:148), European scholars, have often despised, ridiculed, even dismissed African culture and religion. Despite the fact that they contributed significantly by providing numerous ethnographic studies, the anthropological researches over the past half a century have been as biased, got some of their social facts wrong, and mistaken interpretations. This has happened since the researchers were based on a limited understanding of local languages and deep rooted western prejudices. Morris (2006:149) suggests that the African indigenous religious practices and culture should be seen as a part of their worldview that underlines their cultural identity. He argues that their religious conceptions and practices are characterized by five elements that make it religion: a belief in god, cults associated with various divinities or nature spirits, rituals and beliefs focused around ancestral spirits, a belief in magic and the efficacy of medicines, and the fear of witchcraft (Morris, 2006:149). The Oromo, similar to other Sub-Saharan Africans, have their own traditional religion and culture. To this end, let us see, some of the Oromo religious concepts and practices such as the concept of *Waaqa* (God), *qaalluu* and *Muuda* (anointment), *ayyaana*, worshipping, and sacrificial rituals.

#### 3.2.3.1. The Concept of God

Many scholars who have studied the Oromo agreed that being one of the very ancient group of people who had their own culture and religion, the Oromo believe in a monotheistic, one-supreme deity, known as *Waaqa* or *Waaqayyoo*. *Waaqa* for the Oromo is the creator of the universe, the omniscient, the omnipresent and the omnipotent (Dejene, 1999: 44; Benti, 1999:18; Workineh Kelbessa, 2006:22, Bartels, 1983).

Benti (1999:18) explains that the Oromo have different names for God. They call it '*Waaqayyoo*' or '*Waaqa*'. They also refer to it *uumaa* with a meaning 'creator', *ulfin* that denotes the *Waaqa's* greatness and *abbaa* or father. My key informant shared the same idea and further explained that the Oromo people say *Waaqa* is holy and in olden days, they do not call *Waaqa* by name but they call him *ulfin* meaning 'honor'. They also forbid children not to mention the name of *Waaqa*<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Rev. Etafa: Tuesday, March 11, 2014, Dembi Dollo.

### 3.2.3.2. The Concept of Qaalluu in Oromo Indigenous Religion

Workineh Kelbessa (2001:27) asserts that *qaalluu* is the leader of religious rituals in Oromo traditional religion. Qaalluu could be male or female, and known as the *ayyaantu* (the spiritually gifted) for he or she has the *ayyaana* of his lineage or clan. According to him, *ayyaana abbaa* (the *ayyaana* of one's father) and *ayyaana* of the clan is more powerful. The first is called up for assisting in order to fulfill one's responsibility, kept away from evil actions (*Ibid*).

The *qaalluu* have had a moral authority and social obligation to support *gadaa* and its leaders, and to encourage pleasant and good relations based on the principles of *safuu* and *Waaqa* (Asafa, 2012:142). According to Knutson (1967:148), "Abbaa Muuda (father of the anointment) who was considered to be the prophet and spiritual leader of Oromo society headed all qaalluus. All the Oromo travel pilgrims journey to the *Abbaa Muuda* to receive his blessing and anointment to be ritual experts in their respective regions" (Knutsson, 1967: 148 cited in Asafa, 2012). As an institution, *qaalluu* being politically neutral has been committed to social justice, the laws of God and the rule of law, and fair deliberation. It also has played an important role in protecting original Oromo culture, religion, worldview and identity (Asafa, 2012:142).

### 3.2.3.3. Worshipping in Oromo Indigenous Religion

My informants explain that the Oromo people worship God both in private and being in-group<sup>31</sup>. The private prayers are frequently held in the morning and evening, asking God to protect them, their cattle, their crops and their families and maintenance of peace for the community. The following verses show individual Morning Prayer in traditional religion.

*Yaa Waaq nagaan na bulchitee galatakee*  
*Bulee nagaan na oolchi,*  
*hamaan gargar na oolchi*  
*Tolaan wal bira na oolchi*  
*Hin hatu, hin nyaadhu*  
*Kan hatu, kan nyaatu*  
*Qoma qabii narraa qabi*

*Oh God! Thank you!*  
*Protect me in peace, as you did in the night*  
*keep me away from the bad*  
*keep me close by the good*  
*I am neither cheater nor evil-eyed,*  
*The cheater and the evil-eyed*  
*Keep them away from me!*<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Tesfaye Megersa: Monday, April 07, 2014, Dembi Dollo.

<sup>32</sup> <sup>32</sup> Interview with Kena Daka on Saturday, Mar.1, 2014, Hawa Galan.

Each husband in the community has his own worship huts called ‘*galmaa*’, where he alone held a prayer whenever it is necessary. The *galmaa* is seen as a holy place devoted only for the purpose of prayer of husband excluding wife and children. In contrast to my data, Benti (1999:22) argues that *galma* is the Oromo traditional house of worship. It also a place where the followers of the traditional religion meet every Thursday and Saturday nights. In this regard, Dereje (2012:82-83) argued that the Oromo people traditionally used to worship and perform rituals under *Odaa* (sycamore tree). “*The sycamore tree of different kinds are regarded as an abode of spirit among the Oromo and used to provide the Oromo with ritual performances and praying site.*” Therefore, the issue of *galma* discussed by Benti is more related with worship of the people when they gathered at *qaalluu*’s house. Thus, it could be argued that *galma* has two types; first, *galma* is a place of worship for each individual husband and second, it is the place of worship for the whole people at *qaalluu*’s home.

The communion prayers are held on occasions and festivals like weddings, funerals, gatherings, *Hammachiisaa* (child-naming ritual), yearly festivals such as *irressaa* (thanksgiving festival), and sacrificial rituals. This kind of prayer is known as *Kadhata Huumsaa* (group prayer). They divide themselves based on *hoboo* and *cooraa* that shows seniority and junior, paired and stand at each other’s forefront<sup>33</sup>. *Hoboo* and *coora* is a concept that shows respect for one another, father-son relationship in the Mecha Oromo. Then the *hoboo* always starts and the *cooraa* follow the blessings.

### ***Hoboo***

*Kottu!*  
*Akkati dhufte nagaan biyyatti haa dhufu*  
*Hamaan biyyarraa haa ka’u*  
*Xinnaan nuuf haa guddatu*  
*Guddaan nuuf haa bulu*  
*Wal’aalaan nuuf haa beeku!*  
*Beekaan nuuf haa bulu!*  
*Kan maseene nuuf haa dhalu!*  
*Waaqni kan roobaa haa ta’u*  
*Safuun hunda keenyaaf haa ta’u*

### ***Coora***

*Dhufe!*  
*Haa dhufu*  
*Haa ka’u!*  
*Haa guddatu*  
*Haa bulu*  
*haa beeku!*  
*haa bulu!*  
*haa dhalu*  
*haa ta’u!*  
*haa ta’u!*

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Tesfaye Megersa: Monday, April 07, 2014, Dembi Dollo.

### ***The Hoboo***

*Come!*  
*May peace come to the country, as you came*  
*May the hazardous leave the country*  
*May the grown-up live long*  
*May the young grow-up*  
*May the unwise be knowledgeable*  
*May the knowledgeable live long!*  
*May the barren give birth!*  
*May God/sky give us rain!*  
*May safuu be for all of us!*

### ***The Coora***

*I am here!*  
*May it come!*  
*May it leave!*  
*may live a long life!*  
*May it grow-up*  
*May be knowledgeable!*  
*May live long!*  
*May give birth!*  
*May it be!*  
*May it be!<sup>34</sup>*

Generally, the group prayer shows that the Sayyoo people together make prayer for every communal issue during the time of *kadhata huumsaa* (group prayer) at every occasion they gathered. They ask God for peace, health, wealth, love, knowledge, long life, sustainable social norms and orders. Every ritual and festivals begins with such kind of prayer.

#### **3.2.3.4. Sacrificial Rituals**

The Oromo people have different kinds of sacrificial rituals such as *Jaarii gatuu*, *Abdaari*, and *Yaarabbii* prepared once a year as annual festivals (Benti, 1999:23). *Jaarii gatuu* is performed at the end of the rainy season believing that once the ritual is done the animals eat it and stop destroying the crops. In this ritual, the people use to cook food and throw on the garden so that the animals eat it and stop destroying the crops. *Abdaarii* is men's ritual of thanksgiving to *Waaqa* for the harvest. During this time, "men bring black sheep and then praise *Waaqa*, whereas *Yaarabbii* is Women's ritual. Women offer cooked bread from the harvest as praise to *Waaqa* and the women pray for plenty and peace" (Lambert, Bartels, 1983:347-355).

In addition to the above sacrificial rituals, Benti, (1999:24) argued that the Oromo had a concept of human sacrifice and present his justification by quoting Bartels (1983). Bartels (1983:74), using the story of an incident of a clash occurred between two lineages of *Sayyoo* Oromo (*Galaan and Awuu*) on the ownership of *Hora Gorbaa* (Mineral water used as medicine for cattle) and went to the *gadaa* judges. The judges decided that a clan who sacrifices a white bull

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with Kena Daka on Saturday, Mar.1, 2014, Hawa Galan.

would get the mineral water. At this moment, the Awu clan leader approached the judge to sacrifice himself.

The incident was noted:

*“I have something to ask you,” he said. “Korma namaamoo korma sa’atu caala?-which is greater: a human bull or a real bull?” - “A man bull is greater,” they said. “I am the bull,” the leader said. He went to the horaa, cut his throat and made his blood flow into the hora. In this way, the Hora Gorbaa passed into the ownership of the Awuu.*

(Bartels, 1983:74)

Thus, both Benti (1999) and Bartels (1983) conclude that the story implies that human sacrifice was being practiced by the Oromo people as one of sacrificial rituals practiced in Oromo traditional religion<sup>35</sup>.

Nevertheless, my data leads me to different conclusion. When I asked my informants, they did not agree on this issue, because the case does not imply about any spiritual matter, rather than material subject. They point out that it is a one-time incident, not religious tradition. Particularly, one of my key informants, Kena reorganized the context and setting in which the story took place and said:

*For sure, the Galaan and the Awu leaders had conflict on the ownership of Hora Gorbaa and went to the ‘jaarsa biyyaa’ (customary elders). However, the judges were corrupted and wanted to give the hora Gorbaa for the Galaan leader. They knew that Kalittii Lalabuu, the Awu leader had no bull at the time, but the Galaan leader had. Then the judges said, “The one who sacrifices a bull today among you will get the mineral water.” At that moment, the Awu clan leader approached the judge and said “Korma namaamoo korma sa’atu caala? Gaafa mormaa, gaafa xiiqii anuu kormaa”-which is greater: a human bull or cow bull? On such incident, when stubborn I myself am a bull. I am the bull.,” the leader said. He approached to the hora; cut his throat, and made his blood flow into the hora. Then the hora was given to the Awu clan<sup>36</sup>.*

It shows the devotion of the Awuu clan leader for the best of his society. It, by no means relates to sacrifices in the Oromo indigenous religion. Thus, my informants strongly suggested that in the Oromo indigenous religion, the concept of human sacrifices never exists.

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<sup>35</sup> Further Benti (1999:25) infers this, as the Oromo do not have a problem of understanding the death of Jesus as scarification for human kind.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Kena Daka on Saturday, Mar.1, 2014, Hawa Galan.

### 3.2.3.5. The Present Religious Institutions in Sayyoo Oromo

According to the data from Oromia Communication Affairs Department of Qellem Wollega Zone, there are one thousand and thirty seven Protestant churches, four hundred eighty mosques, three hundred twelve Orthodox Christian churches, twenty-six Catholic churches and one Jehovah Witness church in Qellem Wollega Zone. From this data, we can conclude that, there are between three and four protestant churches within one *ganda*<sup>37</sup> (village) of the zone, since the zone has two hundred ninety six *gandas*.

The data from peace affairs office of the zone shows that sometimes conflicts erupt between these religious institutions in the area. Among many causes of conflicts within the boundary of religions includes, competition over burial land, interrupting one another by using loudspeakers and other musical and electronic instruments, and misleading one another's members. Nevertheless, peaceful working relationships also prevail between the different religious institutions and followers.

### 3.2.4. Major Economic Activities

According to Tesema Ta'a (2014:145), the Oromo were quite familiar with highland environment and agricultural practices long before the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, it is essential to stress that even in the early face of the sixteen-century expansion the Oromo did not rely exclusively on animal husbandry. Therefore, the economic life of the *Sayyoo* as sub-group of the Mecha was primarily based on livestock herding and cultivation.

The primary data I gathered in this regard also support this argument. There are evidences that show cattle herding was highly practiced. For instance, there are remnants of many *huraa* and *eelaa* such as *hora Gorbaa*, *hora Qaallittii Lallaboo*, *hora Koroo*, *hora Laaloo Garee* and others that are still available in different areas of *Sayyoo* though they are not functioning. Even, at present, there are remnants of ladders made of woods, which they were using for fetching water from the wells though the wells are not functioning.

The close examination of their oral tradition could be another source of evidence that shows the pastoral life of the Oromo. The traditional attitude of the society towards domestic animals is good evidence. For instance, if any domestic animal comes to one's own kraal during the night,

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<sup>37</sup> The lowest administrative structure in the contemporary administration of Ethiopia.

it is *safuu* (moral order showing respect and distance) to chase the animal away from the kraal. The owner of the kraal is expected to care for the animal until the owner of the animal comes. This is because the coming of the animals symbolizes a destiny. There are also *faaruu loonii* (songs for cattle) that tells the relationship between the people and the cattle. The content analysis of the songs reveals that the *Sayyoo* were practicing both cattle herding and cultivation.

With little difference, the current economic structure and means of subsistence of *Sayyoo* Oromo are characterized by highly dominated agricultural production mixed with animal husbandry. The zone's landscape that consists of both highland and lowland areas and the difference in climatic conditions also helps the people to grow varieties of production. The area yields a wide range of highland crops, and crops grown in semi-arid areas. The highland areas of the zone produces, agricultural production crops such as coffee, wheat, peas, beans and animal husbandry like production cattle horses, mule and honey bees. The low land productions include crops oilseeds like *talbaa*, *nuugii* (*Guizotia abyssinica*), sorghum, maize and livestock such as goat, cattle, donkeys are well known. There are also semi-arid areas crop production like *xaafii* (*eragrostis abyssinica*), millet, maize and fruits and vegetables. Coffee and oilseeds the staple crops of the area are the major outputs of the zone to the market of the country.

### **3.2.5. Socio-cultural Life of the *Sayyoo* Oromo**

#### **3.2.5.1. The concept of *Hoboo* and *Coora***

According to the oral traditions, the concept of *Hoboo* and *Cooraa* among the Oromo of Wollega in general and the Oromo of Leeqaa and Sayyoo in particular has remarkable attention. It was used to show respect for one another in the domain of *safuu*. Asmarom (2006:229) explained similar concept in the Borana as 'the principles of alliance of alternate groups' which is based on the common African assumption that adjacent groups are adversaries and alternate groups are allies. Among the Borana, it is based on 'the arrangement of age sets or generations each group harasses its immediate juniors and is harassed by its immediate seniors'. Fathers and sons are adversaries referred to as *wallana*, grandfathers and grandsons are allies, referred to as *qadaddu* (Asmarom, 2006:229).

In Mecha, it takes somewhat different form, because they name the alternate generation *hoboo* and *cooraa* instead of naming the relationships. If the father is *hoboo* the son is *coora*, the

grandfather and son are grouped to the same category. They say “*Hoboo fi Coorri waliif safuudha*” meaning, *hoboo* and *coora* are *safuu* to each other. Asmarom also confirmed that the generations have different names show respect and avoidance toward each other –they are said to have *safuu* relationship (*Ibid*).

Among the Mecha Oromo, if two persons meet on journey, immediately after greeting they ask “*Ati hobo moo coora?*” Meaning, ‘are you *hoboo* or *coora*?’ if both are from the same category they look one another as *hiriya* or a friend, therefore, they can speak about every agendas of their interest. However, if they are from different category, their agendas of discussion will be restricted. In this case, *hoboo* is always the senior, *coora* is the junior and age does not matter here. On the trip, the *hoboo* walks before and the *coora* follow, at home, *hoboo* should have a sit before, and the *coora* should stand to welcome him. It is a relationship dominated by avoidance, joking behavior and harassment (Asmarom, 2006:229).

Asmarom (2006:229) further added the concept was used as a method of ensuring the rights of the lower groups in protecting against arbitrary power exercised by higher groups. In this regard, it keeps the rights of children from any angry, greedy or uncaring parents who might do them harm. Both grandparents and grandchildren are in a ritually sacred and are linked to each other. It can also be applicable to any hierarchical system, not simply age hierarchies.

During blessing, before starting different ceremonies and gatherings for different purposes, which may include social and religious gatherings, they divide themselves based on *hoboo* and *coora*, paired and stand at each other’s forefront. Then the *hoboo* always starts the blessings. However, at present among the Mecha Oromo the concept is no more functional and has been absolutely forgotten.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE BEGINNING AND EXPANSION OF CHRISTIANITY IN SAYYOO

#### 4.1. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church

The current major religions in the Oromo land are Islam and Christianity. Following their influential socio-political expansion movement in the area, the Oromo had contact with Islam before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Soon after, when the expansionist pressure from the Christian Ethiopia became strong, some of the Oromo groups adopted the religion as an ideology of resistance against the anticipated disintegration of their social structure and identity (Hassen, 1990, cited in Jeylan, 2004). As such it would be logical to argue that some of the other groups, particularly, the Mecha (mainly Wollega, excluding Jimma and Ilubabor), and the Tulama were forced to accept different forms of Christianity.

Accordingly, the first branch of Christianity that got in to *Sayyoo* was the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Scholars claim that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church established itself in Wollega in general during Menelik's conquest of the Oromo people. Negaso and Crummey (1972) argue that the introduction and expansion of Orthodox Christianity in Qellem was part of the incorporation of the area into the modern Ethiopian empire (1972:104). Thus, the defeat of the Oromo and the introduction of Orthodox Christianity into Wollega went hand in hand jointly (Benti, 1999:27). Aren (1978:394) also states that Orthodox Christianity was introduced to the Wollega in 1882. The first Church to be founded to the West of Wollaga was founded by a monk from Gojam in 1890 (1978:373). After the death of Moroda, the governor of Wollaga, in 1889, his son, *Dajzmach* Gebre-Egziabher or Kumsa, succeed the position, became loyal to Minelik, and enjoyed local autonomy. Thus, he began to establish Orthodox Churches in other parts of Wollaga, where he appointed his local governors and six Ethiopian Orthodox Churches had been built in Wollaga by the year 1900 (Aren 1978:394). Similarly, right away as conversion to Orthodox religion started to take place, church planting went hand in hand. The opening of Orthodox Church planted in the area of *Sayyoo* was 'Saint Mary church of *Gidaamii*' by *Dajzmach Jote Tullu*.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Tesfaye Megersa: on Monday, April 07, 2014, Dembi Dollo.

My data in this regard also fits this argument. My key informant, Mihratu Dhuguma said, “*The people of Sayyoo were converted to Orthodox Christianity by proclamation. Menilik used it as a mechanism to incorporate the Sayyoo under the Ethiopian empire.*”<sup>39</sup> In this regard, Negaso and Crummey (1972) state that the governor of Qellem, Jote proclaimed that all his subjects should come to Gidami (his administrative center, where the first Orthodox Church was planted in Qellem) to be baptized. The *Sayyoo* was converted ‘according to the 1978 famous *awaj* (proclamation) of Emperor Yohannes’ (1972:104-105). Furthermore, my key informants argue that the expansion of the religion and the conquest were interrelated and supported each other by numerous methods. These were forbidding burial land if not Orthodox Christian, occupying spiritually important places where the people celebrate traditional rituals, deceiving the local rulers and awarding them political title whenever they accept the religion and convert the society. Above all, miserably there were cases when imposing the Orthodox Christianity was accompanied by murder during the time. Benti stated, “*The Abyssinian conquerors killed those who refused to be baptized*” (Benti, 1999: 98).

Negaso and Crummey (1972) clearly pointed out two factors that were contributed to the expansion of Orthodox in Qellem. Firstly, the two interrelated Oromo traditional institutions, the *gadaa* system and the Oromo indigenous religion were already weakened to resist the introduction and expansion of Orthodox Christianity religion. Secondly, the *qaalluu* institution could not able to adequately control over the people to form the basis for common resistance to Christianity. Generally, the weakness of the traditional religion, together with conversion of the ruling class, help realize the expansion of the Orthodox religion up to 1918 the year more complex socio-economic factors were involved (1972:107-108).

#### **4.2. Protestantism**

Mitiku (1999: 5) stated that the coming of Protestantism to *Sayyoo* was accidental. It was related to a historical event, the rise of influenza epidemic. As discussed in chapter two, *Dejazmach* Birru Wolde Gabriel was governor of *Sayyoo* starting from 1906. His administrative centre was *Fiinchoo*, some forty kilometers north of *Dambi Dollo*. Following the First World War, influenza epidemic erupted in the area. The *Sayyoo* and the governor’s family and his soldiers were

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Rev. Mihratu Dhuguma and Tesfaye Megersa: on Saturday, March 15, 2014 and Monday, April 07, 2014, Dembi Dollo respectively.

affected. The governor's appeal to Addis Ababa for medical support did not bear fruit due to lack of medical professionals in the country (Mitiku, 1999: 5).

Then the desperate governor asked the British consul based in Gambella for medical help. The consulate responded soon and arranged a medical team to be sent to Qellem. The arrangement was made and sent to *Sayyoo* with the help of the United Presbyterian Church of America, which had its mission at Nasser, Sudan. The team was lead by Doctor Thomas Lambie and reached *Sayyoo* through Gambella in 1919 (*Ibid*).

After they successfully accomplished their task, when they were about to leave *Dejazmach* Birru requested them to stay in *Sayyoo*. The team showed their willingness, but on condition: permission to set up a clinic, school and missionary activity. The governor allowed them to establish all the three at Dhanqaa in 1919. This was a turning point in the history of the *Sayyoo*.

#### **4.2.1. The Expansion of Protestantism among the Sayyoo**

Several sociological and anthropological studies report evangelical Christianity as a growing force, actively increasing the number of followers in the world (Bacchiddu, Giovanna, 2007: 141) and particularly so in Africa. This subtitle is concerned with issues of 'conversion' to evangelical Protestantism in the land of the *Sayyoo* Oromo. Among the *Sayyoo* Protestantism has been realized through two interrelated dimensions: donation and conversion.

##### **4.2.1.1. Donation**

Donation played a great role both in the arrival and in expansion of Protestantism among the *Sayyoo*. The two have a hand and glove relationship, circumstance in which Protestantism was a hand in a glove with donations. At Dhanqaa, medical service that resulted in the erection of some of the first modern health institutions in Wollega started. The medical work and school services officially started in the year 1922. One hospital and five clinics in *Sayyoo* paved the way for the missionaries to begin their mission. Prayers and bible studies accompanied the medical and school services in their daily activity. A Sunday service also was held in the hospital and school. As such, evangelism became a part of medical and school services, which later on contributed to the rise of the 'Bethel Evangelical Church' in *Sayyoo* and within Ethiopia in general (Mitiku, 1999:5, Benti, 1999: 69, Daniel, 1984:88).

Daniel (1984:89) explained those who first converted to Protestantism were people with low social status: beggars, the sick, the poor who were daily laborers. Here, one could well understand the converts' low economic status forced them to follow the missionaries and to accept their objectives by becoming convinced through the donations. However, this does not mean that all the first local converts were people with low social status. Rather, according to many of my respondents, the donation especially the medical services and the school acquired the attentions of other members of the society who also have a good social status, because whoever they were, they did not have any other options to teach their children and to attend medication. Therefore, they were clearly forced to go to the station where the missionaries preach and teach the Bible. One thing among others that actually win their attentions mostly was the language in which Bible was preached. Afaan Oromo was a language of preaching with a forced translation into Amharic as the regime obligates them to do so. In fact, though the entire church members preferred the preaching in Afaan Oromo, it should be translated into Amharic language, because of the then regime's policy to do so<sup>40</sup>.

Those who taught the Bible in the hospital and school and Sunday services began to go out to the countryside for preaching gospel. Up to 1954, eighteen preaching stations were established outside of the mission compound at Dhanqaa, in different parts of *Sayyoo* (Mitiku, 1999:13-14). Daniel (1984:90) explained that it was after the Italian invention that, the first missionary church was established in the area. Nevertheless, my sources of secondary data and my informants show that it was during the Italian invasion that the first missionaries' church was established in *Sayyoo*. The first local converts established 'Dembi Dollo Bethel Evangelical Church', when Italians persecuted missionaries. Generally, the convincing pressure of donation paved the way for the growth and expansion of Protestantism among the *Sayyoo*.

#### **4.2.1.2. Conversion**

Though conversion could be seen from different angles, I looked at conversion from the point of view of people's religious change in the context of this paper. The people of *Sayyoo* were converted from traditional religion, Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism, Islam and secular life to Protestantism. For analyzing the conversion of the people of *Sayyoo*, the stage model theory

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Mitiku Tucho on Wednesday, April 09, 2014, Dembi Dollo

coined by Rambo (1993, 1990) is useful. I believe that the stage model can serve as a framework in which the nature of the converting processes of the *Sayyoo* Oromo can be seen more adequately. Under this subtopic, I discussed the process of the conversion of the Sayyoo to Protestantism by using Rambo's theory of conversion.

Rambo used the assumption that conversion is a process; a stage model is helpful in portraying phases of a process that takes place over time and useful as a map of the features of change over time (Rambo, 1999:23). Similar to the proponent's assumption, my data also exposed that conversion is a process both for an individual or a group and for a particular religion. Conversion into Protestantism started as soon as it arrived at *Sayyoo*; and still people are converting into the religion at individual level. During my fieldwork, I have seen few people witnessing coming to church for the first time and converting to be protestant Christians. Churches are also inviting peoples to be Christians, and conversion is an endless project that Christian churches are carrying out. On the other hand, a conversion of individual or a group is not something happened at a time; it is through gradual process and takes time. For instance, a person who comes to church cannot be a Christian immediately after the day he/she joined the religious group, because, there are stages to pass over to be converted fully. In some churches, at least the person is not a Christian until baptized.

#### **A. The Contextual Background of the Sayyoo Religious Change**

To analyze the history of conversion of the *Sayyoo* Oromo, one should start from the context in which it took place. As conversion is a process, the context influences each stage of conversion, and has a reciprocal impact upon the context. When we say context, it includes dynamic forces consisting of three interconnected elements: macro context, micro context and mesocontext. The macro context includes such large-scale domains as political systems, religious organizations, relevant ecological considerations and economic systems (Rambo, 1999:24).

Regarding the context in which the Sayyoo were converted, it is essential to examine the then political system, religious organizations and economic system of the *Sayyoo* Oromo that influenced their conversion to Protestantism.<sup>41</sup> Politically, they were subjugated to an empire they had never known before. Negaso and Crummey (1972) argue that after they were

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Mihratu Dhuguma: Saturday, March 15, 2014

subjugated under Menilik, ‘many people fled to Burayu’s<sup>42</sup> territory and Ilu Abbaa Bor, many young delayed their marriage, the people felt a distinct loss of property’ that show how harsh burden had been imposed upon the *Sayyoo* (109-110). It was an exploitative hierarchical system and quite opposite to the political experiences of the society. The *Sayyoo* were also under pressure of Orthodox Christianity, which was completely different from their traditional religion and belief systems. Within the political context and the forced conversion to Orthodox Christianity, the arrival of Protestantism had a liberal role. Many people felt liberated not only in religious sense, but also politically.

The low economic life of the society was also the other context that paved a way for their conversion. Many pioneer converts such as Gidada Solan<sup>43</sup> were people with low income. Some of them were beggars, the disabled and daily laborers. Lack of infrastructures such as school and hospitals also played a great role in accepting Protestantism among the *Sayyoo* Oromo.

Geographically, the proximity to the Sudan has also its own contribution in the process. As we have seen in chapter two, the extension of the United Presbyterian Churches of North American Missionaries from Egypt to Sudan in 1913 shortens the distance between the missionaries and the *Sayyoo*. In this environment, the occurrence of Influenza epidemic offered opportunity for the missionaries to contact the *Sayyoo* in 1919. Thus, geographical proximity to the Sudan, in addition to lack of medical professionals in Ethiopia, contributed lots in linking the *Sayyoo* to the protestant missionaries based in the Sudan. This made the political, economic and geographical contexts all very important in the introduction of Protestantism to *Sayyoo*.

### **B. Catalyst and Crisis for Religious Change among the *Sayyoo***

This stage focuses on the means that initiate the religious change, which may include internal and external forces (Rambo, 1999:25). The catalyst for religious change among the *Sayyoo* Oromo includes both internal and external forces. Externally, there were contacts with outsiders: missionaries, Abyssinian military conquerors, traders moving between Sudan and *Sayyoo* through Gambella. Internally, there were events like diseases, especially influenza epidemic,

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<sup>42</sup> Burayu Abba Gosa was one of the local rulers before the *Sayyoo*’s complete subjugation to Menilik up to 1906. The *Sayyoo* oral tradition suggests that the territory of Burayu, Awu never was ruled directly by *naftengas* (*Menilik*’s lowest grade of administrative officers).

<sup>43</sup> Gidada Solan was the first local convert among the *Sayyoo*. He was the first blind illiterate Ethiopian who was able to read and right using brail. He is also the father of the former Ethiopian president Negaso Gidada.

which was a major inside catalyst for conversion, political crisis, poor economic life and lack of infrastructures. Some of the situations were very harsh. Particularly, the event of influenza epidemic was a big internal catalyst that caused the coming of missionaries. The impact of disease and death combined with the political subjugation devastated the local people, thus undermining native religious beliefs and practices.

In recent times, though the mass were already converted, I observed conversion is still taking place among the *Sayyoo* at personal level. Individual or household level crisis such as illness, mystical experiences and existential questions about the purpose of life are causing more conversions. The following incident could be an appropriate example that initiates conversion of the family members. *“My mother was possessed by an evil spirit and was healed through prayers by the elders of the Bethel Evangelical Church in 1988. Then our whole family believed in Jesus Christ and joined the Church. Today, there are five strong churches in my village.”*<sup>44</sup> Negaso’s and Crummey’s (1972) idea could justify the argument. They state that the strong bondage between relatives was the other factor that was contributing the expansion of Christianity in Qellem. When a person became a Christian, his brothers and sisters, uncles and other relatives were likely to be influenced. This undoubtedly played an important role in the growth of protestant churches (1972:111).

Generally, the contextual background of the then *Sayyoo* was catalysts and crisis that played significant role in initiating the people for conversion. There were also individual level catalysts and crisis such as illness, mystical experiences, peer and family pressure that initiate the *Sayyoo* for religious change.

### **C. The *Sayyoo*’s Quest for Conversion to Protestantism**

This stage deals with the different ways in which people gave response (actively/passively) to the crises and or in which way people orient themselves to religious life. It includes the availability of better option for salvation and motivational patterns such as emotional, intellectual and religious features (Rambo, 1999:27). At the time, the political, economic, religious and ecological settings of the *Sayyoo* were initiative factors that inspire and move them for

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with Wakjira Lamu, Monday Feb. 2014, Hawa Galan.

conversion. At the same time, a contact with protestant missionaries provides Protestantism as a recovery option from the difficult situation.

The response style of the *Sayyoo* Oromo towards the question of conversion includes both active and passive one. According to Rambo (1999:27), active response style is the energetic sought for conversion of the potential converts. A passive response style is the potential converts seek conversion simply to satisfy the desire of the missionaries or remain passive in conversion because of other factors. The *Sayyoo*'s quest for conversion to Protestantism was active because of two things.

First, it was something the people actively wanted, it occurred not because the people simply followed the desire of the missionaries. According to my informant, "*The people of Sayyoo established 'Bethel Evangelical Church' in the absence of the missionaries who were persecuted by Italians.*"<sup>45</sup> The fact that the first local converts established the church shows the desire of the people to be converted to Protestantism. In addition, my informant told me that with the coming of the Italian rule, the followers of the new faith faced persecution from both the Orthodox Church and the Italians. Nevertheless, regardless of these persecutions, the people of *Sayyoo* never gave up to follow the new religion, because conversion was what they were yearning for actively.

The second thing that made the conversion of the *Sayyoo* active was donations: the need to get educational services, health services and generating incomes (daily laborer). They could not find other options for these deficiencies rather than using the available advantages. My informant Mitiku said, "*By the 1922 the first Sayyoo School had an enrollment of 70 students.*"

On the contrary, the response style of the *Sayyoo* Oromo towards the question of conversion includes passive one, particularly, because of politics. What made the response passive was the fear of the then regime, which promoted Orthodox Christianity religion and never wanted to leave space for any other religion. This was continuous up to three consecutive regimes: Menilik, Haile Sillasje and Derg. The Italian invasion, which promoted Catholicism and resisted Protestantism, was also unforgettable situation that made the response style passive<sup>46</sup>. However,

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<sup>45</sup> Mihratu Dhuguma Mar., Sat. 15, 2014, Hawa Galan.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

when we see the situation in time span, amazingly, by the end of the Derg regime after 1991, conversion towards Protestantism has been highly active; for instance, one of my informants Etafa told me that, between the years 1993 to 2007 seven protestant churches were established within one rural village, Fincho<sup>47</sup>. This means that after the downfall of Derg regime, the people of *Sayyoo* were converted to Protestantism actively. Before the fall of the Derg regime, even though the people had the interest to be converted, it was difficult to exercise the religion under the then socialist command.

Rambo (1999:27) argues that the assessment of motivational patterns in understanding the quest stage is significant. These motivations are complex, involving emotional, intellectual and religious features. Most of the time, people actively search deliverance under catastrophic situation and they look for resources to ‘fill the void’ and to grow and develop. When we see the *Sayyoo*’s seek for conversion from the perspective of motivational patterns, the *Sayyoo* wanted Protestantism as a resistance method to the political domination of the then regime and the local official religion (Orthodox Christianity). It was one of the several means of resistance or at least to show their disobediences towards the Orthodox Church in which they were forced to be. In other words, the *Sayyoo* searched Protestantism as deliverance from the situation in which they were politically and religiously subjugated. As some of the present Muslim parts of Oromo territories embraced Islam as a resistance ideology to Ethiopian colonial domination (Bartels, 1990:42, cited in Asafa, 2012), for the *Sayyoo* society, conversion to Protestantism was part of the resistance against both the regime and the orthodox religion. According to my informant, even though translating preaches into Amharic was mandatory, the people of *Sayyoo* were glad to worship in Afaan Oromo in protestant church. He said, “*even though both the preacher and the audiences were the Oromo, the preaching in Afaan Oromo was required to be translated into Amharic. But, the people of Sayyoo were happy to listen to Bible preaching in their native language- Afaan Oromo.*”<sup>48</sup>

This has happened in many parts of Wollega where missionaries arrived. For instance, a particular case about the coming back of Onesimos Nasib<sup>49</sup> to Nedjo, Western Wollega, could

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Etafa, Tue., Mar. 11, 2014, Hawa Galan.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Mitiku Tucho, Wed., Apr. 09, 2014, Dembi Dollo.

<sup>49</sup> His birth name was Hiiikaa Awwaajii, and was born sometime in the middle of the 1850s in Ilu Abbaboor, western part of Oromo land. He was kidnapped and separated from his widowed mother by slave traffickers at the age four.

more clarify the argument. On his arrival, he and his works in Afaan Oromo was received with great honor by *Dajazmatch Kumsaa Morodaa*, the Oromo Governor of Wollega and the people, which were beyond the expectations of Onesimos.

*Onesimos and his Eritrean fellow missionary produced books in Oromo, read some portions of the New Testament and sang some hymns. Dibaba (Governor of Bojji and son of Bakare, the Mooti of Leeqaa Naqamte) marveled. He had never imagined that it would be possible to use his own native language for sacred scriptures and Christian poetry. Excited, he gave Gebre-Ewosteos the priest instant employment. Dejazmatch Gebre-Egziabher (his Oromo name was Kumsa Moroda) consented, remarking that the clergy from Gojjam would never permit the Oromo Holy Scriptures to be read in Naqamte Mariam. In Boji Mariam, it would be possible.*

(Aren, Gustav, 1977: 395-396).

This realizes that his works were received with open arms by the Oromo people and their leadership, and immediately started to take root and came to leave permanent track in the awareness of the people. It also well explains that the people's heart was not with orthodox religion, they really were in need of conversion to available better option. Asafa Tefera (2009:82) further explained that the people, by leaving the Orthodox religion which they were forced to accept, rejecting Amharic (the language in which Orthodox was preached), accepting Protestantism which was preached in Afaan Oromo, and teaching their children at missionaries' school, and showed their resistance. In recent times' conversion of the people, motivations such as the need to obtain social rank, friendship, influence of family member are some sources of inspiration to be converted among *Sayyoo* Oromo.

#### **D. Encounter: the Initial Contact between the *Sayyoo* and the Missionaries**

This stage describes engaging the new option and the opening contact between the potential converts and the advocates. The first contact hurries the conversion process. Here, three major components of the encounter: the advocates, the potential converts and the setting of the encounter need to be analyzed (Rambo and Charles, 1999:28).

**The Setting:** - The first point we need to glance the stage is the ways in which the missionaries and the converts meet. The missionaries in *Sayyoo* used various strategies in meeting the

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After being sold many times and freed from slavery handed over to the Swedish missionary station in Massawa in 1870, converted to Protestantism at the age of sixteen and graduated his education in 1881. After three times unsuccessful attempts to reach Oromo land because of the difficult political situation in the country, he arrived at his homeland in April 1904, after thirty-five years in exile (Mekuria Bulcha, 1995:36-47).

potential convert. These include personal intimacy, private one-on-one encounters and the use of huge public gatherings such as spiritual conferences. Among these, a major way of converting the *Sayyoo* to Protestantism was by the means of sending the first local converts in the name of outreach in different areas of *Sayyoo* where people gathered for various activities. For instance Gidada, an employee of the missionaries at 4.5 Maria Teresa Dollar, started his first outreach on April 1, 1924 at the place called '*Burqaa Baddeessaa*', the then 'traders station' found between *Sayyoo* and Gambella in favor of preaching Gospel to the traders. He was preaching to fifty to hundred people per day (Gidada Solan, 1972:17). The first local converts were rotating in the people mainly focusing on *qaalluus* home, where the people of *Sayyoo* used to gather<sup>50</sup>. The missionaries in *Sayyoo* were also contacting the people at schools, clinics and different public gatherings.

In recent times, protestant churches prepare large crusades in different areas of *Sayyoo* at different times in collaboration with all protestant churches what they call 'unity of spiritual and Bible believers', which has profound effect on individuals' religious lives. One of my key informants, Assefa supposed:

*The people of my village were converted to Protestantism after the largest spiritual crusade organized by 'Full Gospel church in Fincho village was held in July 2002. The crusade was continuous from Thursday up to Sunday. Each day, the preachers made call the people for conversion. On that stage, above two thousand people accepted Christ. After the crusade, five protestant churches were established within the years 2003 to 2007 only in the village'*<sup>51</sup>.

During my fieldwork in Dembi Dollo, comparable spiritual conferences were held three times within five weeks. From which I participated on the one held between Thursday 27 up to Sunday 30 March 2014. It was titled as '*Shalom Dembi Dollo*' meaning 'peace for Dembi Dollo, the occasion on which I witnessed few peoples were converted to Protestantism on those days.

**The Advocates:** - for the religious advocates (missionaries, the local converts), evangelism was central to their mission. My informant and secondary sources show that the first missionary team in *Sayyoo*, Lambie and his group, after they finalized the medical service said to *Dajazmach* Biru that '*we will stay here, if and only if we get permission to preach the bible nearby offering*

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Mihratu Dhuguma, Mar., Sat. 15, 2014, Hawa Galan.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Assefa Dula, Thur., Mar. 6, 2014, Hawa Galan.

*medical and school services” when Biru asked them to stay and offer only medical services.’*  
This shows evangelism was central to their mission.

With this aim, the missionaries wanted to convert the whole society, by focusing on both particular individuals within a society, and the whole society. For instance, they were moving within a community to convince large numbers of people. My key informant, Mihratu said, *“Together with the first local converts, Lambie (the first missionary in Sayyoo) himself was going through the villages to preach the bible, under the curtain of delivering medication.”*<sup>52</sup> The missionaries had focused on individuals who were community leaders with the intention of converting the entire community. The following case that is taken from the autobiography of one of the first local converts also makes clear how community leaders were the focus of the missionaries.

*In summer 1928, I was preaching the Gospel in Begi and Gidami, where Jote was living. One day together with a missionary known as Mr. Bukanin, I went to Fitrar Osana’s home, Dajzmach Jote’s son. He received and welcomed and offered us foods and drinks. He gave us permission so that we could preach Gospel to the people, and he too attended the lesson we delivered. Next to that, we proceed to Begi and again preached to the Muslim society.*

(Gidada, 1972:25-27)

This particular story shows that the missionaries focus on the community leaders, with the intention of convincing and converting the whole people. Such achievement of preaching Bible to the native local leaders helps the missionaries to be familiar with them. It also could be one way of promoting Protestantism among the leaders to recognition. When the leaders became familiar with the missionaries, it was simple for them to preach the Bible to the members of the society.

**The potential Converts:** - The third feature to consider at this stage is what the potential converts gained as the benefits of the conversion. These benefits may vary in type and degree, according to the individual needs: it includes emotional gratification and techniques for living, leadership and power (Rambo, 1999:28). To this end, the benefits the *Sayyoo* gained by the virtue of conversion to Protestantism could be seen from two viewpoints: societal and individual benefits.

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with Mihratu Dhuguma, Mar., Sat.15, 2014, Hawa Galan.

On one hand, significant benefits that the *Sayyoo* gained at social level because of conversion are multidimensional; education, health services, various developmental projects such as clean water, and so forth. One of my key informants, Mitiku said:

*Our country, Sayyoo got various societal benefits. The Sayyoo saw all good things necessary for life merely through missionaries of protestant church. For all the development activities observed today, Protestantism laid a ground stone. These are hospital, clinics, schools, water projects, roads and the like<sup>53</sup>.*

On the other hand, considerable benefits that most of the individuals among *Sayyoo* gained because of their conversion is a sense of belongingness particularly in the contemporary life. They think that they took the right and necessary position in their life, which give them opportunity to live ‘successful’ life on the earth and enjoying life after death. In many of my conversation about religious life with a number of people, they refer their life before conversion as the worries, hopelessness, fear and something that has negative connotation. On the opposite side, they explain life after conversion is ‘better’ and may be the ‘best’. For some of them it provides techniques for living; by means of having different paid positions in church, like pastor, priest, bible preacher, famous singer and the like.

#### **E. Interaction with the Protestant Religious Group**

Rambo (1999:29) argues that after the individual/the group meets the new religious group, the interaction intensifies and they learn more about the teachings, lifestyle and expectations of the group, and is required to begin making a decision for devotion. The converted person or group immersed into the new religion by four features: relationships, ritual, rhetoric and roles. The relationship serving as networks of transformation is a way by which they learn more about the new religion. The closer the relationship between the advocate and potential convert the greater the likelihood for creating new identity (*Ibid*).

In the past, Protestants had created strong relationship among themselves. Aren (1978) stated that:

*A cup of coffee has become a symbol of Christian witness and fellowship at several places in Wollega, where it has been customary for evangelical believers to invite their neighbors for a light breakfast in connection with a short devotion consisting of*

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Mitiku Tucho, Wed., Apr.09, 2014, Dembi Dollo.

*singing, prayer, and if possible scripture reading. Such worshipping groups have not sermon given rise to regular congregations.*

(Aren, Gustav, 1978:441).

This shows that the early protestant members of the *Sayyoo* had intensified relation among themselves. Their invitation to the coffee ceremony confirms their strong affiliation to one another. The ceremony also paved the way to share religious experiences among themselves that helped members to learn more about the religion, lifestyle and expectations and participation in rituals.

Similar to that, among the contemporary *Sayyoo*, Protestants who are members of the same church have created strong relationship among one another, even they perceive one another as members of 'one family' currently. In ordinary speech, it is common to hear when they refer to one another as sister, brother, father, and mother. They also frequently go to the house of the new convert to 'visit', make prayer and to invite him/her to their communion. However, there is strong separation among followers of diverse protestant churches, as we will see it in chapter five. The strong relationship between the convert and religious group is used as a network of transformation, by which they learn more about the new religion. Among the *Sayyoo*, it is regular to see converts participating in ritual practices that enable them to experience the religion as well. In many churches the convert is expected to be baptized (based on the respective churches doctrines) then take part in different activities: singing in church choir, preaching bible and prayer, participating in communion, contributing money and other offerings for church. It is commonly observable when people contribute money, crops, domestic animals and other offerings.

Following these, the converts begin to employ the specific rhetoric of the religious group; at this level, they become priest, pastor, known singer, church leader and there are numerous figures of such kinds of personalities among the *Sayyoo*. Finally, converting persons learn the expected roles and conduct required before as a Christian. Changes will encompass different levels: personal self-behavior, values, attitudes and social, cultural, political, economic and religious life (*Ibid*). Thus, it is logical to conclude that among the *Sayyoo*, this is point at which, indigenous cultural practices were lost; rejection of the former self and the creation of a new self have been experienced. In our conversation, people who told me their history of their conversion to

Christianity explain themselves as completely changed in many ways, personal behaviors, social life and cultural practices.

#### **F. Commitment: Taking Christian Responsibilities**

Rambo (1999:31) explained that, at the stage the person or the group consolidates the new spiritual orientations, become fully Christian and expected to hold some sort of public demonstrations. Common methods for publicly displaying are personal testimony, a narrative of the convert's life before and after conversion. In this regard, the authors particularly argued that Protestant Christian testimonies are marked regularly by a profound sense of sin, crisis and surrender to Christ (*Ibid*).

During my fieldwork in Dembi Dollo, I have seen and heard a testimony of an individual who was Muslim and had been converted to Pentecostalism. He was from Ilu Abbaa Booraa Zone of Oromia regional state and he is now living (during the time of my fieldwork) in different areas of *Sayyoo*. He has no permanent place to live, no food to eat, no home to live in. He sleeps wherever he gets on tree, on the road, but usually goes around to Christian family homes. He tells to everybody who ever he/ she is, about his life before and after conversion and preached the gospel at everywhere in the market place, on the roads. He told that he has been imprisoned many times for disturbing such public space. The day I heard his testimony was on Sunday, at the end of Sunday service, the pastor of the church asked the people to listen the testimony. After that, the convert came to the stage started his speech; he told us that he was a Muslim, because he was born from Muslim family and he had attended Muslim religious teaching for more than ten years. He said he had burnt down two Christian churches (mentioning the place and the name of two churches). Later on, he unexpectedly converted to Christianity through mythical experience. He said, "*I saw Jesus himself was warning me in my dreams.*" Then he explained the horrible dream and gave details about the whole history of his conversion. He had been beaten and punished many times in different places and lastly he said that he gave his whole life for the work of Christ up to death.

This particular case and other frequently heard similar cases also justify the above argument. For the above individual, living such kind of life: homelessness, helplessness, food insecurity, being beaten, imprisonment, is seen as commitment to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. The testimony

itself is commitment for preaching the Gospel of Christ. Such biographical information is supposed to help strengthen the believers' faith by offering good example how much one should be strong believer and committed to Christianity life.

#### **G. Consequences: Assessing the Effects of Conversion to Protestantism**

The consequences of conversion of the *Sayyoo* to Protestantism are multidimensional. These are all encompassing changes and effects happened to the people because of conversion. Rambo (1999:33), states that mass conversion obviously increases profound changes and significant impacts within social, political and economic life ways of a nation. The conversion of the *Sayyoo* brought significant influences on the traditional cultures of the people. The assessment of consequences of conversion should be effective and multidimensional including intellectual, ethical, religious, social and political domains. The consequences of conversion of the *Sayyoo* will be presented in chapter five of this thesis.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE EXPANSION OF PROTESTANTISM AND CULTURE CHANGE AMONG THE SAYYOO OROMO

#### 5.1. The Relationship Between Protestantism and Culture

Eller, (2007:162) argues that religious change is a species of cultural change in general, the process by which the existing order of a society, that is, its social, spiritual, and material civilization, is transformed from one type to another. Those changes in religion holistically related to changes in other aspects of culture. The imposition of foreign religions and the openness characteristics of culture for change resulted in the speedy loses of indigenous culture among the *Sayyoo* Oromo.

The intension of this chapter is to see the changed aspects of *Sayyoo* Oromo indigenous culture, what Finnegan, Ruth (2005:11) forwarded as ‘verbal arts and oral traditions’, because of the expansion of Protestantism. Regardless of the fact that there are many controversies behind the scope and usage of these terminologies like, ‘tradition’, ‘oral’, ‘oral tradition’, oral literature’, and ‘verbal arts’, in the context of this thesis, four focal points are outlined. These include material cultures, oral literature, social customs and the social drama/performing folk-arts. In my view, the four are interrelated to one another and one is meaningless without the three. For instance, when certain ritual is celebrated for certain purpose, various material cultures are used, oral literature is said and performance is obviously present. Thus, the four are together on the stage, to fit the same purpose.

However, before identifying the changed aspects of cultural traditions, the central question I was asking my respondents was whether their traditional culture and Protestantism could fit each other. In other words, I asked them whether the traditions should be assimilated to Protestantism or the religion have to incarnate itself into their culture. The intended intension behind this question was to look if protestant religion had influences on or influenced by the traditional culture among the *Sayyoo* and or how the two variables are accumulated together.

In fact, as we have seen in chapter two, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus had developed the concept of holistic theology as ‘an effort in rediscovering total human life’ in the 1975. One of the promises of the theology is that church should incarnate itself into the people’s cultural setting and social practices (Gudina Tumsa, 2008:70). However, regardless of the promises of the holistic theology, many aspects of traditions were destroyed. On the other side, many traditions are still being practiced together with Christian elements in the everyday life of the *Sayyoo*, which that might be the involvement of the holistic theology.

My respondents have contradictory stands on the relationship between traditions and religion. Few of them argue that church should immerse itself into the peoples’ native culture and others argue that culture should be contextualized or if necessary, it must leave the space for religion.

Among those who suggest religion ought to incarnate itself to the peoples’ culture, one of my informant said, “*Since our culture is the basic attribute that made our identity, religion is supposed to be embodied into our culture without devastating our tradition.*”<sup>54</sup> To this point, Benti (1999:86) suggest that culture should be seen as the identity of any society in which Christianity can be incarnated. Since every culture involves human beings, whom God created in His own image-thus, every culture is God’s culture, there is no good or bad culture, which Christianity either rejects or accepts. “*Thus, every culture is God’s culture, in which Christianity can be incarnated and which can be transformed in such a way that it pleases God.*” Even though the last statement, which is directly quoted may raise controversy, his suggestion claims the need to respect and accept every human culture. However, the last statement that says, “*Culture can be transformed in such a way that it pleases God*” may plausibly raise a question: what is that transformation in such a way that it satisfies God?

On the other hand, some of my informants argue that culture should be adapted to the religious contexts; the people should leave ‘unnecessary’ traditional cultural practices that could not go along with the religion. The people have to favor the option of taking advantage of fit in to the Protestant Church.

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with Gemechu Tafesse: Wednesday, March 26, 2014 and Tesfaye Megersa: Monday, April 07, 2014, Dembi Dollo.

The following extract is taken from my conversation with Mitiku-one of my key informants:

*Culture is means of life on this temporary world; a system we organize for livelihood. It is what we have created for ourselves in the course of our life. We made it to adapt our physical and social environment. It is what we learned from experiences how to survive, food production by the use of indigenous skills, knowledge and technologies. It is all about how we live and interact with one another such as norms, kinships and political systems. However, religion differs from culture. Our faith [Protestantism] is not a faith in culture, because it is not our societal creation. It is a gift of God for the everlasting heavenly life. In fact, we were committed to worldly practices before we knew Christ. We were participating in evil works, opposite to God's willing such as worshipping the qaalluus, scarifying bull and sheep to the mountain and rivers. However, for these were not the will of God, He showed us the way of life [religious] through His Bible. Therefore, now is the time we do everything in the way that could satisfy God. Thus, all of our personal and social activities, which cannot go hand in hand with our religion, should be stopped. Our cultural practices should be modified as they could fit our religion<sup>55</sup>.*

Here, some important points in this quotation need to be analyzed to understand the core argument better. My respondent's core idea stress that religion is more important than culture and culture should leave the space for religion. He understands culture as a human creation mechanism for the temporary worldly life, whereas, religion is God's gift (not human creation) for human kind for everlasting life. Therefore, cultural tradition should be contextualized so as it could not oppose the religion and could fit religion. This is because, in his view, the indigenous cultural practices are seen as mistakenly invented achievements without knowing the God given proper way of religious life. Thus, there is a tendency to see the cultural traditions as insignificant and there is perception to recognize every activities of our daily life should be guided by religious orientations.

However, from his argument, my informant seems to forget the values of the *Sayyoo* cultural traditions, which makes it essential to ask who they are truly, because the idea does not recognize the *Sayyoo*'s unique cultural traditions. This makes it problematic to speak of the '*Sayyoo*' that has a 'culture' in a meaningful way. It also does not recognize what the contemporary *Sayyoo* have in common with their ancestors who used to live there in Qellem many years ago to justify that they are belong to the Oromo cultural ways of life. Thus, the argument lacks significant interest in cultural identity that is seen as assets. Accordingly, it does not consider different

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<sup>55</sup> Interview with Mitiku Tucho, Wed.,Apr.09, 2014, Dembi Dollo.

forms of influence from the outside that have threatened the *Sayyoo*'s local uniqueness. It also overlooks the need to react to culture change by attempting to strengthen or at least preserve what is seen as their unique culture and to slow down or prevent processes of change or outside influence.

Generally, both groups of my informants did not deny the fact that the traditional culture of the *Sayyoo* Oromo had been changed under the impacts of the expansion of Protestantism. As the Orthodox religion did, which used political power to convert the *Sayyoo*, though its process was gradual convincing methods, Protestantism too has played crucial role in devastating the traditional *Sayyoo* culture<sup>56</sup>. In fact, Negaso and Crummey (1972) state that the Oromos who accepted Christianity blamed others who were not converted to Christianity and the termed the unconverted as *aramane* (pagan or savage). The derogatory concept ultimately, was extended to cover the whole of the cultural traditions of the *Sayyoo* (1972:111). The protestant missionaries used convincing methods by offering various kinds and forms of donation. They did many good things for the people such as provision of health and education services. The missionaries convinced the people to ignore the native culture also through preaching the bible and teachings.

Thus, the protestant religion approached to the traditional culture negatively; there was a tendency to see the culture as unfit among the missionaries. The first local converts also have contributed considerable part in destroying the culture through convincing religious teachings in various forms, in different areas of the *Sayyoo*. By organizing outreach program, they attacked the traditional religion with its elements such as the *qaalluu* institution. The missionaries destroyed the Oromo traditional religion and *qaalluus* from *Sayyoo* regarding them as witchdoctors during their work of evangelism. Particularly, the local missionaries like Gidada generalized the *qaalluus*, as the ones who had the spirit of Satan and subsequently persecuted; and all the *qaalluu* offices were eliminated from *Saayyoo* (Benti, 1999:84). Based on the above arguments, I separated four categories to examine the aspects of the traditional culture that were changed because of the expansion of Protestantism among the *Sayyoo*. At this point, it is important to bear in mind that the concern is to focus on the devastated genres of culture, than centering and mentioning the minor available components.

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with Tesfaye Megersa: Monday, April 07, 2014, Dembi Dollo.

## **5.2. Changed Aspects of the Sayyoo Traditions because of Expansion of Protestantism**

### **5.2.1. Customary Practices and Institutions**

These categories of the cultural traditions are rituals, festivals, ceremonies, belief systems and indigenous institutions, such as Oromo indigenous religion and its concepts.

#### **5.2.1.1. Oromo Indigenous Religion and Belief Systems**

The Oromo indigenous religion has its own cosmology: unique creation myths that define creation of human beings, the universe and all things on the earth. Gemetchu (1993:20) states, “*The Oromo has been conscious of its cultural identity, its relation to nature and the existence of a powerful force that regulates the connection between nature and society.*” In the Oromo indigenous religion, the organization of spiritual, and physical, human worlds are considered as interlinked facts. *Waaqa*, the creator, regulates their existence and functions in balanced ways. *Waaqa* directs the world from above and controls everything from within. The Oromo cosmology has important consequences for the Oromo vision of the universe as a whole. It has influenced aspects of its traditional culture, its political and economic thoughts, and determined its customary system of administration and forms of production (Asafa, 2012:141).

However, in today’s *Sayyoo*, the Oromo indigenous cosmology and its concepts we have seen in chapter three, such as the concepts of *Waaqa* (God), *qaalluu*, worshipping, mediumship, *ayyaana* (spirits) and sacrificial rituals have been replaced by Christian cosmology. The concept of one Supreme Being - *Waaqa* (God) and *ayyaana* (spirit) were replaced by the concept of Trinity and Holy Spirit from Christian cosmology, respectively. The worshipping styles of the traditional Oromo religion were replaced by the protestant church worshipping styles. Prophet replaced the idea of *qaalluu* and the possession of Holy Spirit replaced the idea of *muudaa* (anointment). When they are asked about the Oromo cosmology, my informants describe the Biblical accounts of Christian cosmology. For instance, one of my key informants describes the concept of *Waaqa* (God) in regards to the concept of trinity. He said *Waaqa* is one Supreme Being, who showed Himself in three forms: father, son and the Holy Spirit. The three forms are

confirmed by the fact that God created human beings in the image of Himself. Human life is composed of three things: the soul, the physical body and the spirit (the breathing system)<sup>57</sup>.

In the Oromo indigenous religion, the concept of mediumship is very noticeable; they used mountains, rivers, lakes, trees, plants as a medium through which they appreciate and glorify the almighty God. The traditional concepts such as appreciating the works of God through His creations, water bodies, mountains, trees through which they make prayers that are never important in their contemporary religious life. Some of informants argued that this all are unnecessary. One among them said, “... *the son of God, Jesus was crucified once and for all to bring peace between us and the God father; he came to this world to mediate between the sinners and the Holy God.*” Thus, according to his view, there is no need of going to different sites of fauna and flora to worship God.

Additionally, other traditional practices related to misfortunes have been abandoned. For instance, in the past, if snake crosses the street, or come across a woman carrying an empty pot, the *Sayyoo* Oromo consider it a sign of misfortune that signifies a bad fate and unsuccessfulness. Thus, the person is expected to stay at home. However, these days no one cares about such issues, rather everybody is expected to have a morning prayer before he/she leaves home and looking for fortune is not their business.

In Oromo indigenous religion/belief system, a woman who gives birth to a baby, have to conduct birth rituals called *shanan* (fifth day after giving birth to a baby). The woman, when she goes to fetch water, the first time after she conducted a birth rituals, she holds ‘*coqorsaa*’ in her hand and put it into the water saying “*yaa Waaq бага madda kanatti na deebifte, yaa madda nana bagan nagaan sitti deebi’e*” meaning, ‘*Oh God, thank you! You helped me see this spring again. You spring, I am happy to come back to you!*’ This symbolizes the woman’s acknowledgement of God for He passes her through such difficult situation and back to her daily activities in normal life. However, in today’s *Sayyoo* birth rituals are conducted in accordance with church teachings.

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Mitiku Tucho: Wed., Apr.09, 2014, Dembi Dollo.

### 5.2.1.2. Festivals, Rituals and Ceremonies

Similarly, traditional Oromo festivals such as *jaarii gatuu* related to harvest and *yaarabbii* related to thanks giving festival became outdated. Let me discuss them one after another.

***Jaarii Gatuu***: - Conceptually, it is a ritual ceremony performed once every year at the end of August, a time when crops, especially, maize is ready to use. It is a time when insects and different wild animals, pests especially worm which is called '*sugee*' destroys the crop. Hence, the purposes of the ritual were; first, to thank the God for He grow the crops, second, to pray to God to let Him protect the crops from wild animals such as worms that destroy it. Women in the area all together go to the field with diverse food items and milk. They threw it to the crops saying '*beelli haa baduu quufi haa dhufu, sugaayi, sugaayi*' meaning, '*let satisfaction come and starvation and hunger go*'. Doing this, when they arrive at home, all husbands gather and ask the women "what do you say?" the women reply, "hunger will disappear and satisfaction will come." The ceremony also involves lighting fire. All male members of the village carry fire to the village altar. Lightning the fire symbolizes the coming of the bright season, blessing and purifying the crops, and offering thanks to God for the welfare He did for the people. Then they have food, drinks and funs.<sup>58</sup> Today, the celebration of this significant ceremony has been completely died out among the *Sayyoo*.

In this regard, some of the informants argue that this particular ceremony has overlapped with Orthodox Church festival known as 'Meskel' or 'the finding of the true Cross'<sup>59</sup>. Among them, Desalegn said, "*Our fathers were practicing gubaa (lightning fire), long before Christianity. The law of Makko Bili ordered them to perform gubaa once a year. However, after the arrival of Orthodox Christianity it overlapped with 'Meskel' (the finding of the true cross)*". Because he said, "*Until recently, except adjusting the date and the name of the ceremony to that of the Orthodox church, the Sayyoo were practicing 'gubaa' for the same purpose with the same procedure as they are being done by Christians.*" For instance, father of a household light the fire, moving it to all corners of the house and says certain kinds of prayers. They perform cultural songs and eat cultural foods. In fact, Negaso and Crummey (1972) states that the *meskel* was already practiced by the Oromo before the arrival of the Orthodox religion in Qellem

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with Kena Daka, Sat., Mar.1, 2014, Hawa Galan.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Desalegn Chawaka, Sat., Feb.22, 2014, and Asafa Dula, Thur., Mar. 6, 2014, Hawa Galan.

(1972:111). As a result, the people were transformed into practicing the later festival until they were converted to Protestantism and by this time, both concepts are not working; because they are marked as not important.

***Yaa Rabbii***: - *Yaarabbii* literary means ‘Oh God!’ It is festival celebrated under a big tree every year in October. It signifies the people’s satisfaction. They say ‘*Yaa Rabbi galatakee, dukkana gannaa bira nu dabarsitee ifa birraatti waan fiddeef*’ means ‘thank you God; we have passed through the darkness and reached this brightness, because of your assistance’. It is a day of happiness, satisfaction for the whole community members. Nevertheless, the protestant churches discontinued this festival among the *Sayyoo*.

***Irreecha***: - *Irreecha* is a ritual celebrated twice a year: one in September and the other in March. The first *irreecha* is thanks giving ceremony. The people acknowledge God for he passed them through the rainy season to the bright season. They hold *coqorsaa* (grass), go to river and put it into water. It signifies appreciating God through nature. The second *irreecha* is prayer ceremony that takes place at the end of the dry season (*bona*), earlier than the start of rainy season. They go to mountain, slaughter a bull and pray to God to make rain. They say, “*Yaa Waaq, lafti sanyii baatee dheebotee, magarsuuf si eeggattii, roobii magarsi!*” meaning, ‘Oh, God, the earth suffered thirsty to grow the seeds, please, make rain and grow the seeds.’<sup>60</sup>

However, protestant churches and members among many of the *Sayyoo* banned both types of *irreecha*. When I asked about the practice and significance of *irreecha*, all of my informants who are religious express that it is not important and the people of *Sayyoo* were right for they ignore it. One of my key informants commenting on *irreecha* said:

*I realize irreecha as one of our ancestors’ spiritual remnants, but I never believe in it; it might have socio-cultural and political implications. It may help reconstruct our fathers and ancestors’ history, it may show who they were (non-Christian). However, this time, it never shows who we are (as Christian). Therefore, it is one of the traditions that are not applicable to the life of Christianity, the people of Sayyoo are correct for they banned it*<sup>61</sup>.

Accordingly, protestant churches continued to pay attention to demolish *irreecha* and other indigenous rituals and ceremonies. For instance, during my fieldwork in Dembi Dolloo, among

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with Jirata Lamu, Fri., Mar. 15, 2014, Sayyoo.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Mihratu Dhuguma, Mar., Sat.15, 2014, Hawa Galan.

three remarkable spiritual conferences held within five weeks at the town's stadium, the one took place from Thursday, March 27 up to Sunday, 30, 2014; precisely have significant contribution in changing the minds of the *Sayyoo* against *Irreecha*. The conference was organized by the collaboration of all spiritual and bible believers' protestant churches in the town and it was titled as '*Shalom Dambi Dollo*' meaning 'peace for Dambi Dollo. The conference was aimed at asking God for forgiveness since the people of the town were/are acting out of God's will. The guest speaker of the conference preached the people about God's miserable reaction to the *Sayyoo* mainly because of two things, as he said. First, there was shocking bleeding at a point in history and secondly, people have currently gone back to worship rivers and mountains.

He invited the elderly people to the stage to tell all they know about misfortunes that took place in the town. Then, many of the elders went on the stage, told all the bad happenings they remember. Among these bad things, one elder man talked about the *buttaa* ceremony that took place in the stadium during 1991, when numbers of oxen were slaughtered. At that time, I was excited to know about the topic the elder is speaking.

In the next interview session I had with one of my key informants, I asked if he could clarify to me concerning the issue. My informant told me about the occasion in detail. As soon as the Derg regime fall down, the Oromo started to revitalize their cultural practices. Accordingly, with the intension of reviving their traditional cultural institutions, the Oromo of *Sayyoo* celebrated *buttaa* ceremony at the stadium. The ritual was celebrated to resume the transfer of the bokkuu (scepter) of the *Jahan Sayyoo*, as an initial point in the revitalization process of the *Jahan Sayyoo gadaa* system. On the day, a number of oxen were slaughtered. Thus, according to my informant, the bleeding the preacher speaking was about the blood of the slaughtered oxen.

Regarding the peoples' 'tendency to go back to worshipping rivers and mountains,' the preacher took typical example of *irreechaa* that takes place once every year in September at Hora Harsadi, Bishoftu. At the end of the session, he requested the people not to participate on such traditional occasions.

**Ateetee:-** *Ateetee* is exclusively women's annual ceremony through which they ask 'Maaram'<sup>62</sup>, to give them birth and believed to regulate their reproduction. *Maaram* is the spiritual mother who was believed to order fertility in the Oromo traditional religion. Every woman in the neighborhood performed *ateetee* in former times. They call upon 'Maaram' - the divinity of motherhood to give baby for childless woman. They evoke and address in their song at any birth-ritual (Benti, 1999:86, Jeylan, 2004:113).

According to my informants, *ateetee* was celebrated under a big tree. Sometimes it was also performed at the household of the junior woman among the neighborhoods women<sup>63</sup>. Women prepare *buna-qalaa* (fried coffee beans mixed with butter), foods such as bread, and drinks such as *farsoo* (a kind of local drinks). Then, all women with the children sit turning towards the eastern direction. The elder woman who was referred to as *haadha ateetee*, meaning the 'mother of *ateetee*' puts grass in coffee beans mixed with butter and fling /threw it up to the sky. She blesses the children saying; "*ijoollee fi maatii keenyaa wajjin nagaan nu eegi*," meaning, 'protect our children and families in peace'. After that, they serve the prepared foods and drinks.

Nonetheless, this ritual was destroyed among the *Sayyoo*. The following idea is taken from the autobiography of one of the first local converts, *Gidada*, which shows the contribution of Protestantism and its missionaries in destroying *ateetee*.

*In winter 1928, together with a group headed by Mr. Fill West - a missionary, we had horseback journey to Gooree, Ilu Abbaa Booraa, to participate on a missionaries' general assembly, where we spent three weeks. After three weeks, on our journey back to Dembi Dollo, we saw women worshipping 'ateetee' under a big tree, preparing feast at a place called Akaakil, some three days horseback journey from Dambi Dollo. Since, they understood that some members of our group members were very hungry, the women invited us to join them so that we can have the feast. However, I respond to the women, 'we do not have share from these foods with you, because we do not worship devil and its work. Rather if it is the will of God, we are working to destroy this and other similar worshipings. I advised them not to do so. Then we passed nearby neither eating nor worshipping.*

(Gidada, 1972:17)

From the above quotation, one can understand the antagonism of the protestant missionaries to *ateetee*. The narrator made four points clear; firstly, he referred the ceremony as if it is a work of

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<sup>62</sup> In the Oromo traditional religion, maaram is the divinity of motherhood.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Tajitu Kulusha, Sun., Mar.2, 2014, Hawa Galan.

devil. Secondly, he pointed out his finger at the participants as they were worshipping the evils' work. Thirdly, he mentioned the groups' (the missionaries') plan to destroy the practice and fourthly, he recommended the women not to repeat the same thing in the future.

However, I could not recognize the harmful side of *ateetee* and other similar practices and I believe that *ateetee* and other similar rituals were useful. *ateetee* was a colorful indication of the place women had in the religious and cultural philosophy of the Oromo. It had two ceremony important implications. First, it had regulatory function of religion. There was a belief that *Waaq* listens to women's desire and immediately responds to it, because they are closer to nature in their nurturing and life-sustaining activities. They are intermediary figures between *Waaqa* (God) and human/nature and the physical world. In the past, women's prayer was used as a powerful means of terminating harsh ecological disruptions such as crop failure, drought, endemic diseases and other social crises such as protracted warfare. The second one is that *ateetee* was the way to exert pressure on male domination being in-group, which shows men are functionally dependent on women in many ways. It was also used as a prime source and guardian of the female individuals' morality (Jeylan, 2004:113-115). Thus, I recommend that church should not be antagonist to such practices; both foreign and local missionaries have to understand functions and the meanings that the natives attach to such practices before labeling it as the work of devil, judging the practices, planning to destroy.

### **Indigenous Conflict Resolution**

The Oromo have also indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms such as *jaarsummaa* (mediation), and *gumaa* (blood price). *Gumaa* is a ritual performed for purification after homicide (Dejene, 1999: 86). Among the two let me discuss about *jaarsummaa*, for the purpose of narrowing it down. *Jaarsummaa* comes from Afaan Oromo term '*jaarsaa*' literally means 'an old man.' In the *jaarsummaa* context, it refers to a process by which two or more men who are respected members of the community are called upon for mediation, whenever there is dispute (Dejene, 1999: 68).

In the *Sayyoo* customary law, *jaarsummaa* has its own procedure. Concerning the way in which the *jaarsaa* take up matters for mediation, my informant told me two ways of gaining

jurisdiction<sup>64</sup>. The first way was the elders who heard about the dispute go to the disputants and ask them to submit the matter to them so they can mediate between the perpetrators. This is due to the common understanding of the community that resolving conflict is a social responsibility of elders. The second form, in which a case appears before the community of elders was when one of the disputants goes to the elders, states the case and asks them to intervene. When both agree to settle their quarrel through mediation, they consult with the elders on the date on which they will meet, when each party will appear along with the elders. The days preferred to meet for *jaarsummaa* were Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday under a big tree. Then they start their session by blessings and asking God for successfulness of their plan. Before blessing started, everybody is expected to have *coqorsa* (a type of grass) at hand, which symbolizes their promise to speak the truth and peace. Because they believe that grain is source of life for both human and animals. It is believed that if they do not speak the truth, the grain may not grow.

After the blessing, they proceed to ask the parties to present their respective cases before the elders. This was done in private, when one partner presents his/her issue; the opposite partner leaves the session temporarily. After hearing both of them, the elders ask the disputants to stay aside and consult among themselves. When their consultation ends, the elders call the disputants individually and tell their faults. Then they strive to convince the partners, though articulating different types of oral literature such as proverbs to make an apology. Then the elders decide on the type and amount of compensation to be paid by either one or both of the disputants. The initial compensation to be paid by the offender goes from '*haqa kennuu*' (giving the truth) up to some amount of cash. The conflicting group accepts the decision for the sake of the respect regarded to elders as well as for the fear of curse and social banishment.

In today's *Sayyoo* people, these indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms are conceptually available, but their respective procedures have been changed, because of church interventions. One of my key informants said, "*Dispute settlement mechanisms have been adapted to church orientations*<sup>65</sup>." For instance, whenever conflict happened between two or more church members, church leaders within their communion should handle it. Its procedure follows in accordance

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<sup>64</sup> Interview with Asafa Dula, Thur., Mar. 6, 2014, Hawa Galan

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Mihratu Dhuguma, Mar., Sat. 15, 2014, Hawa Galan.

with the church guidelines. They pick some verses from the Bible and read it for the parties, make prayer and convince them forgive each other<sup>66</sup>.

### 5.2.2. The Material Culture

The Oromo have material cultures with religious, political and economic significance. Some of these material cultures have been outdated because of different factors that includes political, religious, and technological one. However, I focus on those outdated because of the expansion of Protestantism. One of my key informants said:

*Some of these materials were destroyed not only because of the expansion of Protestantism rather the causes vary. However, church teachings have the significant contribution in the process. For example, church never tolerates material cultures with spiritual functions that are used in worshipping other gods. The Kallacha<sup>67</sup> and Caaccuu<sup>68</sup> were used in different ritual performances and prayers of Oromo traditional religion. These material cultures are not relevant to Christianity, and have their own interpretations, which are not biblical teachings. However, it is not our intention to devastate other material cultures that have no spiritual meanings. Even, we encourage and preserve material cultures like the traditional costumes and agricultural production materials<sup>69</sup>.*

My informant in the above quotation is clear that the church has contributed in destroying the traditional material cultures that could not fit the protestant religious context. Thus, church devastated traditional material cultures those, which were irrelevant to church worship styles, and those, which have no biblical interpretations. For instance, *kallachaa*, and *caaccuu* have their own interpretations in the traditional Oromo religion. Their interpretations in the traditional religion are irrelevant to bible teachings. *Kallacha* was believed to be a gift of God dropped from the sky together with comet. Thus, there was a belief that animal should be slaughtered to move it from one place to another for it needs blood<sup>70</sup>. Thus, since such materials, with its significance and interpretation are inappropriate in Christian context, they are not tolerated.

Tesfaye Megersa, another key informant, also agreed the above argument. Churches role is devastating these material cultures. He said, “*My own grandfathers’ bokkuu (scepter) and*

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Mihratu Dhuguma, Mar., Sat.15, 2014, Hawa Galan.

<sup>67</sup> Kallacha is metal objects, which is used for blessing by *Gadaa* leaders and to make prayers on religious ceremonies. It is a gift of God that is believed to be dropped down from the sky with comet in the past time.

<sup>68</sup> Caaccuu is a ritual object used only by women as a symbol of female fertility

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Mihratu Dhuguma, Mar., Sat.15, 2014, Hawa Galan.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Mihratu Dhuguma, Mar., Sat.15, 2014, Hawa Galan.

*galmaa (small huts in which the husband only hold prayers) and my grandmothers' caaccuu have been crushed and destroyed by local converts of Protestant religion<sup>71</sup>.*”

Generally, among the *Sayyoo*, traditionally respected materials were totally lost. However, the awareness of the society towards traditional costumes is outstanding. It is common to see while people wearing such cultural costumes on different ceremonial occasions like wedding, holidays, and in churches. These costumes are tolerated, because they have neither antagonistic interpretation with Biblical teachings nor inappropriateness to church worshipping style.

### 5.2.3. The Oral Literature

Finnegan (2005: xi, 23) who played a key role in developing a distinctive social anthropological approach to the study of oral literature explained, “*anthropologists' interest in oral tradition and verbal art is, no doubt, to understand people's cultural activities.*” The term Oral literature is controversial; it is not universally recognized as it is seen as ‘self-contradictory, since ‘literature’, etymologically implying writing, cannot be unwritten’ where ‘oral’ is perceived as opposite to written. However, it was introduced as an appropriate term for folktales, myths, legends, proverbs, riddles, songs and poems, together with verbal processes like rhetoric, or tongue twisters (Finnegan, 2005:8-10).

The Oromo in general and the *Sayyoo* in particular, have various forms of oral literature. These are oral narratives consisting of folktales, myths, and legends, witticisms such as proverbs, riddles, and tongue twisters and various forms of oral poetries such as *geerarsa* (heroic songs), *weedduu* (love songs), *faaruu* (praise songs), and blessings. Dereje, (2012:82), proclaims that ‘the Oromo oral tradition is rich in folklore such as songs, tales legend, myth’ and witticisms.

Among these forms of oral literature, I focus on songs, particularly *geerarsa* as a sub-genre. *Geerarsa* is one of the Oromo traditional folk song. As a genre, it is generally identified as a collective noun encompassing the Oromo oral poetry of hunting, war and historical and political events<sup>72</sup>. According to Assefa (2003:60), the subject matters of *geerarsa* could be recording

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with Tesfaye Megersa: Monday, April 07, 2014, Dembi Dollo.

<sup>72</sup> See, Assefa, (2003:59).

major events of particular time in history. It could also be hunting songs of a successful kill or an unsuccessful kill of wild animals. It could also be songs of success or failure in life.

In the past, *geerarsa* was performed on such occasions like wedding, *moggaasa* (child naming ritual) and *jila* (feasts), *daboo* (cooperative work) ceremonies. The process of reciting, composing and singing *geerarsa* was linked with its relevance to the context. It was sung to teach and initiate the youngsters, to praise individuals, to show one's own irritation, success or failure. In addition, the *Sayyoo* were praising fathers, mothers, land, heroes, crops cattle, husbands and wives through *geerarsa*.

Nevertheless, the fact I observed among the *Sayyoo* shows these genres of the traditional literatures have been missed. Particularly, all kinds of the *geerarsa* sub-genres are absent from the daily lives of the people. My informants did not deny the fact that *geerarsa* has fundamental social, historical, and political significances. However, in the contemporary *Sayyoo* people, these all were forbidden not to be practiced among protestant church members mainly because of two things. First, the subject matters of *geerarsaa* have no spiritual content. The people believe that praise should be only to God, the religion allow them to admire nothing except Him. Second, currently, most of the stages on which *geerarsa* was sung such as *moggaasa* (naming) are destroyed because of church teachings. Some of the remained stages such birth rituals, wedding, and *daboo* (cooperative works) replaced *geerarsa* by protestant spiritual songs, prayers and in some cases bible teachings<sup>73</sup>. The church was canceling membership of those who have found attending and participating on Oromo folk songs, and other traditional rituals such as *moggaasa* (child naming) because these were seen as the acts of sin among the church leaders.<sup>74</sup> In this regard, Benti (1999) discussed the role Protestantism played in the destruction of Oromo oral literature. According to Benti (1999:64-5), Oromo traditional music, instruments, and Oromo melody was officially banned by the general assembly of the missionaries without considering the dissatisfaction of the people when cultural songs were not tolerated.

In conclusion, the contemporary situation of this oral literature is not good; because of the speedy lose of the remaining genres. This situation clearly comes from the misunderstandings of

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<sup>73</sup> Interview with Etafa Korsaa, Tue., Mar. 11, 2014, Hawa Galan.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Tesfaye Megersa: Monday, April 07, 2014, Dembi Dollo.

the uses of such genres among both the church leaders and the society. This is because, without considering the enormous uses of these genres, they were definitely prohibited by the church missionaries. For instance, praise song, which girls sang on wedding ceremony of their peer girl, is a way to advise that how she would overcome difficulties she might face in future life; nevertheless, this is also completely gone.

Contrary to the current situation of these genres, amazingly, the first Oromo converts who were enslaved, freed, educated and baptized in different parts of the world, and later came back to Oromo land as missionaries have done a remarkable contribution in studying the Oromo traditional songs and other genres of the oral literature. For instance, Gannoo Salban who was renamed as Aster after baptism in Sweden played a significant role, in this regard (Benti, 1999:42). In addition to assisting Onesimos in translating the Bible, and teaching in Nedjo and Nekemte after coming back from exile, she also contributed greatly in writing and studying Oromo folktales, proverbs, riddles and songs of love (*Ibid*).

Nevertheless, in contemporary society of *Sayyoo*, I observed the case differently, while people neglect traditional oral poetries, as unnecessary thing of the past. For instance, once during my fieldwork, I was discussing with an elder about the traditional songs, particularly *geerarsa* genre in our informal conversation. Suddenly, the elder became provoked by remembering the then situation and unconsciously started to sing. As soon as he narrated few stanzas, his daughter forbade him not to say such needless song and warned me not ask the same thing again. Thus, I did not revisit and interviewed the elder again.

#### **5.2.4. The Traditional Social Drama**

According to Finnegan (2005), performance is an element in everyday action. It is also helpful in analyzing and understanding oral expressions and verbal arts. The concept of ‘Social Drama’ developed by Victor Turner (1982) in this regard is one influential approach, which sees the idea of ‘performance’ as a fundamental key to human action and to culture (Finnegan, 2005:87).

The significance of looking performance is necessary to understand the general background of specific ceremony. However, in this study I found it problematic to clearly describe and analyze the *Sayyoo* traditional drama mainly because of two things. These are the banishments of significant stages of the dramas and the interjection of Protestantism into some remnant stages.

On the one hand, as we have seen above, the traditional *Sayyoo* people were celebrating various forms of rituals and festivals. These ceremonies were potential stages on which traditional dramas were performed. Nevertheless, in the contemporary *Sayyoo* Oromo these rituals and festivals have been destroyed. If the stages had survived, it would have been possible for me to observe the traditional dramas. Thus, in this research, since the stages have been demolished, I found it difficult to describe the dramas. Therefore, one would not expect the indigenous social drama anymore, because it is only when the rituals and festivals are practical that performances could be observed. On the other hand, since some of the remnant stages such as birth, marriage and funerals rituals were highly affected by religious interjection and made it difficult to see traditional dramas independently.

Generally, to conclude this chapter, what *Negaso and Crummey (1972)* had forwarded before years ago has captured the situation correctly. They state that it is not unfair to conclude that when one aspect of cultural tradition with which it was associated declined because of the new religion, the others did too; and the culture of the new religion dominant culture should take its place (1972:110).

## CHAPTER SIX

### RELIGION AND EVERYDAY LIFE OF THE SAYYOO

In chapter four, we have seen that Protestantism arrived in *Sayyoo* land at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by UPCA missionaries. In this chapter, I discuss religion and everyday life among the *Sayyoo*. I will ask, in the context where Protestantism dominates the tradition, how does the society live daily life? In other words, how does Protestantism play out in everyday societal life of the *Sayyoo* Oromo?

With this insight, this chapter investigates religion and daily life from the perspectives of how protestant Christianity informed culture and social and spiritual meanings for the *Sayyoo* people. To this point, the chapter follows Bacchiddu's (2007/2012) technique<sup>75</sup> in her study of *Apiao* society of Chile Island. By focusing on the various ways in which the domain of religion penetrates into everyday life of the people, first I try to explain what it means to be protestant Christian for the *Sayyoo* society. Then I look at the people's ways of life in relation to the normative doctrines of protestant churches, since religion is an integral part of one's individual, familial, structural and social systems (Loser W. Rachel et al, 2008:1). This is done mainly by analyzing marriage rituals of the *Sayyoo* as one of rites of passage. The chapter is also dedicated to conceptualizing the everyday religion of the *Sayyoo* by using Gudina Tumsa's holistic theology that adaptively favors co-existence of tradition and Protestantism in some aspects.

#### 6.1. Being Protestant Christian among the Sayyoo Oromo

Grand scheme is normative or a standard that offers a comprehensive metaphysical, moral and spiritual order that makes sense of life. It is influential normal way to act, to live, to be and to perceive the world. However, the concrete existing practices of people and their religious lives appear to be different manner. Yet, grand schemes constitute one part of lived practices; they can significantly offer guidance in the multiple paths of daily life. Thus, the concept of the everyday makes it easier understand the indefinable characteristics of religion as part of a complex ordinary life (Schielke and Debevic, 2012:1-3).

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<sup>75</sup> In her ethnographic study of *Apiao* society of Chile Island, Bacchiddu (2007) made two points clear: what it means to be catholic for the *Apiao* and how Catholicism go through in the everyday sociality of the people, by providing vast ethnographic data (Bacchiddu, 2012:66-81).

In this regard, the holistic theology of Gudina Tumsa that tries to rediscover ‘the total human life’ (Gudina, 2008:70), seems to influence the everyday life of the *Sayyoo*. The theology is aimed at making the message of the Gospel meaningful and relevant to people’s life situation: economic life, political life and social life as whole. It is a theology that was developed out of the existing daily experiences, from people’s dealing with ordinary affairs of life as they experience them in their situation, cultural setting, economic life, political experience and social practice (Gudina, 2008:69). According to Eskiel (2014:31), in the early 1972, Gudina had made clear that all aspects of human condition politics, economic, social and cultural realities cannot be separated from the religious dimension. Eskiel further argue that life of Gudina himself shows that how Christians should involved in different issues of human situations such as politics, economics and socio-cultural aspects mutually with their religious life. Among Ethiopian evangelical leaders of the recent decades, Gudina is an outstanding and prominent church leader, who is considered as a prophet, theologian, martyr and political activist (2014:29-31).

Accordingly, protestant religion constitutes parts of their daily life practices among the *Sayyoo*. In the document he produced in the 1979 which was titled as “The Role of Christian in a Given Society,” Gudina’s clearly puts what it means to be a Christian. He sees Christianity from two dimensions: a Christian is responsible to God and man. A Christian is a transformed person by believing in the Gospel of Christ and who is responsible to confess the Gospel of Christ. At the same time Christian is a person who ‘lives in a given society where he carries the mandate given to him by the Lord of the Church’ (Gudina, 2008:2-6). From this point of view, Protestantism influences the *Sayyoo*’s religious or spiritual and non-spiritual (politics, economy, socio-cultural) activities. Hence, Protestantism directs their individual activities in a comprehensive way; it controls their clothing choices like wearing appropriate clothes, conversation- what to speak, the manner in which one talks, and awareness of everyday activities- what to do how to do in their daily lives. Individual person is expected to obey and live in accordance with the church teachings. The complete personal activities: how to speak, how to react and live with others, what to eat and drink, are guided by religious orientations.

Protestantism in the *Sayyoo* appears to regulate the perceptions of the significance of family. Beginning from its establishment through marriage, the manner of managing familial life, solving marital conflicts and living ‘successful family life’ as they like to say is religiously

oriented. The religious belief manipulates how to take care for their children spiritually and socially. Parents there in *Sayyoo* are responsible to teach their children about their religious principles and ethics. Likewise, it controls the way the people decorate their house too. For instance, I observed in many houses of the people where they enclose pictures of Christ and verses from Bible that help them to remind about Him. I usually observed the Bible on a desk in many houses of the *Sayyoo*.

Protestantism manipulates also the social life of the *Sayyoo* by involving and incorporating them in religious community<sup>76</sup>. According to my informants, church members use their wealth to enhance the ‘work of God’ as they use to call. They organized into Christian associations. Fathers, mothers and the youths have their own separate associations. Through these associations the members contribute to money and render communal services such as visiting the family of dead person, visiting sick, older people and helping others that in turn ‘help the church’. They used their knowledge by servicing as performing leadership, teaching, in the religious community. Among the *Sayyoo*, all these activities are viewed as a positive way to get involved in the religious community.

Accordingly, Protestant Christianity directs the individual, familial and collective everyday life for the *Sayyoo* Oromo and constitutes an arena on which everyday life of the people is experienced. They consider such religious oriented life as an appropriate life. Therefore, protestant church doctrines are some source of morality<sup>77</sup> and ethics in the people’s actual lived experiences among the *Sayyoo* Oromo.

Eller (2007:134) tells us that though the relationship between morality and religion remains unclear, morality is commonly supposed to be the greatest contribution of religion. Religion is valued for its moral qualities that make people ‘good’. All religions and all cultures possess its respective behavioral exhortations and ruling. Even if they are supposed to be originated from nonhuman dominion, religious concepts and morals are embodied in actual life of humans and

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<sup>76</sup> Interview with Assefa Dula, Thur., Mar. 6, 2014, Hawa Galan.

<sup>77</sup> Many philosophers have little succeeded with tiny consent in defining morality; hence, anthropology brings to the discussion of morality as “attention to diversity, to social construction, and to the relativity of language. First then, it is immanently obvious that morality actually exists as a widely varied congeries of moralities, just as religion actually exists as a widely varied congeries of religions” (Eller, 2007: 135).

real social institutions. They are part of ‘actual human minds and personalities as well as shared practices, relations, and institutions.’ Religion legitimates the order of human relations and institutions; members of religious communities believe that their institutions and practices such as their language, knowledge and skills, kinship arrangements and political systems were given by various spiritual sources like the ancestors, the gods, culture heroes of some sort. These spiritual sources morally obligate the people to justify the practices and institutions (Eller, 2007: 145,149). In the same way, the protestant church teachings rationalizes and regulates the order of their social relations, dealings, associations, institutions and their daily activities among the *Sayyoo*.

Similarly, as Morris (2006:148) states, “the ethical principles of Protestant Christians are derived from the Protestant churches ethical principles,” the ethical principles of the *Sayyoo* are derived from the protestant church dogmas originating from the Scriptures and gifts expressed through the Holy Spirit (Morris, 2006:148).

My data resonates the above argument. In all interviews that I conducted with my religious respondents, they identified themselves as Christians. They critically stressed how Christianity and its practices are important for their everyday lives. To the society, Christianity is seen as a source of basic principles and standards by which individual ethics and social moral values are understood. Most of them consider that the basic rules and regulations of the society that direct their everyday life emanate from churches doctrines and teachings. One of my key informants Mitiku said:

*You know, Christianity is life; it directs our entire life on this earth until we transfer from this temporary world to the everlasting heavenly life. Our light is Christ, to whom we always see; our constitution is the Bible, by which we orient our entire life, since it tells us what wrong and right, what to do and not to do. As Christianity gives a holistic and satisfactory response for all of our needs- both spiritual and non-spiritual wants of human beings, thus, all of our spiritual and non-spiritual activities should be guided by Christian principles. Religious activities, political activities, social activities and economic activities- generally our daily individual and social life ought to be within the domain of the Bible-the words of God.<sup>78</sup>*

In this regard, even if they hypothetically originate from the nonhuman realm (Eller, 2007:145,149), the religious concepts and morals are embodied in the consciousness of the

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<sup>78</sup> Interview with Mitiku Tucho, Wed., Apr.09, 2014, Dembi Dollo.

people of *Sayyoo* and their social institutions. They are part of the peoples' minds and personalities as well as shared practices, relations, and institutions. Protestantism and its moral quality produce persons who think and feel certain things and, therefore, do certain things, and bind them in social relationships that support these actions (ibid). Hence, the *Sayyoo* have integrated religion and morality that suits and strengthens their social order throughout time as an ideal normative behavior.

This time, since Christianity is turned out to be a source of moral principle in the society, being or becoming Christian is perceived as ethically good and morally right' in ordinary life of the *Sayyoo* Oromo. Therefore, goodness or badness, rightness and wrongness, justice and injustice, correctness and incorrectness and being proper and improperness are judged mostly on the basis of Christian values. However, Eller (2007:136) reminded us morality refers to 'good behavior' but vague, because, what is 'good' is culturally and conditionally relative with varying degrees of goodness and varying sets of standards, in any particular society. Generally, being Christian, attending church, participating in different prayers programs, obeying the words of God - generally being 'strong Christian' is seen as accepted achievement in the *Sayyoo* society. Accordingly, a remarkably large number of people with whom I had conversations regularly attend church. There is a very strong belief to be a Christian, and spiritual, committed to church obligations, other spiritual gatherings and spiritual conferences in the *Sayyoo*. Galane, a college student who went to Dembi Dollo from Hawa Galan to attend her college education identified herself as a Christian. She said:

*As a Christian, I have my own prayer time everyday in the morning before I go to school, and during night before I go to bed. I go to church twice or three times a week. Every Sunday morning I have to attend Sunday service, every Saturday afternoon I must attend Christian students' fellowship and Thursday afternoon I go to church to get training on spiritual songs, because I am a singer in a church choir. There are also different worshipping programs out of church; example, Tuesday and Friday during night, there is prayer at two individuals' home. There are also other unplanned prayers; for instance, when my friends come to visit me, we will have prayer time at my home and vice versa. If my church arranged spiritual conferences, I obviously participate in it and usually I attend spiritual conferences organized by other 'bible believers' church. Anyways as much as I can, I do not want to miss any spiritual prayer and worshipping.*

In addition to church, most of the respondents practice worship programs in their locality (communion, and individuals' home) based on neighborhood and their proximity to one another.

They offered three reasons in this regard. First, these local places are gatherings through which the members supervise one another than at churches. Second, they are helpful in strengthening social solidarity of believers. Thirdly, these programs are very relaxed and easy to follow. The people easily integrated the worship, as it could go with the busy everyday lives of the *Sayyoo*. Such kinds of gatherings as big spiritual conferences are considered as very important because of miracle stories happened there. Spiritual conferences are events commonly understood to serve the spiritual needs of all kinds of people who join the gatherings and ask for the help of God.

They pray every day, usually in the morning and night, or some times more than two times a day. Apart from 'ideal' regular daily praying there are also sudden kinds of praying both in private and being in-group. Every Christian guest who visits others home has spiritual obligation to pray for the family, and every family who receive a Christian guest is expected to ask to make a prayer for the family members. Hence, for the guest, as there is a session for eating and drinking, time should be allocated also for prayer.

Generally, Gudina's holistic theology that stresses that 'gospel applied both to the temporal aspect of life on the earth and the timelessness of the next' (Eskeil, 2014:31), has influenced the everyday life of the people. It directs how they perceive what it means to be a Christian and how they should handle their spiritual and non-spiritual aspects of their everyday life. Thus, it could be concluded that religion interferes and regulates daily life of members of protestant churches among the *Sayyoo*.

## **6.2. The Intersection of Protestantism in Everyday Life of the Sayyoo Oromo**

The Intersection of Protestant Christian practices and ordinary life of the *Sayyoo* Oromo is better understood if it is seen from the perspectives of religious practices integrated in the rites of passage rituals and ceremonies. Van Gennep (1960) and Victor Turner (1964) have noted that almost all human societies use ceremonial rites to mark major transitions in the social status of individuals. As Neitz, (2011:46) point out, one way of understanding religion is the analysis of rituals, practices and symbols, because meaning-making could not be understood separately from people's feelings, their embodied perceptions of pain and joy, their uncertainties and desires as they moved through their lives, interacting with others, including religious and other authorities. For that reason, to look at the everyday life of the society in relation to church doctrines, I

purposely focused on rites of passages rituals ceremonies in which Christian character is involved, because ‘ritual involves different forms of action from everyday life’ (Mitchell, 2010:617). The logical reason behind selecting rites of passage rituals as adequate understanding of the *Sayyoo* everyday religion is not only the above rationale that Neitz (2011) provide, but also the fact that I observed – these rituals are aspects in which cultural tradition is relatively conserved and able to survive, because of the adaptive response of the church among the *Sayyoo*.

In chapter four, though I argued that the traditional Oromo culture such as indigenous religion, festivals and rituals has been lost to a great extent, rites of passages such as birth, marriage and funeral rituals are aspects of social-cultural life in which relatively indigenous cultural components are mixed with protestant Christian practices and functioning among the *Sayyoo* Oromo. In the next sub topic, I will show how religion has become an integral part of everyday life of the *Sayyoo* Oromo by using a form of marriage called *hiikkannoo*. This demands describing different forms of marriage in brief.

### **6.2.1. Forms of Marriage among the Sayyoo**

There are six culturally found forms of marriage arrangements among the *Sayyoo* Oromo: *Naqata*, *Aseennaa*, *Isgootaa*, *Butii*, *Hiikkannoo*, *Sokkaa*. *Naqata* is the most preferable, but costly form of marriage in which both families of the couples and the couples themselves negotiate based on their interests. *Aseennaa* is a form of marriage in which the female is interested in the boy who has no interest, and goes to his home, without his intentions. *Isgootaa* is acted in the case when the two couple loves each other, but the boy has no enough money or other things to pay as a bride wealth for her family. In that case, the boy goes to her family’s home and pleads them so that they give him permission to marry her.

*Butii* (Abduction) is another form of marriage, which is performed when the boy loves the girl, but she does not love him or he is unable to pay the bride wealth. Then he abducts her and marries her by force. *Hiikkannoo* is the other type of marriage that is based on both partners interest, in which they do not care for the interests of both families and is relatively economical. *Sokkaa* as well is a category of marriage form, in case when the boy feels affection for the girl, but she do not: in this form of marriage, he begs to make sympathetic by using different mechanisms such as praising her via songs. Generally, some of these forms are based on mutual

consent of both parties, for example, *hiikkannoo*, *naqata*, and some are partial partner interest, for example, *butii*, *isgootaa*, *aseennaa*. *Sokkaa* form of marriage lies between the two options. Among these forms of marriage, those that are based on mutual interest of both partners are acceptable to Protestantism. Mutual negotiation is the basic initial step for the second, because church does not teach them pre-marriage education unless the relation is mutual negotiation of the two individuals. Other forms that are based on partial interest of the partner are not acceptable by protestant churches.

### **6.2.2. Marriage Procedures of the Sayyoo**

In today's Sayyoo society, especially among protestant Christians, *hiikkannoo* is the most preferable and *naqataa* is the second preferable, because both are based on mutual interest, but the latter is comparatively uneconomical. Thus, let me highlight some procedures of *hiikkannoo*, since it is one of the most preferable and the most involved forms of marriage in *Sayyoo*.

There are many processes of actions and events included in the progression of all forms of marriage in general. Likewise, in '*hiikkannoo*' form of marriage in particular, the process starts by looking for /selecting marriage partner and the mutual negotiation of both partners, as the essential initial step in the course of the ceremony. The ways in which the couple chooses each other involves traditionally arranged procedure and spiritually oriented one. The traditional way of choosing one's own partner is based on the set of beliefs and customs seated in traditional culture. These include principles such as, long term studying each other like counting the clan lineages, examining conduct and behaviors, exploring the social status and classification.

In counting each other's lineages, one should make sure that the lineages difference of his/her marriage partner by counting up to seven ancestors. According to the customary law of the *Sayyoo*, marriage partner should be outside of one's own lineage, counting back to seven generations. Marriage within one's own lineage is not allowed, to prevent the blend of people of the same kin, rather, it must be arranged outside one's clan or lineage. Among the Mecha Oromo in general, and the *Sayyoo* in particular, marriage is seen as shedding of blood, which is not accepted to shed one's own blood. The idea was taken from, the sheds of the women maiden blood during the first sexual intercourse with the groom. Therefore, marriage within a lineage is seen as marriage between brother and sister, which is a great taboo and is called *haraamuu*

(incest), a terrible sin (Benti, 1999:16). The *Sayyoo* people are still implementing these ideas in choosing their marriage partner.

The other essential thing is considering the socially constructed status and classifications. According to the *Sayyoo* oral tradition, there are socially classified categories of people such as the *shammaanee or tumtuu (blacksmiths)*, the *garbaa* (slaves), the *budaa* (evil eyed), and *tolchaa* (witchdoctors and evil actors). These classifications were made in the past. At present, though these categories are considered as derogative and illegal, yet, they have significant meaning in the society. Despised groups are not chosen as a marriage partners.

Besides, personal and parent's behavior or acceptance in the society is also given consideration. The *Sayyoo* oral literature has numerous proverbs and sayings that reveal this reality. Proverbs such as, '*duuba ilaalanii keessaa dhuguu; haadha ilaalanii intala fuudhu*', which is roughly translated as 'as one observe the glass, before drinking from within; study the mother before marrying daughter' are still functional in the *Sayyoo* Oromo. Hard working, skilled, responsible, industrious, resourceful and creative men/women are measured as excellent and desirable spouses. People with these characteristics have a better opportunity of being involved in a relationship, and are valued and respected within the community. Laziness, unreliability, irresponsibility and bitterness - as well as intemperance in alcohol drinking are attitudes and defects openly condemned among the *Sayyoo*.

Then, the other way of selecting marriage partner is through spiritual orientation. There is a belief that says marriage partner is a 'gift of God'. Most of the time, people make marriage as a big agenda in their prayer. A marriage partner should be from similar religion, i.e. a protestant Christian must marry a protestant Christian. Most of the people pay special attention to attributes that are used as a measurement of spirituality<sup>79</sup> to decide marriage partner. These may include church attendance, serving in the church and participation in different spiritual activities. Church also frequently organizes youths' spiritual education, mainly by aiming at helping them to find a good marriage partner and to foresee how to establish successful family.

After selecting their partner, they discuss about lots of things to reach mutual negotiation. The issues of discussion include the types and amounts of bride wealth and the seasonal schedule of

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<sup>79</sup> The term is used to describe the everyday ways of ordinary people attend their spiritual life (McGuire, 2008:98).

the wedding ceremony. Following the mutual negotiation, the partners report the decision to their church, so that the church will give them a pre-marriage spiritual course or what they call *barnoota gaa'ila* meaning 'marriage education'. The teaching is followed by fixing a wedding day, a particular day when the wedding ceremony would be performed.

On the wedding day, the ceremony begins in the church. Besides relatives, friends and neighbors, church principals, leaders, pastors, priest and church quire are invited to facilitate and escort the program. Participants are expected to sing spiritual songs. When they approached, his mother with neighboring women stands in front of the house to welcome the couple and the accompanying group. When they arrive home, there are different religious events and activities to be performed, before getting in the house. These activities include, reading verses from the bible, preaching, prayers, making oath as a promise to live with each other up to death, ring exchanging that symbolizes a confirmation of their marriage. These events take place according to the respective church regulations. For instance, in the case of oath making there are common actions, symbols, and common words of the promise. Let us see briefly a case I observed during my fieldwork.

The pastor and the couple stand in fronts of the people, each of them holding a candle. The pastor first glow his candle, then the couple blaze their candles from the pastors' at the same time. This action symbolizes the couples' searching and finding each other, from many boys and girls through the prayer. Next, the couple gives their candles to the pastor and takes the single candle from the pastor, to indicate the combination of the couple as 'a single body'. The audiences clap their hands to praise the God for His help. Following that the pastor says, "*This moment is an instant at which the couple gives their words in promising for each other.*" The pastor order the couple repeat each word he says; and the male partner begins then the female partner goes after turn by turns.

**The pastor**

*Today, (Naming the date, month, year)*  
*Me, (mentioning the name of the partner)*  
*Standing before God and His people,*  
*My 'sister'/'brother' (stating name)*  
*In all situation; in his/her ups and downs*  
*In his/her sickness and healthiness*

**The couple**

*Today, (naming the date, month, year)*  
*Me, (mentioning the name of the partner)*  
*Standing before God and His people,*  
*My 'sister'/'brother' (stating name)*  
*In all situation; in his/her ups and downs*  
*In his/her sickness and healthiness*

*In his/her happiness and sadness  
Accepting him/her as my own body,  
Loving him/her equally as I loves myself  
Standing in front of God and His people  
I accept him/her into my life,  
As the promising husband/wife.*

*In his/her happiness and sadness  
Accepting him/her as my own body,  
Loving him/her equally as I loves my self  
Standing in front of God and His people  
I accept him/her into my life,  
As the promising husband/wife.<sup>80</sup>*

Two explanations are given about this oath making. First, it shows recognition of the relationship by the religious institution. The oath justifies the establishment of family- the basic social unit what the *Sayyoo* call *mana*- family. After the oath, the *Sayyoo* calls the male as *abbaa manaa* (father of the house) and the female as *haadha manaa* (mother of the house). Second, it explains the way their future life should be. The oath has significant influence in shaping the family life. It forces the two individuals to live together as a ‘single body’ forever. They are obligated to stay mutually under whatever circumstances: the sickness, healthy, happiness and sadness. This means, neither polygamy no divorce is allowed after the marriage. However, in the past *Sayyoo* Oromo culture, there was polygamy since it was seen as privilege of good social status. Divorce was available in such rare cases as behavioral incompatibility between husband and wife childlessness. After that, when the church principals complete their part, the couples get inside the home and the whole participants who accompany the wedding are offered with feasts.

In the past, according to the traditional culture of the Oromo, the occasion takes different form. Before the couple enters the house, the groom slaughters *Hoolaa Rakoo*- a sheep that is slaughtered on the wedding day. On the occasion, the groom slaughter the sheep on gate of the house and step over the blood and his wife follow him. According to my informants, the custom of slaughtering *hoolaa rakoo*, symbolizes two meanings. On the one hand, it refers the boy is calling up on his parents for mercy, since he is going to depart from them. My informant on the matter clearly states that the customary laws of the *Sayyoo* strictly stress that slaughtering *hoolaa rakoo* is essential element of wedding ceremony; even the poor should cut *caffee* (a kind of grass) instead of the sheep, for critical meaning it contains.

After public performance back to the family, the procedure takes customary ways nowadays. The next day to the wedding, during the morning the bride introduces herself to his parents, relatives and neighbors, the action that is known as *mul’achuu* (showing self) among the *Sayyoo*. This is

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with Fitsum Geneti, Sunday, March 9, 2014, Hawa Galan.

not through orally narrating her life history; rather *mul'achuu* is by giving those drinks and foods. After eating and drinking, the people do not give back the materials from which they drink and eat; instead, they are expected to pay some amount of cash and take the materials with them. The thing may be coffee cup, glass, *amoolee* or *soogidda* - a salt bar.

The celebration is continuous for next consecutive five days. Within these five days, the whole community members come to his home, contributing cash or items on the account of cheerfulness to the wedding. In this case, the social value of the partners is crucial, because it is kind of reciprocal exchange in which the couple receives the same amount of what they contribute before their wedding or they pay it back on the same occasion. Among the *Sayyoo*, all the gifts are registered with name of the donor for the purpose of knowing and paying back the exact amount of the donation.

On the fifth day, there is a ritual called *shanan* meaning the *fifth day*, as 'five' in the Oromo is represented by the word *shan*. It is a ritual celebrated for renaming the female partner, since the family and neighbors of the male partner restrain themselves from mentioning the bride's name. Among the society, it is unlawful and *safuu* to mention her name. She deserves respect; hence, she has to be called by the name that shows admiration. In addition, since she is from another lineage, the ritual also shows her acquisition of full membership to the new family/lineage.

The new name given is common based on the seniority order of the male partner along with his brothers in his family. For instance, the wife of a first-born son is named as *soorettii* (the richest); the wife of the second sons is *badhaatuu* (the prosperous). Accordingly, the wife of the third, fourth, fifth born son is *hortuu* (the birth giver), *toluu* (the hearted), *magartuu* (the budding) respectively. The wife of the last son is named as *kosii* (the remnant), because she is the one who remain with his family taking care of them than the others and inherit the room after the parent passed away. At the same time, names are given for the husband's junior brothers, since it has reciprocal principle to call the boys to mention their actual names. Accordingly, the senior brother among unmarried is *ulfataa* (the respected), and the next is *Abbaa simboo* (the graceful), the third brother is *Abbaa kaarruu* (the smiled/clown). The junior unmarried son is named as *Abbaa jabbii* (the owner of calf), because when his preceding brothers are young and able to plough and other hard works, most probably he is at the stage of shepherd. Likewise, all family

members of both sides also refrain themselves from mentioning one another's name, thus, the in-laws call each other as *Soddaa* to refer one another.

After the wedding is celebrated at the home of the groom, negotiation between both the parents of the couple follows; the social elders on behalf of both partners start *jaarsummaa*<sup>81</sup> - the negotiation process. Their discussion highly center at the kind and amounts of the bride wealth takes different appointments what, how and when, to do necessary things. After the mutual negotiation of both parents, the couple goes back to the home of the bride's family with the purpose of *mul'chuu*, a case in which the husband introduces himself to her parent. It is after these happenings that the two sides are recognized as in laws and relatives.

### **6.2.3. Marriage Attendance among the Sayyoo**

In the traditional *Sayyoo* culture, every kind of marriage is not only a matter for the individuals, but concerns the nuclear families, extended families, neighbors, relatives and even the community (Benti, 1999:17). Marriage that is not recognized by the community, the families and the elders is not culturally acceptable; the couples are referred as husband and wife; only after the society recognize the relationship in their collective context. In the series of the marriage process family, neighbors, relatives and the whole community take part in different ways. The family has numerous responsibilities to discharge while son or daughter marries. When the son is young enough to get married, the family supports him through donating bride wealth expenses, arranging and organizing house, preparing feasts, presenting different forms of gifts for the spouses. The neighbors too have considerable roles in the ceremony; they arrange different work-parties in decorating the dwelling as preparation for the ceremony. The *Jaarsa Biyyaa* on behalf of the two sides takes fundamental part of responsibility in the process of negotiating the two families of the spouse in order to make them affine.

Likewise, nowadays, church as an institution too has significant role by officially legitimizing the husband-wife relationships. It also determines wedding attendances of the *Sayyoo*. I have observed different circumstances in which church plays a great role in influencing the social relations in cases of marriage. For instance, church pressured the wedding attendance of the

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<sup>81</sup>*Jaarsummaa* is Afaan Oromo term and adjective of '*jaarsaa*' literally means 'an old man'. Most of the time, *jaarsummaa* refers to two or more men who are respected members of the community called upon for mediation whenever there is dispute or conflict (Dejene, 1999:70). However, in this context, it is an act of going between the two families of the couple to make them relatives.

people. It could impose sanctions on individual Christians not to take party on wedding ceremony of non-Christians. I have observed, when church forbids its members to participate in the non-Christians wedding celebration, except contributing gifts after the wedding day. Even, Christians are not allowed to participate on Christian wedding if the marriage is not organized by church, or if the couples do not follow church principles. The following cases would explain the argument very well.

Raga who is a Full Gospel church member in a village called Hawa Fincho married wife from the same church. Before marriage, the couple had started to learn a pre-marriage education offered by the church. However, after some times, they married each other before finishing the lesson, because of certain private reason. Amazingly, on the wedding day, only ten to fifteen individuals accompany the couple. Even, no one among his family members has involved. In fact, they prepared feast at home. When the small group arrived at home, only his mother, father, sisters, few relatives and neighbors were at home to welcome the couple. There was no church principal, priest, and pastor who could preach the Bible, make oath and bless the couple. Thus, the couple entered the house without undertaking any religious events. However, on next day, people were going to the house visiting him, contributing cash, eating and drinking.

This was because the wedding was not in accordance with the church regulation. If members participate on such kinds of wedding ceremony, the church would automatically punish them by preventing them from participating in spiritual services for a certain period. They could not sing in a church choir, preach the Bible, and their responsibility in the church would be taken up from them. This punishment in their view is very serious. It is seen as a serious failure in the 'calling from God', and therefore, nobody wants to take such risks. Hence, in the case of *Sayyoo*, the community participates on wedding ceremony, only if the couples are members of a church and if the marriage is arranged through church. Unless the church recognizes and announces to its members, they refrain to participate on the wedding. This shows how much Protestantism has become a part of the everyday life of the *Sayyoo*. Generally, in the contemporary *Sayyoo*, marriage is recognized with both community and religious institutions; people in *Sayyoo* use the expression 'proper marriage' to refer to the weddings that are guaranteed by both the customary and religious ceremonies.

### **6.3. Holistic Theology: Co-existence of Traditions and Protestantism among the Sayyoo**

This subtitle conceptualizes the contemporary everyday life of the *Sayyoo* as practices of interwoven cultural traditions culture and elements of Protestantism. The section is based on the promises of Gudina Tumsa's holistic theology. The foundational principle of the holistic theology is to contextualize the evangelism of a certain people in accordance with their real life situations - politics, economy and socio-cultural realism. Similarly, it claims that church should adaptively respond to all changes in human conditions (Eskiel, 2014:45-48). As we have seen in the marriage ceremony of the *Sayyoo*, the holistic theology tolerates their everyday life to adaptively draw from diverse sources: religious and nonreligious sources, i.e., cultural traditions.

In the other areas of the Oromo, religious and cultural syncretism of blending Islamic elements with those from traditional religion is also evident. The great majority of Shewa Oromo, who has long accepted Orthodox Christianity religion, is also still integrating the Christian religious practices with their own indigenous beliefs (Jeylan W. Hussen, 2004:104). In the case of the *Sayyoo*, most of the rites of passage ritual ceremonies consist of several separate and interwoven parts of both Protestant elements and the traditional cultural practices.

The above presented ethnographic data on marriage roughly indicates that the *Sayyoo* marriage ceremonies are mixture of Christian and traditional components. Such marriage practices of the *Sayyoo* are used to understand and interpret patterns of their creative cultural identity with its interwoven diverse elements from religious and traditions. Initially, the arrangements, the process, events and actions, the objects and the material cultures, the sites and spaces, religious beliefs and practices, the transformed traditions, the taboo cultures involved in marriage ceremony provide significant ways of mapping the co-existence of religious elements and traditions among the *Sayyoo*. The removal or adding these issues and others outstandingly used to open a fascinating discussion about the adaptive relationship between religion and culture. Thus, based on the various components of activities and events within the case, the marriage ceremony of the *Sayyoo* can be differentiated into three interrelated segments that make a new sense of what marriage for the society is. A number of its parts are dominated by church doctrines, several are dominated by cultural traditions and others are subjected to intersection of the two, an argument that would be more understandable in the subsequent illustrations.

### **A. The Customary Features in the Sayyoo Marriage**

There are quite customary practices that are melted with the protestant Christianity elements in the celebration of marriage ceremony among the *Sayyoo*. This part of the wedding ritual undoubtedly contains the beliefs, values, customs, and the taboos incorporated within the traditional culture of the *Sayyoo* Oromo. Accordingly, the five days consecutive celebration, the *shanan* (the fifth day ritual celebration), the naming of the wife and the unmarried brothers of the husband, the meanings attached to the names, the particular form the marriage illustrate the traditional cultural aspects in the ceremony. Further, the societal involvement in the rite: the reciprocal based gifts, the family responsibilities, the duty of the elders, the *jaarsummaa* (the negotiation) procedures and the task of the community are aspects of traditional culture that are blended together with church doctrines in the marriage rituals.

### **B. The Dominance of the Protestant Church Doctrines**

The wedding ceremony from the beginning to the end is dominated by Christian principles. The juncture purely shows the distinct domination of the protestant church doctrines and teachings. The wedding ceremony begins in the church by religious ceremony. The religious ceremony is celebrated in the crowded church: couples and the accompaniers of the spouses join up in front of the altar, while relatives, friends and fellow peoples fill the church benches. All the activities, the songs, the prayers, the blessings, the Biblical preaches, oath making, interchanging rings, ‘language and words’ are of protestant contents.

These activities authorize the spiritual teachers and principals with the religious practices to undermine the local communities’ supremacy together with the customary experiences, in favor of ‘purifying’ the marriage. For instance, in the traditional Oromo marriage every blessing is given by elders, with its own procedure; it is known who starts the blessing and who follows among the elders. The traditional blessing has its own unique symbolic materials such as *buna-qalaa* (coffee beans mixed with butter), milk, *coqorsaa* (a type of grass), and uniquely common words that have deep cultural meanings. Nevertheless, in recent days blessing is offered by church principals, priests, pastors, Bible teachers; the church principals invite one another among their comrades whom they want to commence the blessing, no material culture is important, than the Bible. They simply put hands on the heads of the partners, close their eyes and mention Biblical verses and examples that are sufficiently enough in the present wedding ceremonies.

The spiritual songs replaced the different forms of traditional songs. In the customary marriage of the Oromo, there were many cultural songs and dances. Most of the songs were very important; some are songs of advice to the couple who are going to lead their independent life. However, church played a significant role in the destruction of these Oromo traditional songs (Benti, 1999:64). For instance, the following verse shows the traditional song that the neighboring fellow girls were used to sing to advise the bride.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <i>Manni alagaawoo laga</i>                    | <i>the house of the an alien is a trap</i>                  |
| <i>Attam goonee bulla addooyyee</i>            | <i>how could we survive 'Addooyyee'<sup>82</sup>,</i>       |
| <i>Halagaa gabbaranii</i>                      | <i>being kind for the alien</i>                             |
| <i>Akkas goonee bulla yaa Addooyyee</i>        | <i>it is via these ways that we could survive</i>           |
| <i>Addooyyee koo yaa abalu,</i>                | <i>Oh my Addooyyee! (mentioning her name)</i>               |
| <i>Wantan sii dhaamuu</i>                      | <i>these are my advices for you</i>                         |
| <i>Abiddikee hin dhaaminii</i>                 | <i>do not let the fire go out in your homestead</i>         |
| <i>Gandaa si hin waaminii</i>                  | <i>let not your husband call you from the village</i>       |
| <i>Kanaan si dhaaninii</i>                     | <i>let him not beat you when he comes home</i>              |
| <i>Kophaa mana hin aarfatanii</i>              | <i>while your husband is not at home, don't make a fire</i> |
| <i>Kophaa nyaatti siin jedhu</i>               | <i>they say to you 'she is eating alone'</i>                |
| <i>Gom'itee hin taa'inii</i>                   | <i>do not sit down idly</i>                                 |
| <i>Maal yaadde? siin jedhuu</i>                | <i>what are you contemplating, he will ask you</i>          |
| <i>Afaan dhiphadhuu, garaa bal'adhuu</i>       | <i>have narrower mouth, and wider stomach</i>               |
| <i>Siifkennen baadhuu, siin jedhan baadhuu</i> | <i>eat what is given for you, able their contempt</i>       |
| <i>Wantan siifjibbuu</i>                       | <i>these are things I hate for you</i>                      |
| <i>Laqqaamsa amaatii</i>                       | <i>mother in-laws' irritation</i>                           |
| <i>Laqqaamsa dhirsaa</i>                       | <i>husbands' frustration</i>                                |
| <i>Yaa qarree nagaa nagaa</i>                  | <i>Oh!, qarree<sup>83</sup>! Bye</i>                        |
| <i>Durbummaan egaa hin hafee</i>               | <i>no more virginity</i>                                    |
| <i>Nadhummaatu harka angafee</i>               | <i>motherhood is coming<sup>84</sup></i>                    |

This song contains enormous advice for the girl who is going to marry. By incising her about difficulties she may face, it tells her how she could pass through them. It advises her to be capable of managing her future life, being generous for others and well disciplined. Nevertheless, despite the fact that these and other songs are very important for the society, the missionaries' ethnocentrism played a vital role in its devastation. Nowadays, protestant spiritual songs replaced this and other cultural songs.

<sup>82</sup> *Addooyyee* is a name that companion girls used to call one other. It shows their friendship

<sup>83</sup> *Qarree* was girls' hair cutting style that shows her virginity or unmarried.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Etanesh Kena, sat., Feb. 15, 2014, Hawa Galan.

### **C. Matching Components of Church and Customary Elements in the Sayyoo Marriage**

At the very beginning, the situation of searching and or selecting for marriage spouse is determined by a strict parallelism of essential traditional aspects and Christian parameters. This means, both protestant church teachings and local traditions have significant role in deciding whom and how to marry.

On the one hand, Protestantism forces the people choose their spouse based on the criteria of the church doctrine and teachings. This includes the similarity of religion (the institution), degree of spirituality, which might be measured by church attendance, participation in various spiritual services like singing in church quire, preaching Bible other measurements that characterize the couple as strong Christian. Above all, most of the people strongly believe that a protestant Christian should marry a protestant. These attributes show an obvious dominance of Protestant church in determining whom to get married to.

On the other hand, deciding marriage partner is correspondingly pressured by the culturally set decisive factors. These cultural factors include, counting each other's lineages, assessments of the social classifications and examining personal behaviors that follows the traditional way. Thus, the contemporary marriage of the *Sayyoo* emerged as the process of co-existence of the customary elements and church orientations.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION

This study dealt with the influences of the expansion of Protestantism on the traditional cultures of the *Sayyoo* Oromo. The pressures came from two external forces: politics and religion breaking down of the plausibility structure of the two Oromo institutions: *gadaa* system and Oromo indigenous religion. The two are very much intertwined. As Asafa (2012:130) rightly puts, these factors have suppressed the production, reproduction and distribution of the intellectual knowledge of the society by destroying the *Sayyoo* Oromo institutions and culture. The disturbance of these institutions consequently resulted in extreme loses of the Oromo knowledge system. Since the Oromo were mainly transmitting the historical and cultural practices of the past through oral communications, our current knowledge of the social and cultural history of the *Sayyoo* Oromo is very limited and fragmented. Thus in this thesis I argued that the culture change among the *Sayyoo* Oromo is fundamentally related to the expansion of Protestantism that has broken down the system of the knowledge transmission.

My historical data evidently show that the expansion of Protestantism among the *Sayyoo* took place through two interrelated dimensions: donation and conversion. Donation and Protestantism have the hand and glove relationship. I used Rambo's (1993) stage model theory to explain the conversion of the *Sayyoo* to Protestantism. It attempted to show the political, religious, economic and social context of the *Sayyoo* as critical contextual factors for the conversion. The missionaries preached the people and converted them to western forms of Christian culture and civilization. They preached against the customary institutions and successfully destroyed them. The missionaries' teachings played a significant role in distorting the peoples' knowledge of the indigenous culture that left a gap between the current generation of *Sayyoo* and their ancestors, which resulted in the tremendous loses of the Oromo knowledge system and the ways of cultural life.

My ethnographic data from the *Sayyoo* partially confirms Benti's (1999:93) view. He argued that the experience is comparable with the 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary movement approached to the African cultures, "by the assumption of *Tabula rasa*, starting from vacuum, cleansing Africans minds from primitive, 'superstition', and inscribing the same minds with Western form of Christianity, cultural beliefs and 'civilization'" (Benti, 1999:93). It is early to conclude the

missionaries cleansed the minds of the *Sayyoo* from their traditional culture and inscribe the same minds with western form Christianity, cultural beliefs and civilization as Benti argued.

In fact, the *Sayyoo* Oromo culture, the customs, the rituals, ceremonies, taboos, belief systems, legends, myths, the material cultures, traditional medicines and healings, the costumes, the food cultures were lost. The oral literature and verbal arts, the folktale, proverbs, riddles, sayings, music, songs, folkdances, cultural sports were affected. However, my ethnographic data about the *Sayyoo* clearly show that there are elements of their traditional culture that are still practiced being integrated with Christian elements. Practices such as birth rituals, marriage ceremonies and death rituals are some instances in which we can observe some elements of tradition mixed with Christian components.

What Bartels forwarded twenty-four years ago has captured the situation correctly. He (1990:15) asserts that, though the Oromo approach of experiencing the divine has continued more or less unchanged, several rituals, social institutions, and the ways in which these were expressed have been extremely weakened and in realty submerged in the new ritual cover (Bartels, 1990:15, cited in Asafa, 2012).

After dealing with the impact of Protestantism on *Sayyoo* cultural traditions, I proceeded to Protestantism and everyday life of the *Sayyoo*. How they are living in the context where Protestantism dominates the tradition and how Protestantism plays out in the everyday life of the *Sayyoo*. In this regard, my data show that the *Sayyoo*'s daily life is dominated by religious expressions, while Protestantism penetrates into each activities of their everyday life. Particularly, by focusing on *hiikkaannoo* form of marriage of the *Sayyoo* I argue that the marriage as significant rite of passage is an important occasion on which habits of Christianity is exposed and it is such well organized form of everyday religiosity. Even though the society has their own marriage custom, many of its aspects were changed and replaced with elements from Protestant Christianity. This fact resonates Eller's (2007:196) explanation that foreign religious authorities held factual control of institutions like marriage, and the Church interjected itself into marriage arrangements and bride wealth payments in order to influence who married whom and how. The *Sayyoo* Oromo have adopted a powerful force from outside and kept parts of their own

culture and they reformed their marriages by means co- existing of traditional culture and protestant principles.

Generally, the destruction of *Sayyoo* culture and institutions by the expansion of Protestantism could be seen from two points of view. On the one hand, the destruction of these cultural traditions and institutions was not positive achievement in the past. As Gemetchu (1993: 92-102) rightly puts it, *Oromummaa* (Oromoness) is understood in relation to its *jiruu fi jireenya* (works and life), worldview, traditional and cultural knowledge that constitute the Oromo identity. The cultural traditions and institutions of the *Sayyoo* were the way the people understood themselves, the world, the others and every things. Thus, the study and reconstruction of the destroyed Oromo cultural traditions, in the present-day *Sayyoo* reality, is part of the problem that needs attention and careful handling in order to be aware of the current and to foresee the future. Oromo scholars should loopback to the past, the oral tradition, the oral literature and verbal arts, the olden customs and material cultures to asses, understand and criticize the present.

On the other hand, the contemporary situation of some aspects of the destroyed cultures because of the expansion of Protestantism is progressive. For instance, the *Sayyoo* were naming their children by the Christian or Biblical names and the Oromo names were being changed during baptism. There was a tendency to consider Oromo names pagan or secular even among Oromo theologians (Benti, 1999:125). In recent times, the situation is progressive, because the church is not changing the Oromo names during baptism. Today majority of *Sayyoo* Oromo Christians name their children by Oromo names. They do not claim that Biblical names qualify to fit Christianity. Similarly, one of the Oromo yearly festivals, *irreecha* is becoming very important among the educated and young *Sayyoo* Oromo people. Many of the *Sayyoo* people who are able to access are participating on *irreecha* festival at Bishoftu, Hora Harsadi. Thus, such awareness created among the contemporary *Sayyoo* indicates that there is optimistic future for revitalizing the other cultural traditions that have been destroyed.

Many scholars have recognized various important examples of how, Christian churches adaptively responded to cultural meanings and practices of the diverse peoples who had converted to Christianity (McGuire, 2008:191). She further argued that significant religious syncretism is necessary for any religion existing outside its foundational culture. Similarly, as an

effort to respond to the question of identity and cultural revival that was occupying the minds of many people including theologians and church leaders in the time of Ethiopian revolution the concept of holistic theology has been developed in the 1970s. The theology promised to make the message of the Gospel meaningful and relevant to the people's life: concrete daily experiences, situations, cultural setting, economic life, political experience and social practice (Gudina, 2008:69). It also claims that church and church leaders should be adaptive to the constantly changing situations of human life. In fact, holistic theology of Gudina Tumsa was grown out of the 1960s numerous economic, political, cultural and theological changes that were happening nationally and internationally. In those chaotic times, the church leaders were succeeded by new ways of thinking, working and adaptively responding to these changes and challenges (Eskiel, 2014:48).

However, as we have seen in chapter five, the promises of Gudina Tumsa's holistic theology that contextualizes the church in accordance with the culture of the people are not fully exercised in the contemporary *Sayyoo*. Hence, theologians and church leaders should make efforts to achieve the mission of the holistic theology. The *Sayyoo* people who became Christians had pre-existing cultural understanding such as social structure, language, gender norms and everyday cultural practices. The practices of Christianity in their everyday lives, had to be linked with their own culture and not presume that they would by some means be re-socialized as Judean in order to practice the religion of the first Christians. Protestantism has been admired for using Afaan Oromo as a worshipping language. In fact, this has been a source of attribution for many Oromo to embrace Protestantism. As we have seen in chapter six, the church adaptively respond to some cultural traditions that such as birth, marriage and funeral rituals of the *Sayyoo*. However, I argue that this is not sufficient, and the churches should be accommodative of various other aspects of culture that are very much linked to the everyday life of the society. My argument is that every culture has something vital to offer in facilitating process of growth. Without the predatory expansion of single civilization, all society's wider cultural identities should be allowed to develop by balancing the combination of many diverse cultures. *"No human society should be forced to give up its cultural identity without making a critical contribution to the larger reality of which it becomes a part. That remains true whether the larger reality is national culture, pan African culture, or universal culture"* (Asmarom, 2006: ix).

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