

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY**  
**SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN MARRIAGE  
PRACTICES IN BACHO WOREDA, SOUTH WEST  
SHOWA, OROMIYA NATIONAL REGIONAL STATE**

**BY**

**ASHENAFI ZENEBE**



**NOVEMBER, 2012**

**ADDIS ABABA**

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY**  
**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

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**STUDIES OF ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL**  
**FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF**  
**MASTER OF ARTS IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

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## Glossary of Local Terms

<i>Aaraqee</i>	Local bear in which its alcoholic content is very high
<i>Aseennaa</i>	Marriage by entry
<i>Atteetee</i>	Women ritual ceremony
<i>Badda-daree</i>	Temperate
<i>Buti</i>	Abduction
<i>Caffee</i>	Council
<i>Coqorssa</i>	An ever green grass
<i>Farsoo</i>	A local bear
<i>Feexoo</i>	A drink used to exhaust the body of the bride
<i>Gingilchaa</i>	Flat basket like sieve
<i>Guddifachaa</i>	Parent adopting a child
<i>Gumaa</i>	Blood Compensation
<i>Haftuu</i>	Unmarried girl whose age enters to twenty
<i>Hiddi</i>	<i>Solanum icanum</i>
<i>Irradhaaba</i>	Incidental type of marriage
<i>Kadhaa</i>	Parent arranged Marriage
<i>Miinjee Deebis</i>	Congratulation
<i>Miinjee Dhiiraa</i>	Best man
<i>Miinjee Dubaraa</i>	Bridesmaid
<i>Rakoo</i>	A Sheep slaughtered by the groom
<i>Saddeeta</i>	The day in which the girl's family announce the date of marriage ceremony.
<i>Soddaa</i>	The relation that the boy's family has for the girl's family or vice versa.
<i>Teff</i>	Kind of crop cultivated in summer and harvested from November to December
<i>Uwwisa</i>	Bridewealth given to the bride
<i>Wandaboo</i>	Money given to the bride's mother

## **Abstract**

*Marriage is an institution that helps for the continuation of generations, however, through time its form, process and practice changes. Therefore, this study is mainly conducted on marriage practices with much emphasis on the peasant communities of Becho Oromo of Becho Wereda. The main objective of the study is to investigate the change and continuity in marriage practice. To achieve the objective, data is collected through informal interview, key informant interview and observation. The study reveals, the changes observed in marriage practices today are categorized broadly into three. a) Changes observed as a result of the modification of the already existing elements of marriage. b) Changes observed in the adoption of some new elements of marriage. c) Changes observed due to some traditional elements of marriage are on the way to extinction. Changes which are the result of modification of some elements of marriage practice include change in bridewealth in which in the past, cattle were given for the bride's family. Nevertheless, nowadays, money is given. In the past, elders were sent to the bride's family three times. However, today only two times. In the pre- and Derg regime, the parents select a wife for their boys. Indeed, these times, priority is given for the boys to select their future wives. The feasts prepared for the wedding day ceremony, marriage between unequals, the amount of bridewealth given and age at marriage are all these modified in the study area. The changes observed as a result of the incorporation of new elements in the already existed marriage practice is the result of interaction with neighboring areas. In this way that bridesmaid is introduced to the study community from the near town, Tullubollo. Abduction and early marriage are the forms of marriage that are on the way to extinction mainly due to education and an awareness created by the gender office. However, Kadhaa and Fuudha Gursuma are still widely practiced in the study community.*

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of the Study

Before going into an in-depth analysis of the economic, political, and social aspects of a given society, it is imperative to understand the system of kinship and marriage of that society. This helps to know how people live together, work, and interact with each other in their environment (Radcliffe Brown, 1970:43).

Marriage exists in all societies, everywhere in the world. It is quite natural and social for humans to go to marriage. Various writers have looked into marriage from different perspectives. For Goodnight marriage is a customary transaction in which the couples satisfy their biological needs. according to him:

Marriage is a transaction and resulting contract in which a person (male or female, corporate or individuals in person or by proxy) establishes a continuing claim to the right of sexual access to a woman this right having priority over rights of sexual access others currently have or may subsequently acquire in relation to her until the contract resulting from the transaction is terminated (1970:12-13).

Therefore, for him marriage is primarily for biological need. Amadiume (1987) also supports his view about marriage. According to him, marriage is not for the replacement of generations in the homosexual orientation, but merely for satisfying biological needs.

In stark contrast to the aforementioned views, Gough (1959:23) regards marriage as an institution in which the new born children obtain formal acceptance within the society to which they belong. Therefore, for him marriage is primarily to bear children to sustain generations. Likewise, Holy (1988:50) also asserts that marriage is an institution whose main function is the legitimization of children in the society. Similarly, Gary (2004:195)

defines marriage as a socially accepted union between male and female in which both have sexual and economic rights and obligations.

As a definition of marriage varies, its form, process and practice also varies from one society to another. However, the marriage practice of a given society could be modified or changed through time because of an interaction with other cultures or introduction of new elements to marriage practices. As Spardly and David (1994: 371) assert, culture of a particular society may change overtime because of a diffusion and addition of new elements to the previous culture by the host community. According to Radcliffe-Brown (1987:45-46), marriage practices of a society are the result of social development or the result of recent social changes. Indeed, for Kornblum (1988: 583) ecological ordering of population and communities and social interactions are causes for the change. In Ethiopia also changes are observed in marriage practice. According to Fessha Tawek (1983) in Tigray change has been observed in mate selection in which marriage is based on the interest of the couples. Gena Keḍu also wrote on the changing marriage practices of the Arsi people in which Islam as a cause for the change in marriage practice.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

Marriage is natural and social, and occurs at least once in the life of an individual. It is one of the basic human institutions, which assures the perpetuation of human beings on earth.

Many writers who have hitherto produced works on marriage in Ethiopia focus on its various aspects. Assefa (1983) wrote on the marriage practices of the Oromo of *Horo Guduru*. He elaborated the forms of marriage. According to him, Buti (abduction), *Fuudha Assena* (marriage by entry) and *Kadha* (parent arranged marriage) are some

forms of marriage practice exist among the *Horo Guduru* Oromo. Similarly, Eshete Taye (1984) wrote on the marriage practices of the *Deder* Oromo. He tried to show the change in marriage practice. According to him, in older time, as there was strict parental control on young girls, they were denied to establish marriage based on their interest. However, later on, the introduction of urbanization, modern educational system and the formation of youth association in to the *Deder* Oromo region enabled young girls to establish marriage based on their interest. Tassew Shiferaw (1988) has also discussed various forms of marriage practice under the auspicious of Ethiopian Orthodox church. For him, church marriage, civil marriage and customary marriage are the major forms of marriage in Addis Ababa. Moreover, he analyzed marital conflict resolution and court proceedings. Fessaha Tawek (1983) tried to show that in the past in the rural areas of Tigray, marriage was arranged by the family. However, later on, marriage began to be established based on the interest of the couples. He explained that this practice began because of the young men manifestation to urban way of life. Gena Kedu (1983) also wrote on the changing aspects of marriage practice among the Arsi people. He explained that Islam as a cause for the change in marriage practice.

However, a study has not been so far made on the changing nature of marriage practice among the Becho Oromo. It is obvious that practices of marriage are not static. They changes through time as culture of a society changes over time. According to Kottak, the change may occur as the result of diffusion, acculturation, and independent invention. Through cultural diffusion, new cultural elements may transmit from one area to another and may subsequently result in acculturation. Through independent invention, people

may also create new ideas and juxtapose it with the existing ones, and this process may eventually give rise to a new brand of culture (2005: 53).

It is, therefore, to fill in the gap i.e. geographically as a study has not been made on the Becho Oromo, the researcher try to bring out new knowledge on the subject.

More specifically, this paper has addressed the following research questions

- What are the changes observed in marriage practices in the study area?
- What are the causes for the changes in marriage practices?
- How have some elements of marriage continued to exist to date?
- What factors contribute to the perpetuation of some elements of marriage practices among the Becho Oromo?

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

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

The general objective of this research is to investigate and analyze some patterns of change and continuity witnessed in marriage practice among the *Bacho Oromo* of *Bacho Wereda*.

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

The study has also the following specific objectives:

- Investigate the change occurred in *Kadhaa* (parent arranged marriage)
- Examine education, gender office and interaction as causes of change in marriage practice.
- Explain some elements of *Kadhaa* (parent arranged marriage) continued to these times.
- Describe the role of the host community in maintaining marriage practice.

## **1.4. Research Methodology**

To begin the work, the researcher first prepared research instruments and then collected data pertaining to marriage practice, history, and genealogy of the people in question. The data was collected from selected research participants through informal interview (see appendix II). The interview was made in the house, under tree in the farm place and offices. The researcher also employed observation to obtain an additional data. Ethnographic study was also applied through observation.

## **1.5. Data Sources**

The data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. However, the vast majority of the data used in this thesis are original information obtained mainly from primary sources.

### **1.5.1. Primary Sources of Data**

The researcher employed key informant interviews, case studies, and observation in order to collect original data used to produce this thesis. These methods are briefly elaborated below.

#### **1.5.1.1. Key Informant Interviews.**

To maintain the validity and reliability of the data, the researcher selected key informants based on their age, experience, social status, acceptance and willingness. These key informants were identified through informal conversation with the people in the study area these people are men, women, educated and uneducated. The researcher used nine community elders as key informants. These informants are all of them men married and uneducated. The major reason why only community elders were used as key informants

was because of their age, status, social acceptance and experience to describe issues pertaining to marriage under three regimes, namely that of Haileselassie, the Derg and EPRDF. Using this method, data was gathered about the background and genealogy of *Becho* Oromo and marriage practices. Data was collected in every situation (social gatherings, local ceremonies, and farm place).

### **1.5.1.2. Observation**

According to Flick (2002:135) observation is a qualitative research method in which not only visual perceptions but also hearing, feeling and smelling are articulated. Kumal (1996: 105) also describes observation as “a purposeful, systematic and selective way of watching and listening to an interaction or phenomenon as it takes place.”

The researcher observed issues related to pre-marriage pre-requests like “*saddeeta*” in which the father announces the date of marriage. This helped the researcher critically to observe every activity and to ask questions. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003:350)

Observation offers the opportunity to record and analyze behavior and interaction as they occur. Although not as a member of the study population this allows events, actions and experience and so on, to be ‘seen’ through the eyes of the researcher, often without those involved.

Therefore, the researcher had made observation in the schools and noticed that the number of both female and male has increased perhaps as a result of a decline in early marriage. According to the school director, the decline in early marriage is due to the attitudinal change of the families to send their children to school instead of arranging early marriage. However the researcher not able to attend and observe marriage ceremonies since there were not these activities at all during the fieldwork which remained an obstacle to get ample data on marriage practice. Generally, the researcher

tried to observe systematically and critically both the physical environment and social aspects of the study population.

### **1.5.1.3. Case Study**

An attempt was made to select two case studies, which the researcher assumed to have detail ethnographic data about the study community. The first case study is mainly about early marriage in which the girl refuses to establish marriage before her accomplishment of school. The second case study deals with a woman who uses family planning to limit the number of her children. Generally, the method provided valuable information about early marriage, marriage as based on the choice of the girl or the boy. In addition, it helped the researcher to identify how the number of children in the family began to decline.

### **1.5.2. Secondary Sources of Data**

The study also employed relevant official documents, unpublished and published books, electronic soft copies and articles as a secondary source of information. Data from these sources were used for the background of the study and in literature review section.

## **1.6. Selection of the Research Site**

The research was conducted on peasant associations found around *Tullu Bollo* Town in southwest *Shewa, Oromiya* region. The study area is located 80 km south west of the capital, Addis Ababa. It shared boundaries with Ilu Woreda in the north, Waliso in the southwest, Tole in the east, Dawo in the northwest and Sadeen Soddo in the south. 7 elementary schools, 1 high school, 1 preparatory and 1 vocational school are found in the area. The site was selected because of the researcher's interest to study the *Becho Oromo* as they have not been studied well by other researchers before. Therefore, it was the

interest of the researcher to study the area's potential culture and present it to the public that has led to the selection of the site.

More specifically, the researcher selected the area mainly for two major reasons

- Lack of empirical and anthropological research on the study community.
- The research site is located close to the researcher's birthplace.

## **1.7. Fieldwork Experience and Methods of Data Analysis**

### **1.7.1. Field Work Experience**

The researcher conducted ethnographic fieldwork during two seasons: winter and summer. The winter ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in February and March. During this time, the researcher made four short visits rather than spending much of the time with the host community. During these short visits, the researcher had collected information about the genealogy of the people in question, their economic activities and the geography, and obtained some background data on marriage practices. The second ethnographic study was conducted from June 10 to August 1, 2012. During this time, the researcher spent the entire period with the host community.

During the first ethnographic trip, the researcher went to the *wereda* administrative office to get the officials' good will to conduct the research. This is because the rule of the *wereda* administrative office which states that without the pre knowledge of the office, no one conducts an interview in the area. Having secured their willingness, the researcher had then selected his informants. Indeed, it was very easy to select the informants. This was because the members of the community were cooperative in the selection process and the role of the research assistant was also instrumental in this regard.

During the first week of the fieldwork, the researcher had communicated the objectives of the study to the informants and explained the far-reaching significance of their participation for the ultimate success of the research. In fact, initially, the researcher found it hard to obtain much information particularly from the key informants. The main reason was that they critically looked at everything from the political point of view while comparing marriage practices practiced under three successive Ethiopian regimes, namely that of Haileselassie, the Derg and the incumbent regime.

However, through time, the elders understood the very objective of the research and provided the researcher with ample information. The researcher conducted an interview mostly under the tree, in the houses of the informants and sometimes at farmlands. The informants were very gracious and friendly.

### **Challenges Faced during the Fieldwork**

During the ethnographic fieldwork, the researcher encountered the following difficulties.

- The researcher was not able to attend and observe marriage ceremonies since there were not these activities at all during the fieldwork.
- Failing to get informants on their appointment day was another problem that the researcher had encountered. This was because they were busy with different tasks such as attending market days and spending their time on farming. Therefore, the researcher overcame this problem by readjusting his daily schedule according to the situation.
- The researcher could not get ample information since there has been information gap i.e. from the imperial regime to this contemporary time remained an obstacle

for the informants to remember all things and describe about the change and continuity of marriage practices.

### **1.7.2. Methods of Data Analysis**

During the fieldwork, the researcher divided the activities into daytime and nighttime tasks. During the daytime, the researcher was collecting data from the informants and recording it. In addition, observation was also made to understand the social activity of the people under study. During the nighttime, starting from 8 p.m. local time, the researcher was transcribing the data with the help of his translator. This is because the researcher was not perfect in speaking and writing the local language (Oromiffa).

During transcription, if the data was not complete, the researcher used to revisit the field and once again asked his informants to fill the identified gaps.

Therefore, the data was organized and analyzed based on primary data at most.

### **1.8. Ethical Considerations**

Before the researcher began to collect the data, he introduced himself and the objectives of the research to his informants. He assured them that the research is merely for academic purpose. Based on this the researcher got consent to study their culture. Indeed, the researcher showed utmost respect for the culture of the host community.

### **1.9. Limitations of the Study**

The following are the limitations of the study

- Lack of anthropological researches on the change and continuity of marriage practices, which became a great challenge for the researcher to compare and contrast the empirical data

- Absence of marriage ceremonies during the fieldwork produced a difficulty to observe each activity.
- The research was done only on the *Becho* Oromo around *Tullu Bollo* Town, 80 Km from Addis Ababa. Due to time and financial constraints, the other areas in the Zone were not included in this research

### **1.10. Significance of the Study**

The study has the following significance

- It helps as a launching pad for further study on the change and continuity of marriage practices in the area
- It may also help government and non- government organizations to formulate and change their policies and programs based on the information obtained from the ethnographic research.

# CHAPTER TWO

## Review of Related Literature

### Theories on Marriage

#### 2.1 The Social Structure Theory

This theory is developed by Peter Blau. This theory gives emphasis on the existence of heterogeneity in the community i.e. the existence of different people in society with different background, religion, gender and socio-economic status. And this diversity has the opportunities for interacting with members of other groups (cited in Ameyu Tola, 2011).

Indeed, to some extent, this theory can be applied to the marriage practice of the Becho Oromo in which today marriage is established with various socio-economic backgrounds in which it is observed that when *Tumtus* (weavers) established marriage with anyone in the community. And also, the poor marry the rich in the study area. Therefore, the existence of different people with socio-economic difference may increase intermarriage.

#### 2.2. Ogburn's Theory of Social Change

This theory was developed by Henslin. According to him (1995:617), social change is the result of three things: invention, discovery and diffusion. Invention is producing new things in combining with the already existing material. Discovery is seeing the already existing reality in new way. Therefore, when it is accepted and exercised by the society it

would become part of the culture of a society. Diffusion refers to the condition when some elements of culture spread from one society to another.

Therefore, Henslin theory of social change works for the study. For example, bridesmaid (female minje) is diffused into the study community from the near town, Tullu Bollo which has its own share for the changing practices of marriage.

### **2.3. Definition of Marriage**

Different scholars defined marriage from various perspectives. According to Feraro (2004:195), marriage is a union of male and female. Nevertheless, Keesing and Strathern do not restrict their definition of marriage only to a relationship between couples. Rather they see it broadly as a union of the families of the couples: "Marriage is characteristically not a relationship between individuals, but a contract between groups, (often, between corporations)" (1998:218). However, Olson and Defrain (1994) argued that marriage is more than the union of the couples' families. It is like a network that connects the friends of the two couples with their families. For LeVistrauss (1996), marriage is the change in the residence of the girl from her family to her husband's family.

Marriage is a socially accepted sexual union of female and male for the purpose of reproduction and is served as a certificate for the continuation of a generation through the birth of children (Cheater, 1993:160). According to Olson and Defrain (1994:8) marriage is an institution which is formed based on some interests of the couples and rules of a society for the purpose of physical and emotional intimacy and for economic benefits.

Marriage can have different meanings in different cultures. Marriage in developed countries has the meaning of the alliance between opposite sexes alone for satisfying their biological needs (Radcliffe Brown, 1970:51). Nevertheless, for Africans, marriage is the integration of the couples' families (Philip, 1953:15). For Tafesse, marriage has different meaning for the Oromo in particular. He stated:

According to Oromo custom, marriage has sacred nature expressed in the terms of "qaba" and "eba" relating respectively to the primary and accessory ends of marriage. The first denotes the fulfillment of the predetermined will of God (Rebbi) according to which a man and a woman are predestined to live in a union of husband and wife. The second which means blessing, refers to the precious fruits of marriage, the procreation of children (1984:10).

Nevertheless, marriage among the Oromo is also the union of two families of the couples. For Assefa Tolera, marriage among the *Horro Guduru Oromo* is more than the union of the couples. He stated that:

After marriage ... The soda call on each other whenever either family needs more assistance, and visit each other whenever, from either family a member dies, a new one is born, a young one is married, and also invite each other on annual festivals and other domestic celebrations (1983:7).

Therefore, for the *Horro Gudurru Oromo*, marriage is a means which creates very strong ties, which enables to solve problems and sorrows and assures the existence of the sense of cooperation among *Soddaa* or affinal- relatives. Therefore, from this one conclude that marriage is the infrastructure or the base to bring unity among different peoples in a wider social system.

Tilahun (2011:33) also asserts that marriage among the *Becho Oromo* is an alliance of two different families of the couples. Assefa (1983) also indicated that the strong bond

between the two families of the couples remains intact even with the death of one of the couples.

Genna Kedu also describes the reasons of marriage among the *Arsi Oromo* as follows: “The main reason for marriage is to get children who can replace their parents, there is a belief among *Arsi* that the “medicine for death” is children (1983: IV).”

According to Clark (1991:129), the need of marriage is for stability. For him marriage is crucial to have private property and for the purchase of house through the efforts of the couples. In addition, he explained sexual activity as another important reason for marriage.

## **2.4. Forms of Marriage**

Marriage has different forms. According to Kottak (2005:177), there are three types of marriage- monogamy, polyandry and polygyny. Monogamy is marriage between a man and a woman, which is common in most societies. Marriage between a woman and two or more men are known as polyandry and marriage between one man and two or more women is polygyny. A society that practices monogamy or polygyny or polyandry can also have different forms of marriage.

In Adua, Almeda village, Tigray province, there are also three forms of marriage that Fessaha identified: *Kalkidan*, *Berkinet* and *Gerdana*. The *Kalkidan* marriage is conducted in the church. *Berkinet* is a marriage between a man and a woman who are already in the dissolution of marriage and *Gerdna* is a form of marriage in which the husband is forced to pay some amount of grain or money for his wife (1983:19).

## 2.5. Rules of Marriage

As every culture has its own forms of marriage, it has also its own rules of marriage in which one can and cannot marry. These rules are usually associated with the incest taboo, which prohibits access to sexual relation between families and relatives. According to Levi-Strauss (1969:481), the prohibition of incest is a rule that prevents marriage within the family.

According to the 2000-revised Ethiopian family code, marriage is forbidden until the 7<sup>th</sup> generation. Marriage among the Oromo is exogamous (Spencer, 1975:207). Particularly, marriage among the *Becho Oromo* is endogamy within clans. For example, members of the Malima clan can establish marriage among themselves. However, marriage is forbidden with the immediate family, i.e., marriage is clan exogamy.

As Tilahun asserts: "Marriage among the *Bacho Oromo* is exogamous. In the *Becho* tradition, a female is viewed as sister, mother, and daughter. Therefore, having sexual relation with the one who is mother, sister and daughter is an incest taboo" (2011:33).

According to Genna Kedu (1983:9), marriage is prohibited among relatives in *Arsi Oromo*. Assefa Tolera (1988:6) also wrote about incest taboo among the *Horro Guduru*: "Marriage among relatives is forbidden among this society... marriage from one's *Qomo* is incest, *haramu*. The boy can marry from his mother's line going as far back to seven generations."

There are different reasons why marriage is not allowed within the family or relatives. Robin Fox mentioned that: "The prime objection to incest... is disadvantageous to society

and hence could not be universally practiced is the inbreeding argument ... persistent close inbreeding would be disastrous" (1984, 58)

Furthermore, Tilhaun mentioned the reason why marriage is not allowed within the family among the *Becho Oromo*. He stated that: "According to the *Becho gada law (Seera Cafee Bacho)*, any marriage made between close relatives is a curse and the child who is born from this union is regarded as *fuulu* (outcast)" (2011:33).

Tilahun's idea about incest taboo is consolidated by Cohen (1971:2). As he mentioned, marriage should get consent from the family to enable children to get legitimate position in their community.

Nevertheless, in some other cultures, marriage within the family could not be considered as incest. In Tibet, a man may marry a mother and her daughter (Fox, 1984:58).

Equivalent to incest taboo, there are also different ways in which marriage is contracted. According to Kottack, Marriage is contracted through marriage payments. These marriage payments are bridewealth and dowry. As he stated, in some cultures, gifts are made by the groom and his family to the family of the bride and this payment is known as bridewealth. In other cultures, the bride gives property to the boy's family at marriage and this is known as dowry (2005:173-174). According to Cheater (1993:164), dowry is practiced widely in Europe and Asia whereas bridewealth is common in Africa. Moreover, Goody asserts this. "Dowry is virtually confined to Europe and Asia. It is absent from Africa, except where that continent has been penetrated by Islam or other universalistic world religions" (1973:22)

Nevertheless, in contrast to the assertion of both Goody and Cheater, there are some cultures in Ethiopia in which dowry is common. In Tigray, dowry is given at marriage. According to G/Egziabher Hayle (1984:11, 12), in the past, in the *Kaffan* society, cattle and slaves used to be given as a dowry to the boy's family. Therefore, the researcher argues that dowry is not imported to Africa through colonialism or through missionaries. However, it has already existed before the introduction of external influence. Indeed, According to him dowry is later ceased and substituted by bridewealth in the *Kaffan* society.

Different reasons are proposed why bridewealth and dowry are given to the families of the couples or either to the groom or the bride. According to Cheater, dowry is given for the need of social and religious status. As he stated.

... Dowry involves a property settlement on the bride or the marrying couples, normal from her family. This property enables a young woman to marry a man of higher status than herself, in pattern known as "hypergamy" in which material wealth may be traded off against social and religious status. Conversely, the absence of dowry may render a girl unmarriageable (2005:164).

According to Hoebler (1958: 302), bridewealth is a means of getting wife in which women are considered as commodities to be sold. In this regard, a family with five daughters and one son is economically better than the one with five sons and one daughter. For Radcliffe-Brown and Forde (1970:47-50), bridewealth indicates the responsibility of a husband to protect his wife and wife's kin from any threats. As Kottack mentioned, bridewealth is given for the bride or her family to get recognition for the legitimization of children through the male line (2005:173). Nevertheless, his idea does not work for the *Becho Oromo*. Among the *Becho Oromo*, bridewealth is not simply

a kind of capital goods circulation to the bride's family. However, bridewealth has the symbolic meaning to express the respect for the bride and a means to maintain internal cohesion between the two families of the couple.

The bridewealth and dowry given can vary from one culture to another. As Goody states (1973:22), in African societies, bridewealth is given in the form of cattle. Nevertheless, changes have been seen in the kinds of bride wealth given. According to Taffesse Kassa (1984:20), bridewealth is common among the Oromo of Bale in *Sinanna Woreda*. In this society, in the past, mule, gun and cartridge belt for the father and horse for the girl's elder brother are given and later on, money has replaced these items. Moreover, Berhane Shiferaw (1982:9) more clearly describes the change in the *Adere* society in reference to time. According to him, before the Italian invasion necklace made up of silver, pair of trousers and 50- 80 Maria Teresa were given as a bridewealth. Nevertheless, he states that after the invasion, the type of bridewealth has been substituted by money. Cheater (1993,164) also writes that "Bridewealth, traditionally in the form of capital goods such as livestock but today more frequently in cash, is paid by the bridegroom."

The change is not only in the type of bridewealth given but also in marriage practices in general. It is obvious that the change is not radical, rather it happens through evolutionary means. Moreover, the change is not holistic rather it only occurs in some elements of marriage. For instance, Dominion Jack describes how marriage practice in England changed through time as follows:

... in the past, the parents were influential in choosing a wife for their son... in the eighteenth centuries, the couple began to withdraw from the immediate influence of their parents and elders in their choice of partner and began to have a choice of their own (1996:1).

Marriage practices can be changed due to various reasons. According to Kornblum (1988:583), culture is changed because of change in residence, structure and functioning of institutions and social interactions over time. He mentioned two reasons for the change: endogenous (internal) factor and exogenous (external) factor. Therefore, education, media, government influence, contact with the urban peoples, religion, progress in economic activity could be exogenous and endogenous factors for the change in marriage practices. According to Genna, Islam is an external factor that changed the marriage practices of the *Arsi* society. He stated (1983: IV):

The marriage system of the Arsi people has been modified as a result of some external social influence... the influence of Islam has on marriage system of these people varies from one place to another. In the Arsi administrative regions... are more influenced by this religion, as a result the marriage practice is modified.

For instance, he mentioned that “the system of making a girl legal wife of someone by giving a female calf to her brother” has been made absolute by the introduction of Islam.

## **2.6. Post Marriage Events**

### **2.6.1. Marital Conflict and Labor Organization**

#### **2.6.1.1 Marital Conflict**

In marriage, conflict can arise between husband and wife. Indeed, conflict is natural though its causes can vary. According to Dominion:

Couples often find themselves insinuations of conflict. The reasons for the conflict are multiple, such as money, doing the chores, not having enough affection or sex, managing the children, joint activities, or personal choices (1996:87).

More or less, the causes of conflicts arise among couples are similar. Tassew (1998:21) mentions husband's failure to provide household budget as the major causes of conflict among the Orthodox Christians in Addis Ababa. Furthermore, Mamo (1988: 38) in his study of marriage and divorce in Addis Ababa, mentioned factors such as the existence of different faiths in one family, economic conditions within the family, sexual incompatibility, influence of parents and relatives as the major sources of conflict in marriage.

Traditionally, marital conflicts gain solution through the efforts of elders. According to Mellese (1993: 5) a conflict between husband and wife is common within the *Walayta* society. These conflicts are settled by elders. Tarekegn et al explained elders as "... mature, exemplary persons of honor and dignity, have good judgment, charismatic, and discerning with faith... (2008, 6)" Therefore, the role of elders are not only restricted to pre and during marriage ceremonies. Rather, it continues in post marriage to manage conflicts in the family.

#### **2.6.1.2. Labor Organization**

In post marriage (post wedding ceremony), family formation follows. In the family, there is organization of labor, which is mainly based on sex and age. According to Hoebel (1958:389), the roles of male and female are culturally determined. Most of the roles of males are outside home in the field. Females' roles are confined to activities inside the house or near the house. For instance, they may take care of the children, prepare food and keep the house clean. This idea of Hoebel is common in most cultures of Ethiopia particularly in the rural areas. According to Wessen (2008:19), among the *Majangere*

community, women are engaged in the household activities while males are not. Pauline Rose et al (1995:8) wrote the effect of this on women in their study of gender in selected areas in Ethiopia. According to them, women are not allowed to gain access to education after marriage since their roles are culturally confined to household activities.

Therefore, even though division of labor in family is common in all cultures, women are still restricted to household activities in the rural areas, while males mostly work in the field. In recent times, however, some changes have been observed as a result of the intervention of government agencies and NGOs in many rural areas of Ethiopia.

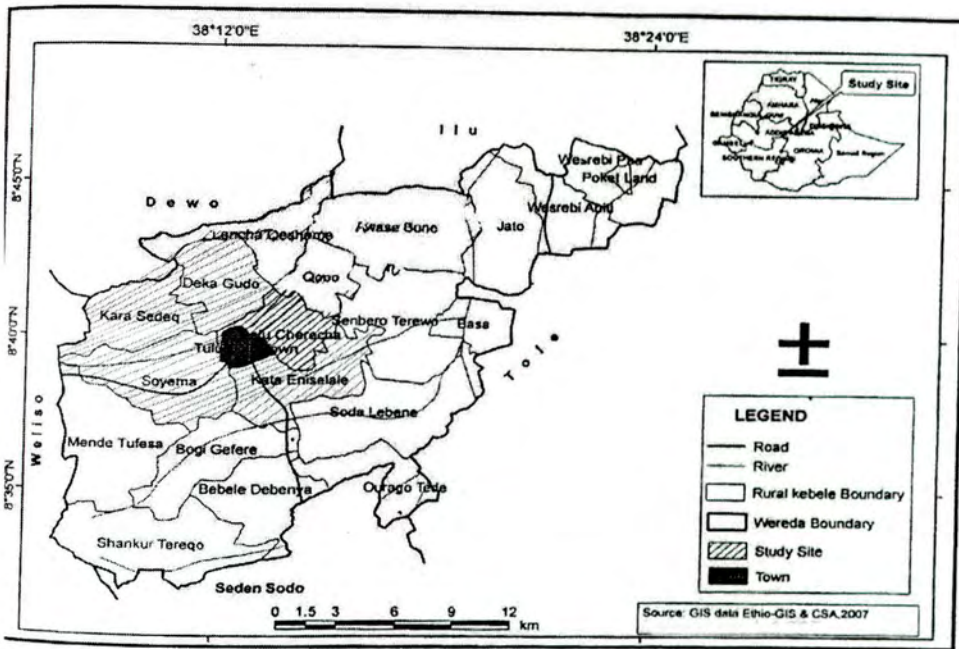
# CHAPTER THREE

## Description of the Study People

### 3.1. Location

The study was conducted on *Becho Oromo* living in *Becho Wereda*, Southwest *Shewa Zone* of the *Oromiya Regional State*. The study involved five peasant associations of the *Wereda*, namely *Katta insilalee*, *Sooyyoma*, *Kaarraa Saddeeq*, *Daka guddoo* and *Baatuu cirrachaa*. These peasant associations are found around the *Woreda town*, *Tullu Bollo* town, which is located 80 kms away from *Addis Ababa*.

Map 1: Study Site



Taken from Tilahun Negewo (2011: 20)

### 3.2. Livelihood

In the study area, agriculture is the main economic activity supplemented by animal husbandry. The people mainly depend on a rain fed agriculture. As the area has an agro climatic zone of Badda-daree (temperate), different crops like maize, *teff*, potato, wheat, bean and pea are widely produced. Particularly, the region is famous in *Shewa* for producing a kind of *teff*, which is commonly known as “*Becho Teff*.” The months of the year are divided into four parts- periods of ploughing, seeding, weeding, and harvesting. Much of the crops are produced for local consumption.

Due to a growing increase in the number of population in the study area, shortage of land has increasingly become an acute problem. According to elders, since the coming to power of EPRDF, land distribution has not been revised and only few peasants are in control of large farmlands. To the contrary, most of the farmers are suffering due to a shortage of land. Indeed, land dispute is the most prevalent problem in the region.

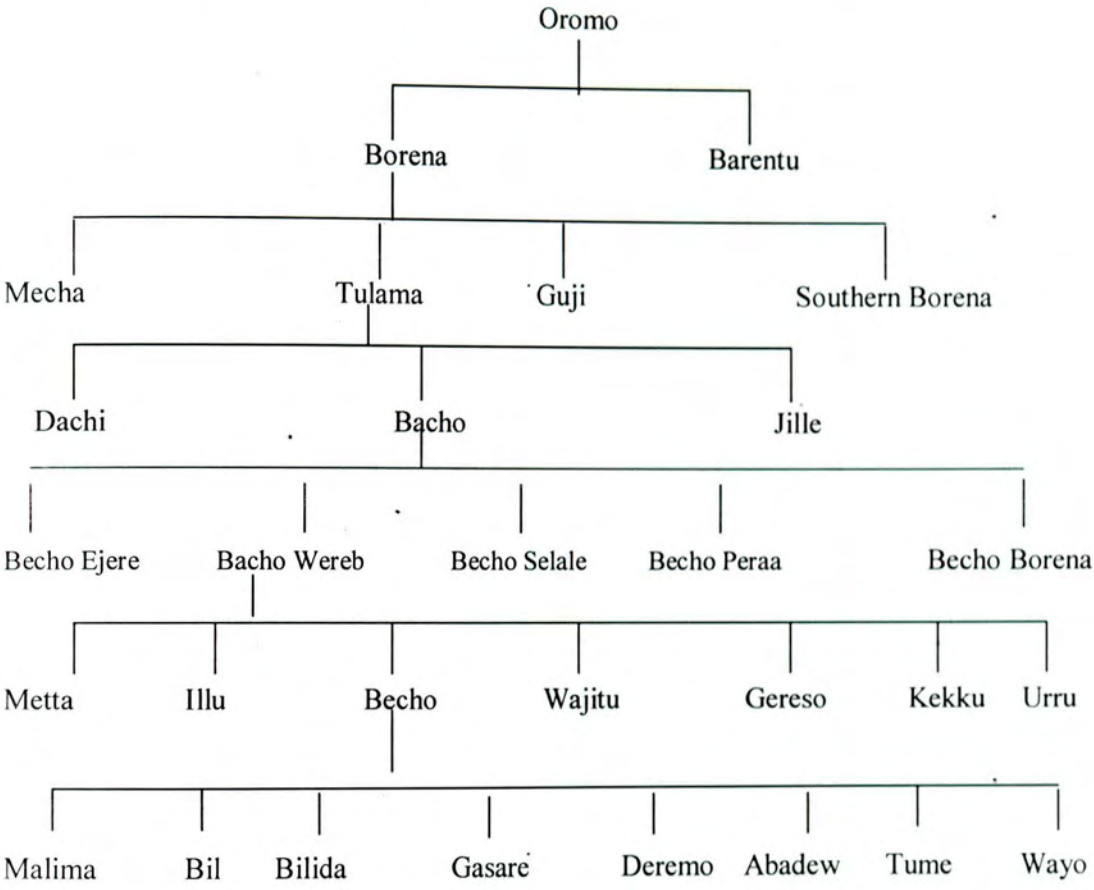
### 3.3. Genealogy of the *Becho Oromo* of the Study Area

The Oromo are one of the Cushitic speaking peoples of Ethiopia. They are also one of the largest ethnic groups in Ethiopia. Before and during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Oromo were divided into two confederacies: *Borena* and *Barentu*. The *Borena* confederacy is consisted of *Mecha*, *Tulama*, Southern *Borena* and *Guji*. The *Tulama* and the *Mecha* groups lived under a common *Gada* government that was located at *Oda Nabe* in Fatagar (Mohammed, 1990, pp 4, 18, 42). According to Alemayehu, the *Tulama* Oromo gradually detached itself and occupied *Shewa*. The *Tulama* Oromo is divided into three main clans *Dachi*, *Bacho* and *Jille*. The *Bacho* clan has six families and thirty-eight subfamilies. Furthermore, they are divided into five main branches. These are *Becho Wereb*, *Becho-*

*Ejere (Meta), Becho Selale, Becho Perra and Becho Borena (Wello)*. With the exception of *Becho Borena*, the others settled within a restricted geographical area (2004, pp 20, 152, 184).

The *Becho Oromo*, also known by the name of *Becho Wereb* for many years, have been living in the areas today known as *Teji, Illu and Tullu Bollo*. The *Becho Wereb* has different sub clans: *Illu, Metta, Wajitu, Geresu, Kekku and Urru* (ibid). However, according to the information the researcher had obtained from elders, the *Becho Oromo* of the study area belonged to the *Becho* sub clans of *Becho Wereb*. And the *Becho* sub clan in the area is further divided into different sub clans. These are *Malima, Bil, Bilida, Gasare, Deremo, Abadew, Tume and Wayo*. Among these clans, *Malima* is the elder. My informants relate the main reason for *Malima's* status as the elder of all other clans in the study area to the popular oral tradition existed in the society. This tradition has something to do with drought and famine that occurred in the area at one time in their history due to a natural factor i.e. shortage of rain. At this time, the people asked *Ayana* to get the rain fallen. Then, they got the reply that "a man should be slaughtered" to get the rain. At this time, the mothers of *Malima, Bil, Bilida Tume, Wayo* and others were asked to "slaughter" their sons. Nevertheless, while all of them had refused only the mother of *Malima* had agreed to sacrifice her son for the benefit of the society. As a result, *Malima*, the son to be sacrificed, was taken to "*Melka*", which was a big tree around river that was serving to worship *Waqqa*. When the knife was ready to put on his neck, *Waqqa* (God) made rain fallen along with sheep to be slaughtered. In place of *Malima*, the sheep was slaughtered. From that time on, *Malima* got social acceptance and became the elder. Nowadays, in different festivities such as in holidays and marriage, *Malima* is given priority for blessings than other clans.

**The Genealogy of the *Becho* Oromo of the Study Population**



Source: 1.Elders 2. Alemayehu (2004)

NB. *Malima, Bil, Bilida Gasare, Deremo, Abddew Tume and Wayo* sub clans (subjects of the study belong to *Becho* Oromo

### 3.4. Kinship

*Malima, Bil, Bilida, Gasare, Deremo, Abadew, Tume and Wayo* are the main clans in the study area. These clans live together in a very short distance. Nevertheless, they have a common history, culture and means of livelihood. Even though *Malima* is the elder in the area, there is no segregation in social relations including marriage. Members of *Malima* can establish marriage outside their group with one of the remaining clans. When woman from the *Malima* match in marriage with one of the clans, she will no longer be the member of her clan for she joins her husband's clan. For example, if a woman from the *Malima* is married to a man from the *Bil* clan, she will automatically become the member of the *Bil* clan since descent is identified through the male line. Marriage is also allowed within members of a clan. Example, marriage among the members of *Malima* is possible. Nevertheless, generations are counted and no one in the group establishes marriage with his/her clan members until five generations since it is considered as an incest. Indeed, after marriage, the father's and the mother's kin have different names called *Wesila* (father's brother), *Endotiya* (mother's sister), *Akakayu* (grand father), *Akewo* (grand mother), and *Essuma* (mother's brother). The kin on the father's line are closer to a family than those on the mother's line. They are always given priority to discuss family issue. For example, the father's kin have the right to confirm and reject marriage.

### 3.5. The Family

The *Becho* Oromo of the study area is characterized by patrilocal extended family in which it is composed of the father, the mother and children. In addition, other family members consist of married couples and their children and grandparents. Among the

*Becho* Oromo, the husband has power and authority. Therefore, other members of the family do not usually influence his decisions. In fact, the elder son is given right to guide his brothers and sisters in some activities.

In the family, there is a division of labor. This involves each member of the family. Division of labor is based on sex and age. Each boy takes specific responsibilities. Children in the age around seven usually look after calves, and if their age is over seven they may take part in herding.

Males are mainly engaged in the field activities like farming while women usually spend in the house doing household activities. As the *Becho* Oromo saying goes: "*Aduree fi na'dheeni mana keesa olan*" meaning, "cats and women spend at home". This is to indicate that women's activity is confined to home. The husbands are seen as "pillars of the house". Therefore, he is the decision maker. This is because of the economic imbalance in which females of the area are dependent on their husband for money. The society says: "*Eege fi dubartiin Abba duuba*", meaning "females and tails are behind their owners". Hence, this is to indicate that the sole authority in decision making in the family is that of the husband among the *Becho* Oromo.

### **3.6. House Types**

The houses of the study people live closely with each other in a very short distance. According to elders, the "villagization" program of the Derg contributed for this. In one compound up to four houses could be found. There are two house types in the study area:

- a. **House type one:** - it is made of steel, wood and mud. The wall is made from wood and mud. The floor sometimes is made of stone while the roof is covered by

steel. It has a rectangular shape which commonly divided into three parts. The sleeping rooms for the parents and children and the salon. The cattle have separate rooms in the compound. These types of houses are very few. For example, in Battu cherecha peasant association only nine households built this kind of house. Indeed, this type of house is introduced into the area in recent years from the near town, *Tulu Bollo*. Building this type of house is sometimes regarded as the symbol of richness among the study community.

- b. **House type two:** it is made of wood, mud and a grass known as "*migiraa*". The wall is made of mud and wood and the roof is the combination of wood and *migiraa*. The roof is cone-shaped and the wall is circular. The houses have three main parts- kitchen, sleeping room, and rooms for domestic animals. However, the rich farmers can have separate houses for kitchen and cattle. Traditional houses are the most commonly found house types in the area.

### 3.7. Religion

The study peoples are the adherents of three types of religion.

1. **Followers of Orthodox Christianity:** Christianity was already there with the Becho Oromos who settled in the study area. This is because of the interaction with the Christian population during their movement. Nevertheless, the numbers of Christians were very few. Indeed, due to the influence of the Christian rulers particularly during the regimes of emperor Haileselassie and the Derg, the number of Orthodox Christian followers increased at alarming rate. Besides, the increasing levels of interaction through marriage with the Christians and trade with the people of the near town,

Tullubollo have had its largest share. This is because the majority of the populations in the town are Christian. Hence, the Christians exercised their religion freely during and pre-Derg regime which in return have had its own contribution for the expansion to the study area.

2. **Followers of Waqa (Waaqeefanna):** This is a traditional Oromo religion that stayed with the people for a long period of time. According to Bartles (1983), following the introduction of Christianity and Islam, some Oromo groups became Christians and while others became Muslims and this contributed a lot for the declining of *Waaqeefanna*. Though the majority of the Oromos in the area converted to Christianity, some of them remained *waaqefetta* until the imperial regime. During the Derg regime, a belief in *Waqa* abandoned since it was seen as a traditional religion. Nowadays, due to the proclamation of religious freedom, some people in the study area are practicing their indigenous religion.
3. **Followers of both Waaqeefanna and Orthodox Religion:** According to elders, there is a syncretistic type of religion in the study area. Few peoples practice a syncretistic type of religion by mixing some elements of Christianity with that of *Waaqefetta*. These people do not eat meat and drink milk during the fasting days or seasons. They have the photos of Jesus and other saints on the wall of their house. However, they never go to church since churches are not around at all. Indeed, these people make a pilgrimage on epiphany to the church in the near town. In similar fashion this people gather together and worship *waaqa* under a tree through rituals. And once a year they make a pilgrimage to Bishoftu for the public gatherings to celebrate for thanks giving to *Waaqa*.

## 3.8. Socio-cultural Elements

### 3.8.1. *Guddifachaa*

The Becho Oromo have a deep love for their children. Children grow in the family and society with high degree of freedom. The husband or the father democratically raises children.

Few months later, after the wedding ceremony, the newly married couples perhaps do not bear a child, hence, they are forced to raise a they child of the neighbors through *Guddifacha* (system of parent adopting a child). Among the *Becho* Oromo, when couples have no son and need to adopt a child, an elder make a surprise visit any family who has three or more children. A woman who needs to raise a child usually accompanies the elder together with a small child. The child's parent usually understand why the elders and the woman who need to adopt come to their house when they see a small child together with them since he is a symbol that expresses the demand of the couples to adopt their child. During their visit, the guests bring with them cloth and hold *Elella* and *Caaccuu* (kinds of jewelry that a small child carries).

When the family of the boy to be adopted showed its willingness and gives their child for *guddifacha*, the boy to be adopted goes with his new mother to his new family. When the boy arrives at the home of his new family, he will be given new name like "*Bulti*", "*Qajeelaa*", etc. Giving a new name to the boy is an indication that the family has got a new child and become parents. Furthermore, the new parents of the child prepare a feast and invite neighbors to the festivity. On the event, the child is blessed by the parents as follows:

- “*Quufaan raagi*” meaning “do not be hungry”
- “*Bookan raagi*”, “drink always honey wine”
- “*Aananiin raagi*”, “grow with milk”

At the same time, the new parents declare that he is their son and that he has the right to inherit their property. Afterwards, he is referred to as the son of the new couples.

### 3.8.2. *Atteete*

According to my informants, *Atteete* is women ritual that is celebrated and performed once in a year on the eve of the New Year and the *Meskel* holiday. This ritual connects women with their God through prayer. One of the reasons among many that *Atteete* has been celebrated is to beg “*waqa*” to get a husband for the unmarried woman whose age passed for marriage. There are some prerequisites that are performed before the actual ritual. A black or white cloth, which is dressed on the events, and food *Merka* (porridge) and *Farsoo* (local beer) are prepared.

A group of women, that is, the mother accompanied by her daughters or relatives’ daughters, performs the ritual. The newly married woman celebrates the event with her husband’s grandmother. During the ritual, the mother takes a seat on the floor decorated with grass in front of her daughters. She inserts grass to *Kenche* (food made of pieces of wheat and butter) and touches her breast with it four times. Then after, turn by turn, she touches her daughter’s breast with grass four times. The mother blesses her daughters, saying, “Yours cows to be hundred”.

Generally, Atete is performed to express the wish of good hope. This includes 1) a good wish for the woman not to face obstacles during the time of pregnancy. 2) to get a good husband for girls. 3) to maintain peace in the family and society.

### 3.8.3. *Gumaa* (Blood Compensation)

According to elders, *gumaa* is a blood compensation paid for the family who lost their son through elders' reconciliation to stop a counter revenge that may come in the future.

According to the *Becho* culture, when a person kills a man because of different skirmishes, he hides himself by wandering here and there. The person can hide himself in remote areas, which are inaccessible by the deceased families. After three months of funeral ceremony, the person tells his family to pray for the sin he does before and to announce the need for reconciliation with the family who lost their son. The family and his relatives pray under a big tree near their village. After three days of praying, the killer's family sends elders to convince the families of the deceased to accept offers of negotiation and avoid any move of revenge. When the two families reach an agreement to settle the skirmish in a peaceful way, elders play a crucial role in establishing a sense of trust between the two families.

On the reconciliation day, a small feast is prepared in the house of the killer's family and the families of the deceased are invited to attend. The father or the brother of the killer waits for families of the deceased person by carrying a stone on his head at the gate of the compound. On their arrival, families of the deceased take off the stone from the head of the killer's father or brother and put down on the ground. This shows willingness of the families of the deceased for the reconciliation.

Long discussions are made about the incident through the facilitation of elders. After a consensus is reached, as blood compensation, money is paid for the family of the deceased person. This money could be in thousands and it is usually collected from the killer's clan. After the money is paid, food and drink are provided to families the deceased person. Until this time, the killer will not show himself up to family of the deceased person. Towards the end of the feast, a sheep comes, a hole is made through its womb and through this hole, and the killer and members of the deceased families clap their hands. This is indeed a kind of oath that families' of the deceased person give excuse for the killer. Afterwards, peace is established between the two families and then the families of the deceased person begin to consider the killer as one of their family members.

#### **3.8.4. Conflict in Marriage**

Among the study community, conflict between husband and wife arose mostly when the wife visited her family or neighbors without the permission of the husband. Therefore, the wife was considered as a source of conflict since the husband regarded himself as perfect even though he made some evils that led to a conflict. Nowadays, however, the husband is the major source of conflict. According to elders, it has become common to see husbands frequently going to the nearby town, *Tullu Bollo*, and spending their money on drinking a modern beer. As a result, they could be intoxicated. On their return home, they usually get into conflict with their wives.

Economic issue i.e. the husband's failure to provide money for the house hold budget is another source of conflict in marriage. In contrast, it seems that with the economic independence that women acquire is also another source of conflict i.e. the need of

equality leads to conflict in which the husband is reluctant to accept equality of woman with man.

Another cause for marriage conflict is a bad feeling that the husband or the wife does not get enough attention or love from the other or when both of them not getting his or her sexual needs met for a prolonged period of time.

When the wife is not contributing her share of the domestic duties, for example, not well handling children may lead to conflict.

In general, in the study area, failure of a wife to bear children, for adultery, being lazy in household activities, verbal insults, economic issues and drunkenness are the major sources of conflicts.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Analysis of the Study**

#### **4.1 Changes and Continuity in Marriage Practices among the *Becho Oromo***

According to Ferraro, cultures change by means of internal factor (innovation) and external factor (cultural diffusion) (2004:33). Therefore, the changes observed in marriage practice among the *Becho Oromo* are mainly the result of:

- ❖ modification of the already existing elements of marriage
- ❖ On the way to extinction of some practices of marriage
- ❖ adoption of new elements of marriage

The researcher describes the changes below mainly based on the information obtained from key informants.

#### **4.2. Changes Observed due to the Modification of Some Elements of Marriage**

The change, which is seen today in marriage practices of the *Becho Oromo*, is due to modification in the forms of marriage, role of elders, bridewealth and selection process and division of labor. These changes are described as follows.

#### 4.2.1. Changes in the Form of Marriage

Different societies have different forms of marriage practice. The *Becho* Oromo under study have their own ways of arranging marriage. Nowadays, the *Becho* Oromo have two forms of marriage practices that have been modified through time.

1. *Kadhaa* (marriage arranged by the parents of the couples)
2. *Fuudha guursuma* (marriage with widowed women)

##### *Kadhaa*

Among the *Becho* Oromo, in the past, boys would go to marriage at the age of fifteen and above. Nowadays, however, it is at the age of 18 and above that parents push their sons to establish their own family. Then, the boys look for the girl their need to marry. In previous time, in pre-Derg regimes, the parents fully dominated the selection of the girl. During the Derg regime, the boys, at least to some degree, were given the right to select their future wives. Since early 1990s, the boys were given priority in the selection process. Indeed, this is the radical change, which has been observed within half a century. According to elders, the main reasons for the changes are the result of the access of the rural young children to modern education.

Different cultures have social events that help young boys to select their wives. According to informants, for the northern part of Ethiopia, Epiphany helps the boys to select their wives. In similar fashion, in earlier time, the *Meskel* holiday, which is celebrated once a year on September, helped the *Becho* Oromo boys to observe and select their future wives.

On the *Meskel* holiday, the girls of the surrounding village, being beautifully dressed and making a group of five and above, play music or "*sirba*" known as "*Shenoye Yashenoye*". On this event, the boy with his friends observes the girl he needed at a distance following her footstep. If the boy gets interested, he then informs his family about the girl. Nevertheless, this tradition is now declining. Nowadays, young boys do not wait for the annual celebration to choose girls of their interest. They simply observe the activities of the girl during schooling. Indeed, among the study community it is the boy's family who send elders for marriage proposal not the girl's family. However the girl has the right to accept or reject the marriage proposal. If the girl meets the boy's criteria, he tells his family about her. As a result, to decide on the boy's choice, the family looks at three prerequisites, which serve as marriage rules among the study community.

According to Keesing, marriage rules vary from one culture to another. Among the Bedouins, middle east Arabs, a man can marry the daughter of his father's brother and among the Azande of Africa, brother-sister and father -daughter mating are common (1998:227-228). Nevertheless, incest taboo is one of the criteria to establish marriage among the study community. Therefore, the family counts generations. It is impossible to establish marriage until the fifth generation. Therefore, an individual is forced to practice exogamy. If there is no blood relation, the economic background of the girl's family is considered. Economically, the boy's family should at least equivalent with the girl's family. If the boy's families are very poor and the girl's families are rich, there is a probability that the girl's family may not offer their consent. The question of family descent is also another issue that is taken as a criterion for marriage. If the girl is from the

family of *Tumtu* (weavers), *Faqi* (Tanners), and *Gabra* (slaves), that therefore means the boy's family could not match in marriage with the girl. This is an age-old tradition, which is also exercised at this time even with the influence of education.

When the criteria are fulfilled, the boy's father sends elders along with a letter to the girl's family. The elders make a surprise visit usually in the afternoon of Sunday. This is because on Sunday the farmers usually stay close to their houses since there could be social gatherings and absence of market in the area on this day. If the girl's father is not at home, the elders leave a message for the coming of another day. This is a tradition continued from the past. With the arrival of the elders at the girl's house, the father of the girl asks the elders by saying "*Eessaa deemtu?*" literally it means, "Where are you coming from?" The elders respond by saying: *muka keessaa mukati filatama, nama keessaas namatu filatamee muudama akkuma jedhamu aniis isinin filaadhe*" literally it means, "we are here to ask you to match in marriage with you". Having said this, the elders give a grass known as "*coqorsa*" and a letter to the girl's father. *Coqorssa* transmits the message that the elders came to the girl's family for peace. In addition, the elders orally explain the purpose of their coming.

On the appointment day, the girl's family prepares a local alcoholic drink called "*Miju Farsoo*" and food for the elders. Upon their arrival, the elders will be required to sit on "*Medab*" inside the compound of the girl's parents. Immediately, they will be given *Miju Farsoo* to drink. Nevertheless, the elders refuse to drink. After a short break of silence, the girl's father asks them "what brings you here?" The elders respond by saying "*ofkolti*", meaning "prestige for you" then again they say "we are here, in your house, looking for your daughter for a marriage with our son. Therefore, this is the reason why

we are here in your house”. The girl’s father then responds by saying, “Up on the will of God, it is our pleasure to become your relatives”. Nevertheless, her relatives need to study your background, thus, the time is not now to give our daughter”. Saying this, they prepare coffee for the guests and both the elders and the family discuss about contemporary issues of their family and environment. After the end of the coffee ceremony, the last appointment day will be determined so as to announce the consent on marriage.

On the third appointment day usually known as “*saddaeta*”, which is the day when the consent will be announced, the girl’s families make a small preparation of feast. On that day, the boy’s father goes with the elders to the girl’s family. Up on their arrival, greetings are exchanged by saying “*Akkam Ooltan?*” meaning, “How are you?” “*biyyinagaadhaa?*” (*Is the home land/village peace?*) . Then, the elders and the boy’s father sit on the place that is prepared for them. The number of elders from both sides may range from eight to ten. Before eating and drinking, the girl’s father gives his blessings followed by the boy’s father. After having food and drink, the following conversation is exchanged between the girl’s and the boy’s fathers.

The girl’s father says, “where are you coming from?”

The boy’s father responds, “We came to your house to become your relatives through your daughter named \_\_\_\_\_ and my son named” \_\_\_\_\_

The girl’s father says, “Our family has not yet finished studying your background, therefore, we still need additional time.”

The boy's father replies, "Until now you have studied us and the time is rushing.

Therefore, the information that you have is enough to judge our background"

Furthermore, the boy's father says "*Nakaadhimachiisa*" to the girl's father, meaning, "Give us your daughter as a fiancée for my son". At this time, the girl's father expresses his willingness by saying "*kaadhimadhu Abba ilma*" meaning, "you can engage her as finance (ok, you can father of a son)". After this, to show his respect and excitement, the boy's father stands and kisses the knees of all elders. After the end of the ceremony, another appointment will be arranged to decide about the marriage date. The conversation between the girl's and the boy's fathers are the legacies of the past inherited from their ancestors.

On the appointment day, it is only the boy's father who will present in the girl's house. After an agreement is reached with the girl's family, he returns to his family with the information about the betrothal day ceremony.

### **The Betrothal Ceremony**

The betrothal ceremony will be conducted to confirm that the boy and the girl are the future husband and wife. On that day, only few close relatives and neighbors are invited. Different traditional food items like *chechebsa*, *chuko* and local alcoholic drinks like *Aaraqee* and *Miju farsoo* are prepared. After the end of the ceremony, the girl stays with her family. Then, after a long preparation of usually more than a month or so for the wedding, actual ceremony is held in the houses of both families.

match in marriage with you. Nevertheless,  
where is the bridewealth?")

The elders from the groom side, "*harkii keenya warqee amalli keenya  
dansa dha*" ("here is the bridewealth with  
our honesty")

The elders from the bride side, "*Amala kessan bullet ilaalla fidaa warqee*"  
("give us the bridewealth and we will assure  
your honesty")

The elders from the bride side count and accept the bride's wealth. Then, those people who accompany the groom will be invited to enter to the house. Nevertheless, the sisters of the bride prevent the bridal party from entering the premise of the bride's parents and this is known as "*balbala qabaa*" meaning, "gate guarding". At this time, the groom pays some amount of money and enters inside the compound. Having entered the house and taken their seats, the attendants will be invited to eat the prepared food known as "*Dhanga*". After three hours of stay or more, the bride and the groom stand on the skin of the cattle slaughtered for the wedding purpose. After they get blessings, the first best man puts the bride on the horse back Prepared for her. This is because the mule is cursed, therefore, perhaps the bride will not have a child in the future. And then the group begins a return journey to the groom's family singing songs.

The attendants, on their arrival to the groom's family, warmly accept the groom and the bride. However, the groom's sisters and their friends insult the bride through songs. The bride on the gate of the house slaughters a sheep known as "*Rakoo*" in which it is a symbol done to remove future obstacles in marriage. Then, the bride and the groom enter

the house by walking on a slaughtered sheep. After the elders blessed them, the attendants in the groom's house begin to eat the food prepared and drink *Farsoo* and *Aaraqee*.

In the midnight, the groom's best man leaves the couples alone for a while. This is a time when the groom proves the virginity of the bride. In the last decades, to minimize the scratch that may come from the bride, her fingers' nails used to be cut. At the same time, she would also be forced to drink "*Feexoo*" so as to exhaust her. However, today this tradition is disappeared. The main reason is that the couples are usually allowed to spend some time together to understand each other before marriage. Therefore, the girl would remain not harmful during the first day of sexual intercourse. In the earlier times, if the groom were unable to take the virginity of the girl, his first best man would be allowed to make sexual intercourse with her. Nowadays, it is considered as an incest taboo. If the bride is proved to be virgin, the excitement of the groom doubles and he prepares for the "*Minjedebis*" ceremony, meaning, "congratulation". If she is not virgin with the will of the groom, she began to live with him.

### ***Minjedebis* (Congratulation)**

*Minjedebis* is a ceremony in which the families of the couples express their excitement about the virgin status of the bride and celebrate that with her family. The groom with his best men and relatives go to the girl's family by singing songs. Up on their arrival, they deliver a white scarf with blood stain on it to the bride's family. This symbolizes that the bride was virgin. This is the old tradition, which continues to this day. Many days after the wedding ceremony, the bride family visits their daughter and this is known as

"*Dibaa*". *Dibaa* is done to see the married girl is in a good situation physically and emotionally.

Therefore, what are the major changes that have occurred to the *kadhaa* form of marriage over time? According to informants the major changes are:

- In the earlier decades, in *kadhaa* form of marriage, the family of the boy used to send elders when their sons were at the age of 15 and above. And the family of the girl also allowed their daughter to get married beginning from 14 years of age. However, nowadays in this form of marriage, both the boys and the girls establish marriage at the age of 17 and above.
- In the past, in *kadhaa* form of marriage, only the parents were involved in the selection process. Nowadays, however, both the boys and the girls usually take part in the decision-making. At this time, the girls are also asked to express their opinion about the marriage. If the girl is not interested in marriage she is not forced to accept the marriage proposal even though the family shows an interest.
- In *kadhaa*, elders would be required to visit the girl's family from four to five times to complete the formality of the marriage. These days, the culture has changed because of economic problem hence elders visit the girl's family only twice.
- If the girl had no virginity, the groom would beat the girl by "*Alenga*" (traditional tool made of cattle skin). Nowadays, even if the girl has no virginity, the boy shows his willingness to live with the girl since he involves in the selection process.

- The volume of the betrothal and the wedding day feasts were vast and many people used to be invited to attend the ceremonies. Nowadays, however, only very close neighbors and relatives attend the ceremonies. The main cause for this is the economic situation of the time as the host community mostly leads a subsistence way of life. Indeed, it is not deniable that few rich farmers prepare lavish wedding ceremony.
- Nevertheless, other traditions (sending elders, the steps involved, the conversations between elders and the girl's father and between the girl's father and the boy's father, sequence of events like betrothal, wedding day, *minjidebis*) have continued to exist and are currently widely exercised in *kadhaa* form of marriage.

#### 4.2.2. Changes Occurred in the Role of Elders in Marriage

The role of these traditional elders is very crucial in arranging marriage among the study community. As these elders have developed an enormous experience in social activities, they are sent to the girl's family as messengers to arrange marriage. The elders in the past were sent without the prior knowledge of the girl's family. Because of this, they used to sit outside the compound and the girl's father would be informed about the arrival of the elders outside their compound. Nowadays, however, the girl's families are pre-informed about the coming of the elders and as a result the elders are invited to enter the house. After an exchange of greetings, the elders give grass known as "*coqorssa*", which is an indication of peace and a letter to the girl's father.

On the second appointment day, the number of elders who go to the girl's family increases from two to five. This is indeed to give emphasis for the issue. On this day, a

very small feast is prepared for the elders. This usually includes *Miju Fersoo* because the host communities are mainly Orthodox Christians. As usual, the girl's father gives another appointment to the elders to let them know about the family's decision.

On the third appointment day, the number of elders from the boy's side can be from five to eight and what is new on this day is that the girl's family on their part prepare three to five elders. After a consensus is reached, the wedding day will be determined. With this information, the elders return to the boy's family.

Sending of elders from three to four times is still practiced in the area. However, the host community begins to practice sending elders to the girl's family a maximum of two times these days. The first day is the day of announcement and the second one is the day of consent. The tradition of sending 5-8 elders is now reduced to a maximum of three elders. The major reasons are partly to minimize the amount of money being spent for the preparation of feast for elders and partly due to a cultural diffusion from *Tullu Bollo* town to the study community.

On the wedding day, the main responsibility of the elders from the boy's side is to give bride wealth and the role of the elders from the girl's side is to receive the bridewealth. Indeed, the type and amount of bridewealth is determined before the wedding day. After receiving the bride wealth, the elders from the girl's side invite the groom and his companions to enter to the house and take seats in the place prepared for them. The elders on the girl's side give their blessings to the couple when they leave for the groom's family.

Therefore, the basic changes that have recently occurred to the practice of sending elders as messengers are two things.

- The frequency of sending elders has been reduced to two times
- The number of elders is reduced to three

These practices introduce to the area from the near town, Tullu Bollo through people's interaction.

#### **4.2.3. Marriage between Equals during the Regimes of Emperor Haileselassie and the Derg and Changes Witnessed in the Last Twenty Years**

According to elders, during emperor Haileselassie's regime, particularly in the post liberation period, a remarkable acceleration in land privatization had appeared among the *Becho* Oromo. The land owning system created the landlords and the tenants. The gap between the rich and poor got wider and wider in terms of land ownership. To maintain his acceptance, position, and prestige in the society, the landlord preferred to establish marriage with the families of other landlords in the area. The families of the landlords could not establish marriage with the tenants who were mostly seen as "Gerba" or "slaves". Therefore, the landlords exhibited discrimination against the tenants and did not intermarry with the latter. The tenant families establish marriage from their own class by counting generations. Even there were cases when marriage between the boy and the girl of two different tenant families found in different economic positions got confirmation from the landlords.

However, the distribution of feudal lands to the tenants during the Derg regime following the declaration of land to the tiller had significantly reduced the position and status of the feudal lords. In similar fashion, the tenants got freedom and land for cultivation. This had

a huge impact in narrowing the existing gap between the landlords and the tenants in position and social acceptance. Hence, status in position was not seen as major criteria. However, wealth began to be considered as a prerequisite for marriage. Therefore, marriage continued to be established between the rich families. And the poor marry the poor. This was because only the parents made the decision about marriage, and this was not based on the interest of their children. According to elders, if the girl's family had good background in wealth, social acceptance, and kinship, the boy would be forced to marry her even though the boy had no interest in the girl.

Indeed, in the last twenty years, some changes have been observed in the study area due to the spread of 'modernization' from the nearby town, *Tullu Bollo*, to the community under study. And also the social and political consciousness raising in the community have also its own contribution. Nowadays, the boy selects his future wife and the family only forwards suggestions and comments on his choice. With the agreement of the boy, elders will be sent to the girl's family. Even, the girl is asked to express her opinion. Here is the case study that the researcher observed on 26, July, 2012.

### **Case Study**

In the afternoon of 26, July, 2012, the researcher along with two elders went to the girl's family. It was the second day of appointment for the elders. It was the day that the consent of the family about the marriage would be known. After having *miju farsoo*, they started to discuss about the marriage. On this day, brothers, uncles, mother, and father of the girl were present. The father of the girl said for the elders, "because of the discussion that we had with the family, I am ready to give you my daughter, but she refused to accept the marriage."

The researcher asked the girl why she refused to accept the marriage. The girl responded that, "I am a grade 10 student and I need to complete my education and marry a person of my choice".

From this case study, one can clearly figure out that girls can refuse marriage in the study area. For Keesing (1998:226), in societies where a young man is economically dependent on his family, he has no right to select his future wife. In contrast, among the *Becho Oromo*, the young man/ woman have the right to reject or accept a marriage proposal even if he/she is economically dependent on the family. This is the change observed over last few years.

Indeed, due to the influence of religion, the *Becho Oromo* of the study community do not establish marriage with *Gerbicha* (slave), *Tumtu* (blacksmith) and with *Faki* (Tanners). Particularly, the *Tumtus* are marginalized in the society. These groups of people hardly establish marriage outside their group. This is an age- old tradition that has continued to exist even to this date.

Therefore, during the reign of Emperor Hailesilassie, marriage was mainly based on social status and position among the *Becho Oromo* and during the Derg regime economy was the base to match in marriage. Today, regardless of economic difference, the choice of the boys and the girls is respected or they can easily influence their parents' choice. The girl or the boy establishes marriage with the person they like regardless of the pressure that may come from their families.

#### 4.2.4. Changes Observed in Bridewealth

According to Ferraro (2004:210), bride wealth is the compensation given to the bride's family for the loss of her work service. In contrast to this, among the *Becho* Oromo, bridewealth is given to the girl's family so as to express the respect and value that the boy's family has for the girl's family.

The type of the bride wealth given to the girl's family varies from one culture to another. For instance, among the Nuer, cattle are given as bridewealth. Among the Shiluk of Sudan, cows are used as the medium of exchange in marriage transaction (Ferraro, 2004:21). In pre-Derg period, the *Becho* Oromo gave cattle as a bridewealth. Cattle were given as a bridewealth mainly for two reasons. Firstly, cattle were abundantly found in the study area. Secondly, to show the respect that the boy's family had for the girl's family since cattle were seen as means of livelihood. However, the tradition of giving cattle as a bride wealth was gradually substituted by cash among the study community. According to Ferraro, beginning from the mid 1980's monetization of bridewealth began to be practiced in many cultures. He reasoned out that the change was due to the transition from subsistence economy to cash based-economy (2004:211). Indeed, among the *Becho* Oromo, giving money as a bridewealth began during the imperial regime. It was the *caffé* (council of *Becho* Oromo) located around *Awash Bune*, 40 kms from the study area, which determined money to be given as a bridewealth among the *Becho* Oromo of the surrounding areas. Then after, it has been practiced to give money as a bridewealth. Indeed, without giving money, marriage cannot be established in these days. Hence it uses as a binding rule in the community.

During the Derg regime, the amount of birr (paper money) given as a bridewealth was less than five hundred. However, nowadays, six thousand birr is given for the girl's family. The amount of birr depends on the income of the boy's family. In this regard, the amount of birr given is not fixed by the community but should not be less than 4,000 birr. Obviously, inflation and the economic situation of the people can influence the amount of birr given in the form of bridewealth.

The bridewealth given to the girl's family is divided into two. These are known as *uwissa* and *wandaboo*. *Uwwisa* is a bridewealth given to the girl on the wedding day. This may include a ring, bracelets, perfumes, clothes and shoes. The second form of bridewealth is *wendebo*. It is given for the girl's mother on the day known as *sedeta*. On this day, the boy's father puts up to 2000 birr on "*gingilcha*", a flat basket like sieve. *Gingilcha* is a symbol that the girl's parents are fertile.

In the post marriage time, year after year, the couple visits the girl's parents- usually a week after the celebration of Easter. On this day, coffee, sugar, and incense are given. In the earlier times, cheese, milk, and honey were given on the day of the couple's visit.

#### **4.2.5. Children as Assets**

According to elders among the *Becho* Oromo, in the earlier times (during the imperial and Derg regime) newly married couples were expected to have their first child just the following year after marriage. Those couples over thirty years of marriage relationship could have six to 12 children. This happened because children were considered as assets or sources of income. When they grew up, they were given different responsibilities. Females would fetch water and boys would take part in farming activities. Or else, very

rarely, they would be sent to town for schooling since it was believed that these children would support their family financially in the future. Therefore, the Oromo who had no children because of different reasons used to adopt a child through *guddiffacha*.

However, nowadays the number of children is reduced to a maximum of five because of the efforts made by health extension workers who frequently visit the community and teach them about family planning. According to one female informant, who has only three children, having more than five or above children will have a side effect in her own health in the late age. Moreover, as she said:

In the past, parents did not bother much to feed their children. However, this time it is difficult to feed, clothing and schooling children. Therefore, the old saying, "children would grow up by chance" does not work at all. Therefore, because of the economic problem in my house and for my health, and the entire family, I am using a family planning".

The researcher observed 17 households, and on average, each household has four children. This means the old tradition of having many children has now begun to change.

#### **4.2.6. The Time Duration from *Saddeeta* to the Betrothal Ceremony**

According to elders, before the coming of EPRDF to power, both families prepared for the betrothal ceremony after the bride's family gave its consent for the establishment of marriage with the boy's family on day of *saddeeta*. The duration between *saddeeta* and the betrothal ceremony could be more than a year. This could sometime be used as a favorable condition for other boys, usually those from the poor families, to involve in the abduction of the girl who was ready to marry another person. As a result, the gap between *saddeeta* and betrothal became shorter and shorter. Indeed, in the first decade of the EPRDF, awareness created due to women's right. In contrast, abduction not eliminated in

the society. However, nowadays, because of the economic hardships, the families of the boy and the girl do not prepare a betrothal ceremony. There is a direct marriage ceremony. Indeed, the time duration between *saddeeta* and the actual marriage ceremony is not more than six months.

#### **4.2.7. Residence of the Couples**

Immediately after the wedding ceremony, the couples began to live in their separate house together with the boy's family in the same compound. This is done because the married boy is the one who expected to inherit and administer his parent property on their death. The married girl was isolated from her parents since the society had not been inherited land, a house or other properties to females. Even when the husband died without giving birth to a son, the nearest male relatives of the husband, not his wife, would inherit the properties. By so doing, the culture itself highly discriminated against females. However, today there is attitudinal change among the society. Females have the right to inherit their husband property like land and cattle wherever her residence is either with her husband's family or not. This change has been seen in the area due to the effort made by government officials in different meetings with the society in the area under study.

#### **4.3. Changes observed Due to some Traditional Elements of Marriage are on the Way to Extinction and Contemporary Causes**

Until recently, the *Becho* Oromo used to practice different forms of marriage. Nevertheless, some of these forms of marriage are currently on the way to disappear in

the area, and this has its own contribution for the changes observed in marriage practice. Types of marriage on the way to extinction and the changes are described below.

#### **4.3.1. *Buti* (Abduction)**

This has been practiced when the boy is unable to fulfill all the requirements of marriage like when he is unable to prepare a feast and too poor to give bride wealth, or when the boy likes a girl and her family refuses to arrange marriage and low acceptance in the community. Under these circumstance, he might be forced to take away the girl forcibly. This kind of marriage occurs mainly during market days or at the time when the girl fetches water for her parents.

#### **4.3.2. *Irra daaba* (Incidental Type of Marriage)**

When a man would be unable to give a bride wealth or when the mother of his children died, the person might use *irra daaba* to find a woman who would take care of his children. In this kind of marriage, the boy with some elders would go to the girl's house, enter in, and then put a stick known as "*ule*" in front of the door. *Ule* transmits the message that we came to your house to become your relatives through your daughter. On the spot, the girl's father might oppose to this action. This is because he might consider this against the law in which the family needs to give its daughter through *Kadhaa*. However, when an agreement is reached, the boy takes away the girl with him without any prerequisites such as preparing feasts and giving bridewealth.

#### **4.3.3. *Fuudha Assena* (Marriage by entry)**

Among the study people, a girl would be expected to marry at the age of 17 and below. However, when her age passed this and entered to her twenties, the society called her

“*haftu*”. To get a husband, this girl might enter to the house of a boy that she loved by carrying *hiddi* (*Solanum incanum*) in her hand without the prior knowledge of the boy and his family. The girl, after she gets inside the house, ties herself with the pillar of the house. It is an indication that she is in need to marry their son. Then, the boy’s family, without any objection, must accept the girl since it is a taboo to refuse marriage through *asseena*. this tradition is on the way to extinction because this time girls are going to schools instead of waiting for an husband.

### **Causes why *Buti* and *Irradaaba* Marriage Practices are on the Way to Extinction**

According to elders, there are two contemporary causes why *Buti* and *Irradaaba* types of marriage on the way to extinction. For the extinction of the above forms of marriage

- a) Education
- b) Creation of awareness about the impacts of these types of marriage

#### **a) Education**

According to elders, during the Derg regime, parents usually forced their daughters to marry instead of sending them to school. One of the reasons for this was that there were believes that a woman would bring no change even if they get an access to education. Therefore, the people of the study area say “*Nadheen dheertuu malee beektu hinqabdu*” meaning “one can find only a slender but not a knowledgeable from among women”. On the other hand, parents feared to send their daughters to remote areas for schooling because of believes that they would lose their virginity due to a long travel. Virginity is a

symbol of respect for the girl's family. Therefore, they were grown up at home under strict supervision and were forced to marry in their early age.

Nevertheless, particularly, in the last two decades a profound change has been seen in the area regarding females' education. The outlook of the society has changed and they began to believe that education is necessary for women. Therefore, marriage practices like *Buti* (abduction) and *Irra daaba* (incidental type of marriage) were regarded as an obstacle for female schooling. These forms of marriage practices made girls marry in their early age, and this denied females access to education. Therefore, the society abandoned to practice these forms of marriage and gave chance for female to go to schools. According to my informant, the society nowadays developed a motto "females for education, not for marriage".

Indeed, the opening of schools like *Battu-Cherecha*, *Soyoma* and *Kara Genji* primary schools in the study area has its own contribution to eradicate early marriage and abduction since the schools were opened in their villages.

One can clearly see how the number of girls attending education has increased in Kara Genji elementary school in 2011 as compared to 1990.

Academic Years	Total number of female students in the school
1982(E.C)/1990	43
1983 (E.C)/1991	44
2001(E.C)/2010	419
2002(E.C)/2011	425

Source: Kara Genji Elementary School, 18, July, 2012

Indeed, the changes observed in female schooling are not fundamental. Even though it seems to have been that the number of females who go to school is increasing over the last two decades, still from the figure one can point out that the change observed in female schooling is not satisfactory in which many girls have been forced for early marriage.

Therefore, the difference in the number of female students over twenty years is 382. The age of these students ranged between 8-17. According to my informant, the increase in the number of female students attending schools in that particular peasant kebele has occurred due to the attitudinal change of the society towards female schooling. The opening of the school played a pivotal role to abolish early marriage. As the schools are close to their homes, females are not exposed to abduction. Nowadays, parents prefer to send their children to school rather than forcing them into marriage.

The change that has been seen in early marriage and abduction has not only come through female schooling but also through male schooling. Boys at the age of 15-17 used to be forced to establish their own family. Nowadays, however, they go to school. For example, the total number of male students who attend their schooling in *Kara Genji* School was 63 in 1984/1992 but has increased to 437 in 2003/2011. Therefore, the figure shows how much the society is eager to send their children to school. This means the girls and the boys who were forced to marry in their early age nowadays are going to schools. Therefore, the opening of schools in the study area has undoubtedly contributed towards the eradication of early marriage and abduction.

## b) An Awareness Created by the Gender Office

The gender office of the woreda is located in *Tullu Bollo* town. The gender experts frequently move to the rural peasant associations to create awareness and educate the society through informal meetings and public gatherings about abduction and early marriage for the past many years. According to my informants, currently the society in the area not only understands early marriage and abduction as obstacles for development but also consider them as a serious crime. According to the revised family code, 2000, article 7 “neither a man nor a woman who has not attained the full age of eighteen years shall conclude marriage.” Therefore, according to my informants, the society has accepted and implemented the law as it can be seen today since there is no marriage at the age of 15 and 16.

## 4.4. Changes Observed in the Adoption of New Elements of Marriage

According to elders, in the last two decades, the level of interactions between the rural (the study area) and the urban (*Tullu Bollo* Town) peoples have increased. This is mainly because of:

1) **Crops produced for Market**: In the study area, the market days are Monday, Thursday, and Saturday. In recent times, unlike the past trends, people from *Waliso* and Addis Ababa visit market places found in the study area. This is mainly because of an increasing demand for the crops of the region particularly “*Teff*”. This has created the chance for the local communities to interact with people outside their own and exchange cultures.

2) **Frequent visits of the Youngsters to the town of Tullu Bollo.** This has exposed young people to a new way of urban life. Due to these interactions, the rural people emulate an urban culture and incorporate it into their own. By so doing, female *minjes* (*bridesmaid*), which did not exist before, has been introduced from *Tullu Bollo* to the study community.

In earlier times, only the close friends of the bride spend some time with her before the wedding day. However, nowadays, the bride selects her own *minjes* from among her friends. The number of the bride's *minjes* (*bridesmaid*) can range from four to six. Until the wedding day ceremony, they spend most of the time with the bride chanting, playing, and dancing. They take part in the preparation of the wedding feasts by contributing money. Before and during the wedding day, the *minjes* (*bridesmaid*) accompany the bride in all her activities. Sometimes, they spend the whole night playing with her. This is indeed a new cultural element introduced to the area during the past few years.

However, the tradition about groom's *minji* (*best man*) has existed in the area for many years. What makes it different from the current scenario is the number. In the past during and pre-Derg regimes, the groom had about three to five *minjes*. These days, it can reach up to eight. These male *minjes* also contribute money for the preparation of the wedding feast. They spend most of their time with the groom and accompany him during his trip to the bride's house. The first best man has special place for the groom. He is the one who puts the bride on horseback during their return trip to the groom's family.

## 4.5. Unchanged Marriage Practices

### 4.5.1. *Fuudha Gursuma* (Marriage with Widow)

The *Becho* Oromo has long been practicing a form of marriage known as *fuudha guursuma*, which is still intact. This form of marriage occurs when the woman loses her husband by death. Unlike other cultures like that of *Qebena* in the *Becho* Oromo, it is an incest for a widow to marry the brother of her deceased husband. Therefore, she establishes marriage outside the family of her deceased husband. When a man likes a widow, he sends elders to her families (her parents) to get their consent. In this marriage, the responsibility of taking care of the property of the deceased husband is given to the new husband. He also takes an oath to take care of the children for clothing, feeding and schooling them. This is because to enable him to feel the sense of to be a father and the property (Cattle or land) not to be damaged or confiscated. A small feast could be prepared to announce the marriage for the neighbors.

### 4.5.2. Marriage Songs and Discourses

The marriage songs are among the old practices among the *Becho* Oromo that has shown no changes in its discourses. The *Becho* Oromo marriage songs are divided into two:

1. *Sirboota Mana dubaraa* (songs sung in the house of the bride)
2. *Sirboota kan mana mucaa* (songs sung in the groom's house)

### 1. Marriage Songs in the House of the Bride Family

The songs in the house of the bride's family are sung by the bride's *minjes* and closest relatives and friends. Particularly, these marriage songs are start to sung two weeks before the marriage.

On the eve of the separation of the bride from her friends and relatives, they sing the following song:

*Emmoo yaalashoo laskaalashii*      The beauty bride

*Gasaggasi biyya ormaatti*      You are on the way to separate from your family

Blaming the bride's family for arranging the marriage merely for the sake of money, the bride's friends sing the following songs:

*Gamoo yaa lashaallashee*      The beauty bride

*Baala qarshii caala jedhe abbeettu*      Your father said, the bridewealth is better

*Yaa mura shunkurtii*      Cut the onion into pieces

*qarshii Caala jettee atii ilmoo gurguruufi*      Your mother preferred the bridewealth than  
you

To show the love that the bride's minjes have for her and so as not to depart from her they sing as follows:

*Kooraa roobe kooraa shoolee*      It rained over there, Kora of shole

*Siinkennu qabee*      I do not depart you with the groom

To send a message to the groom to give the bride a good treatment since she is very young, they sing as follows:

*Gufuu kara duraa sossobii buqqisi*      Remove the obstacles in front of you

*Mucayyoon daa'ima sossobii guddisi*      Take care of the bride

Finally, they sing the following songs:

<i>Geeshoon waan ulfaatu</i>	As buckthorn is heavy
<i>Dalga galchii baadhu</i>	Carry it horizontally
<i>Yaa aayyoo jabaadhu</i>	Mother, be strong
<i>Diinqa keessa kaadhu</i>	Work in the kitchen

This is indeed to enlighten the bride's mother that her daughter is leaving and therefore that she should be ready to take responsibilities of the house activities.

## 2. Songs Sung in the House of the Groom's Family

In the house of the groom, songs are sung by his relatives.

Wishing a good hope for the groom, his relatives sing the following songs:

<i>Yaa Habaaboo habaaboo láttee</i>	Flower, the shooting flower!
<i>Yaa misirroo бага hoofkalte</i>	Welcome the bride

To indicate that the bride's mother is in sorrow while the groom's mother is in excitement, the groom's relatives play the following:

<i>Yaa habaaboo gunddoo seetee</i>	Ababo threw away the sieve
<i>Gingilchaa hatte</i>	Taken away the basket
<i>Haati mucaa iliichaa baate</i>	The mother of the groom became happy
<i>Kan mucayyoon imimsaa baate</i>	The mother of the bride is in sorrow

When the groom brings the bride to his house, his relatives insult the bride saying:

<i>Maasaa gamaa maantaraariini</i>	Why was the plot over yonder not ploughed
<i>Mucaan bahe astamaariini</i>	The groom is a teacher
<i>Yaa mucayyoo maantamaariini</i>	A bride why didn't you learn?

In the earlier time, playing songs started a month before the day. Nowadays, however, it is played two weeks before the event. Recently, it has also become customary to see radio tapes playing marriage songs substituting people who play the songs.

Indeed, according to the *Becho* Oromo culture there are cases in which the family selects the *minjes* for the couples. The relationship between the couples and the *minjes* usually endure for a long period. The *minjes* have the responsibility to reconcile the couples in times of conflicts and share their problems since they are regarded as blood relatives. In times of happiness, holidays, and various ritual events, the *minjes* are invited to take part.

### **Causes why Some Elements of Marriage are Perpetuated to these Days**

The Becho Oromo have retained some elements of marriage without being mixed or diffused with other cultures. Blessing during *saddeeta* and the marriage ceremony, marriage songs, marriage with widow are some kinds of marriage elements and marriage practices continued to these times. The major causes are the following:

- a) **Similarity:** The steps and process involved in marriage blessings and marriage with widow no difference is observed between the study community and the nearby town. Therefore, the similarity between the two cultures enabled the host community to maintain the aforementioned element of marriage and practice of marriage.
- b) **Existence of difference:** The difference in language between the study community which the peoples speak Oromiffa and the peoples in urban, Tullu Bollo speak Amharic. This language difference remained a barrier for some marriage elements not to diffused in to the study community.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## Summary and Conclusion

### 5.1. Summary of Major Findings of the Study

This study has described and analyzed the change and continuity of marriage practice among the Becho Oromo of Becho Wereda. The changes observed in marriage practice in the study area are mainly the result of modification of the already existing elements of marriage and adoption of new elements of marriage.

The most common form of marriage practice among the Becho Oromo is Kadhaa. In this type of marriage, in the earlier days, in pre-Derg regimes, the parents were decision makers in the selection process. However, since the early 1990s boys have been given the right to select their future wife. The basic cause for the change is the positive attitude of the families that enabled young children to have an access to education.

The Becho Oromo have marriage rules. Beginning from the past until now they do not establish marriage with Tumtu (Weavers), Faqi (Tanners), and Gabra (Slaves). Moreover, no one establish marriage until the 5<sup>th</sup> generation. Indeed, being wealthy as a criterion for marriage had been disappeared some decades ago since still marriage is based on the interest of both the boys and the girls.

To complete the formality of marriage, elders were sent to the girl's family more than four times. These days, the culture has been begun to change since elders visit the girl's family only twice on the days of announcement and consent. Moreover, the number of elders who visit the girl's family from the first day to saddeeta reaches to a maximum of five to eight. These days it has been limited to a maximum of three.

The volume of the betrothal and the wedding feasts were vast and many people used to be invited to attend the ceremonies. Nowadays, however, only very close neighbors and relatives attend the ceremonies. This has been practiced because of the economic inflation seen in recent years.

Among the study people, during emperor Haileselassie regime, specifically in the post liberation period, marriage was between equals i.e. between the families of the land lords who had equal status and prestige in the society. The tenant families match in marriage among themselves. When the Derg came to power, due to the declaration of "Land to Tiller", the status of the land lord declined. In contrast, marriage begun to be established based on the economic prosperity of a person in which marriage was between the rich family on one hand and on the other between the poor. In the last two decades a paramount change has been seen in which the choice to whom to marry is restricted to the boys and the girls. The role of the family is forwarding ideas and suggestions.

In pre- Derge period, the Becho Oromo gave cattle as a bridewealth. Nevertheless, Chaffe (Council of Becho Oromo) located around Awash Bune, 40 kms from the study area decided money to be given as bridewealth instead of cattle. There has been variation in the money given. In the Dege regime five hundred birr was given as a bridewealth. Nowadays more than six thousand birr is given.

Early marriage and abduction were commonly practiced among the study people. These days, these practices are on the way to extinction. This is mainly because of education. In the earlier days, as there were no schools in their surroundings, both boys and girls were forced to marriage in their early ages. However, the culture has been changed and

families send their children to the nearby schools which in return gradually contributed to the declining of early marriage and abduction.

In the last two decades the level of interaction between the rural (the study people) and the urban (Tullu Bollo, Waliso Towns) peoples have increased due to market to buy and sell products, this interaction enabled female minje which had not been there now to be introduced. Hence, the female minjes spend together with the bride with few days before the wedding day.

## **5.2. Concluding Remarks**

This thesis is conducted on marriage practices among the peasant communities of Becho Oromo of Becho Wereda. The main objective of the study is to investigate the changing aspects of marriage practice and its continuity. Specifically, the causes for the change and continuity are further explored. Indeed, as the researcher understood there is a difference what the government officials say and the fact in the ground among the study community. Government officials believed that abduction and early marriages are disappeared in the area due to the effort made by the government. Nevertheless, these marriage practices are continued to these dates among the study community. Indeed, it is not deniable that these practices are beginning to decline. Therefore, it is not appropriate to say these marriage practices are already extinct in the study area.

Most of the changes seen in the study area are due to contact with the urban peoples through market. This is because different peoples from different areas (Addis Ababa, Waliso) came to the area to buy and sell. Hence, these peoples share their views, ideas and values to the study community in which through time contributed the culture of the

study people to change. Furthermore, the interaction enabled new cultural elements to diffused to the study people in which female minje introduced in this way.

the opening of the schools in the area also have their own contribution this is not only simply the result of classroom teaching and learning but also this is because of the teachers in the schools which came from different cultures and background in which they live and interact with the community around in which its influence is immense.

The study peoples have both positive and negative responses for the changing aspects of marriage. Due to economic crisis, they accept to reduce: a) the volume of feasts prepare for the marriage b) the number of elders to a maximum of three. And also they have positive attitudes for the works done to reduce or extinct early marriage by government officials. However, the study people also have a demand to perpetuate their marriage practice, form and process for the coming generation

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The Revised Family Code Proclamation of 2000.

## Annex I – Profile of Key Informants

<b>Key informant</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Position or role in the community</b>	<b>Date of interview</b>
Assefa Gemechu	M	40	Battu Cherecha	Community elder	Feb 07, 2012
Bekele Hunde	M	49	Soyoma	Community elder	June 15, 2012
Chaka Damessa	M	63	Battu Cherecha	Community elder	Feb 07, 2012
Desisa Wakjera	M	53	Kara Sedeq	Community elder	June 10, 2012
Dibaba Gurara	M	78	Battu Cherecha	Community elder	March 6, 2012
Gemechu Gurumessa	M	70	Battu Cherecha	Community elder	Feb 07, 2012
Gonfa Dibaba	M	66	Deka Gudo	Community elder	July 25, 2012
Mebrate Yerga	M	66	Deka Gudo	Community elder	July 22, 2012
Mulesa Uressa	M	71	Battu Cherecha	Community elder	Feb 07, 2012
Takele Bejiga	M	59	Kata Enselale	Community elder	August 1, 2012

## Annex II – Profile of Other Informants

<b>Key informant</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Position or role in the community</b>	<b>Date of interview</b>
Abebech Beji	F	36	Battu Cherecha	House wife	Feb 10, 2012
Adugna Dekeru	M	45	Soyoma	Farmer	June 15, 2012
Angasa Hubeno	M	38	Deka Gudo	Farmer	July 22, 2012
Alyaye Mergia	F	28	Tullu Bollo	Gender expert	Feb 14, 2012
Bera Gutema	M	50	Soyoma	Farmer	June 15, 2012
Bonsa Bekela	M	59	Deka Gudo	Farmer	July 22, 2012
Delgessa Bultuma	M	42	Kara Sedeq	Farmer	June 10, 2012
Tadelech Bekelcha	F	31	Battu Cherecha	School Director	Feb 10, 2012
Kebeda Benti	M	29	Kara Sedeq	Farmer	June 10, 2012
Kebede Bayissa	M	32	Tullu Bollo	Gender expert	Feb 14, 2010
Nigusse Senbeto	N	32	Tullu Bollo	School Director	June 20, 2010
Mebrate Yerga	M	45	Deka Gudo	Farmer	July 22, 2012
Shelema Chalchesa	M	56	Katta Einsele	Farmer	August 1, 2012
Tadelech Kunma	F	16	Kara Sedeq	Student	July 26, 2012

# DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work, and that all sources of material used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

## **Declared by:**

Ahenafi Zenebe



17/12/2012

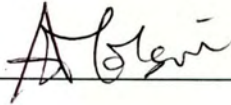
The candidate

Signature

Date

## **Confirmed by:**

Dr. Assefa Tolera



Dec. 17, 2012

Advisor

Signature

Date

