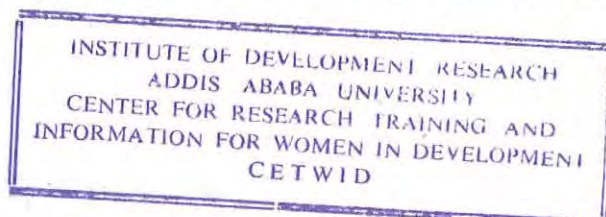


**SOME ASPECTS OF THE STATUS OF WOMEN AMONG
THE KONSO OF SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA**



**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF
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GLOSSARY

Terms

<i>Aba/apa</i>	- father
<i>Abuya</i>	- mother's brother
<i>Afan</i>	- dialect/speech
<i>Aferta</i>	- the clan/ spiritual leader in Turo town.
<i>Agelgelot</i>	- an <i>amharic</i> word means service cooperative
<i>Ahade/ahadene</i>	- good morning
<i>Amhara</i>	- an ethnic group found in the Northern part of Ethiopia
<i>Araida</i>	- clay pot for brewing <i>chakka</i>
<i>Areke</i>	- home made alcoholic drink
<i>Argaida</i>	- a certain type of leaf that is used for the coming out of maternity ceremony
<i>Arhata Ila</i>	- beginning of great rains
<i>Assham</i>	- hello
<i>Assuma</i>	- sister's son
<i>Belg</i>	- small rainy season (from mid February-April)
<i>Birr</i>	- Ethiopian paper money (currency)
<i>Birzz</i>	- a non-fermented honey drink
<i>Boha hauda</i>	- craftsmen association
<i>Bulluko</i>	- a wrapping cloth made of cotton
<i>Chakka</i>	- a home-made alcoholic beverage
<i>Chebotta</i>	- non-alcoholic porridge like drink
<i>Chimra</i>	- a necklace made from blue beads

<i>Chiraro</i>	- pieces of fire sticks
<i>Chiriwanna</i>	- a necklace made of beads
<i>Dawras</i>	- counselors/mediators
<i>Debbo</i>	- organized farm working groups
<i>Dina</i>	- the town's waste depositing place
<i>Dinga diruma</i>	- sacred stone
<i>Etenta</i>	- farmers
<i>Faraida</i>	- an age category for the junior group
<i>Frodda</i>	- a bead necklace worn by a bride
<i>Fuldo</i>	- the head of the craftsmen association
<i>Gada</i>	- the Oromo age-grade system
<i>Gra'azmatch</i>	- a worrier title of the <i>amhara</i> , literally means "left leader"
<i>Haha</i>	- sacred swearing place at the <i>mora</i>
<i>Haleko</i>	- cabbage like plant (<i>shelagaidda</i>)
<i>Harda</i>	- water well/ponds
<i>Hasha bunitta</i>	- coffee leaves
<i>Hauda</i>	- craftsmen
<i>Hauda kollaya</i>	- tanners
<i>Hauda ohawa</i>	- weavers
<i>Hauda okotta</i>	- potters
<i>Hauda olotta</i>	- butchers
<i>Hauda tuma</i>	- blacksmith
<i>Hella</i>	- the warrior group
<i>Herodda</i>	- ornament made of shell of an Ostrich egg mixed with blue beads, worn on legs

<i>Hirba</i>	- one sector of the warrior group
<i>Holla</i>	- drink made from coffee leaves
<i>Iqub</i>	- traditional money saving associations
<i>Iwwa</i>	- women's colorful cotton skirt
<i>Kabata</i>	- stone terraced farm
<i>Kaffa</i>	- clan
<i>Kalkusa</i>	- one sector of the warrior group
<i>Kalla</i>	- one of the prominent clan/spiritual leader in Konso
<i>Kanta</i>	- sub-villages
<i>Kara</i>	- a special ceremony during the transfer of power to the succeeding generation
<i>Karmoha</i>	- lion
<i>Kawata</i>	- stone walled towns
<i>Kegasha</i>	- a roof top decoration made of pot
<i>Kolla</i>	- low land / <i>amharic</i> word/
<i>Kora</i>	- triangle shaped skin cloth worn by women during maternity initiation ceremony
<i>Kurkufa</i>	- type of food prepared from <i>shelgaida</i> , meat and maize dough
<i>Lehha</i>	- a hair style for married women which is divided in to six parts
<i>Ludutta</i>	- a special meal prepared for children
<i>Magana</i>	- a kind of hut the men in konso rest in, also called <i>pafta</i>

<i>Manna</i>	- a hut in which a women in maternity stays
<i>Manyera</i>	- incest
<i>Massa</i>	- indemnity money
<i>Meher</i>	- August to mid October
<i>Mora</i>	- gathering place for Konso men
<i>Mugla/mulga</i>	- five iron bracelets worn by clan leader
<i>Nabba</i>	- a charcoal like material mixed with butter, the woman in maternity smeared on her forehead and breasts to cast of an evil eye
<i>Negaida</i>	- greeting, equivalent to how are you?
<i>Orotitta</i>	-the inside part of the upper roof top of a hut
<i>Pafta</i>	- a kind of hut in the men gathering place which is served as the men sleeping quarter
<i>Parga</i>	- paid work group/parties
<i>Pilla</i>	- knife
<i>Poqalla</i>	- konso ritual, clan or spiritual leader
<i>Poqaltetta</i>	- the wife of the clan leader
<i>Quarta</i>	- first born son from the first wife
<i>Quennazmatch</i>	- an <i>amharic</i> warrior title literally means “right leader”
<i>Robba</i>	- rain
<i>Robba hagayya</i>	- <i>haggaya</i> rain (from mid Feb-April)
<i>Robba kadanna</i>	- annual rainy season (August-mid October)
<i>Sara</i>	- advisors/messengers of the clan leader
<i>Sarra</i>	- horn honker of the craftsmen
<i>Senkalletta</i>	- coordinator for the responsible warrior grade

<i>Shamma</i>	- cotton costume
<i>Shelgaida</i>	- cabbage like plant, which is a staple food in Konso
<i>Shleitta</i>	- a mourning dance held for grandparents who have grand sons
<i>Sogeda</i>	- the coming out of maternity ceremony
<i>Sohaita</i>	- a string like part of false banana
<i>Tanda</i>	- porridge drink that is offered to the women that gave birth
<i>Tarra edoda</i>	- type of gourd used of measuring grain
<i>Teff</i>	- indigenous cereal in Ethiopia from which <i>Enjera</i> , Ethiopian staple food is made
<i>Timba</i>	- drum
<i>Toma</i>	- wooden bowl
<i>Toma aka</i>	- grand father's bowl
<i>Toma apa</i>	- father's bowl.
<i>Treita</i>	- women's carrying bag made from leather
<i>Tuma</i>	- a silver bracelet worn by clan leaders
<i>Turandaga</i>	- a skin skirt worn by women in the maternity initiation ceremony
<i>Ulahita</i>	- dried juniper tree erected by the age grade group to signify the transition of power to the next generation
<i>Waka</i>	- a wooden sculpture erected on the grave of heroes
<i>Woibetta</i>	- piece of stick from a certain type of wood.
<i>Woinadega</i>	- mid attitude

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this paper is to present the ethnography of Konso women and to document their activities and status based on the different categorical division of women as farmer women, craft-women and as wives of the spiritual leader.

Research methods used to conduct this study include key informant method, focus group discussion, participant observation, case studies and, in a limited scale, survey method. Even if I encountered some limitations with regard to time, I tried my best to look in to the life and status of Konso women in their different roles and interaction in the society.

Findings from the study indicate that the konso women are very hard working and their contribution to their family and the society are immense. There is no work as such that the women in Konso do not involve in, except few. But, however hard working the Konso women are, due to social, cultural and less regard to women's domestic labor contribution and income earning activities like marketing, they are holding a secondary status and subordinated position to men.

This study even if it is not a complete account of the Konso women, will give some insight about the status and condition of Konso women. It also gives some insight about konso society and can serve as a background for those who want to study the Konso women. Moreover, it may also serve policy makers and development agents to use it to improve the social, cultural and economic conditions of Konso women in particular, and the Konso people in general.

Chapter 1- Introduction

1.1 Literature Review

There are a lot of written materials in relation to gender and the status of women almost all over the world. Some of these writings provide different explanations and theories concerning on how or why the status of women in a given society is low. According to some writers, one of the explanations given as a factor for the subordinate position of women is biological. The advocates of biological determinism argue that 'anatomy is destiny'; there is something genetically inherent in males that makes them the naturally dominant sex; and as a result, women are naturally subordinate who are satisfied with their position. The tasks and roles assigned to them are highly in relation to anatomically based aptitudes. However, this argument is not acceptable to most anthropologists and it is highly criticized (Reiter, 1975).

Outside anthropology, research by Harney and Viola Klein, as cited by Reiter (1975), supports the proposition that both men and women are behaviorally flexible, and that the way men and women behave in any particular social setting is a result of socially constructed circumstances rather than anatomy.

On the whole, academics no longer hold the position that particular biological roles or social tasks universally belong to either men or women because of simple differences in bones, muscles, and sex organs. Begler and Sanday as

cited in (Mudhopadhyay and Higgins, 1988), emphasize cultural rather than biological causes for the low status of women.

Sanday (1973) further argues that male physical aggression against female emerges only when environmental stress and threats to group cultural identity combine with preexisting cultural configuration of a particular type. She attributes male dominance to a greater male use of violence. Thus, if there is a basic difference between the sexes it is that woman, as a group has not willingly faced death in violent conflict. This fact, perhaps, more than any other, explains why men have sometimes become the dominating sex (Mukhopadhyay and Higgins, 1988).

There are conflicting ideas about men/women violence. According to Divale and Harris who revert to biology, greater male size, strength, and possession of "more of the hormones that are useful for aggression" account for the regular selection of males (and exclusion of females) as warriors.

Contrary to this thought, Sanday argues that although women are capable of violence, their "inner female orientation" towards creation, birth, and life giving roles makes them to be passive or withdrawn from destructive violent activities.

Sanday's explanation of female non-violence and much of her theory assumes that motherhood automatically produces a complex of nurturant, non-violent

behaviors independent of the cultural context of mothering or population dynamics (Mukhopadhyay and Higgins, 1988).

The other theory mentioned by anthropologists as the cause of women subordination is the theory of warfare. In many societies it is believed that one of the factors that gave men dominance over women is their involvement in warfare and the prestige they acquire from it. The practice of warfare is responsible for a wide spread complex of male supremacist institutions among band and village societies. Male supremacist institutions rose as a by-product of warfare. Men mostly have monopoly over weapons, and use also sex for the nurturance of their aggressive personalities. But Harris opposed this opinion as groundless. He argues that warfare is not the expression of human nature, but a response to reproductive and ecological pressures (Harris, 1977).

Likewise, Divale and Harris's controversial explanation for the pervasiveness of "a male supremacist complex" links a) male aggression against females and b) institutions and ideologies supportive of male dominance to both warfare and the general cultivation of aggressive violent behavior in males (Mukhopadhyay and Higgins, 1988).

This is very much the reflection of the tradition of African patriarchy. Sylvia Walby in her article "Forms and Degrees of Patriarchy" tried to divide patriarchy in to two, as private and public. The private patriarchy she said is dominant in the

house-hold, where as the public patriarchy is largely observed in the public domain, like in the work place or in the administrative system at the institutional level. Sylvia Walby tried to elaborate the two patriarchal systems as follows: "In private patriarchy the expropriation of women's labor takes place primarily by individual patriarchs within the house-hold, while in the public form it is a more collective appropriation. In private patriarchy the principal patriarchal strategy is exclusionary in the public it is segregationist and subordinating"(1993: 18).

Mukhopadhyay and Higgins in their article cited White, as he did not find warfare correlated with variables, which are considered indicators of low female 'status'¹. These authors also cited Reiter as believing that historical evidence showed that warfare may provide women with greater autonomy. (Mukhopadhyay and Higgins, 1988).

Historically since the Konso were known warriors, and had high regard for war heroes, this study tries to see if there previous history of warfare has any impact, (positive or negative) on the status of Konso women at present.

The other possible explanation given for women's low status is related to ecological and economic factors. This approach especially focuses on the relationship between female production and female status. It was argued that female contribution to subsistence activities would be a function of certain

¹ Status could be defined as a social position or ranking in a society. It could either be high or low status depending upon one's social position in the society.

ecological factors and/or prolonged drain of male labor (Sanday, 1973). Boserup (1970), in her book, Women's Role in Economic Development, has attempted to link variation of gender roles in agriculture to different types of farming systems. She argues, in the shifting hoe-based agriculture women do the bulk of agricultural work and men do little farm activities, while in plough agriculture men do much of the agricultural work (Boserup, 1970). In a culture where small gardens yield most of the food, a woman might do most of the hoeing while watching her children. On the other hand, herding cattle or hunting might prove difficult for a woman who must simultaneously care for several children. In circumstance where a large proportion of male energy is required for other activities, women also contribute a great deal to subsistence activities. This can happen during periods of prolonged warfare or when other conditions result in male labor drains (Sanday, 1973).

Anthropologists continue to emphasize female economic roles as a primary variable affecting female status. It was assumed that the more women are involved in agricultural activities, the better their status would be. Consequently detailed studies of female participation in hunting and gathering and agricultural societies are now available (Mukhopadhyay and Higgins, 1988).

A number of anthropologists have stressed the importance of female labor in the initial phases of agricultural development (i.e. shifting agricultural systems) and have related this to a number of social organizational variables and to female status (Sanday, 1973). However, according to Sanday, results obtained from the studies, examining the factors affecting female contribution to subsistence and, the relationship between female production and female status showed that, "female production is not simply related to female status. In fact, the correlation between female status, derived from a small pilot study, is negative" (Sanday 1973).

Other dimension of economic roles, especially women control over production and their involvement in economic distribution and exchange, are also being increasingly emphasized, especially in areas in which reciprocity and redistribution are primary forms of exchange. More attention has also been given to women's distribution and exchange activities in market economies.

However, ethnographic evidence now suggests that women's "status" is multi dimensional, measurable according to a variety of possibly unrelated and/or inter-related scales. In addition to economic indicators of "status", there are at minimum power, autonomy, prestige, and ideological dimensions (Mukhopadyhyay and Higgins, 1988).

Hence, as women in Konso are also greatly engaged in crop production, the study tries to look how these activities of Konso women are regarded by the society, and its relation with the status of Konso women. Besides, this study tries to look into the relevance and relation of the above-mentioned theories and explanations with the existing condition of Konso women and their roles in the society.

There are not many detailed studies on the Konso. The existing few materials include C.R.Hallpike's The Konso of Ethiopia: The Study of the Values of Cushitic People (1972), Cerulli's The People of South Western Ethiopia (1956) and Elizabeth E.Watson's "Ground Truths: Land and Power in Konso, Ethiopia", a PHD dissertation (1998). Tadesse Wolde (1992:1993), Shinohara (1993), Shako Otto (1994) and Metasebia (1997) have also written some very useful accounts of Konso. Some other writers also mentioned briefly about Konso.

However, to my knowledge, they are only Hallpike in his book, and Watson in her dissertation who mentioned about Konso women. Their accounts, however, are not detailed. Hallpike tried to explain about Konso's women relation to God and earth, and he claims that the women do not have a significant place in the Konso society. Elizabeth Watson, who wrote on land use, said that during her stay in Konso, her relation was mostly with the male member of the society, as they were the one who owned the land. She admitted that she only spent time with Konso women in her leisure time. Even if she could not say much about their

lives due to the reason explained above, she says that the Konso women are so interesting, it is important that further research should be conducted on them.

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1.2. Statement of the problem

In most existing ethnographic writing on various groups in Ethiopia including the Konso, the writers seem to neglect or de-emphasize the role women play and their contribution to their respective communities in past and present. That is, most researchers tend to obtain vital information relating to women and their work from men, disregarding women's views towards their labor contribution. Most of the accounts on such issues are very patchy and lack sincerity and do not give us a full picture on the status of women in society. This tendency is well reflected in almost all accounts written about various groups in Ethiopia. Almost all of these sources are characterized by the lack of views of women, who are said to be half of the population of the country.

Similarly; in the few studies that deal with the konso, only few authors mention Konso women. And even those sources fail to give us full picture about the life situation and status of Konso women at the time of their study. Moreover, they do not describe women's role and contributions to production and reproduction in their communities. The women in Konso are hard working, and there is no work as such that women do not participate in. They are involved in farming; trade, fetching water and firewood, grinding grain, cattle husbandry (feeding, caring etc.), weaving and production of utensils in the past and at present. However,

their production activities and the roles they play, and the views of men and women towards female labor are issues that have not been sufficiently documented, and calling for a comprehensive research work.

1.3. Objectives of the study

a. General Objective

The general objective of this study is to look into the social, cultural, economic and political status of Konso women.

b. Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are to: -

- to look into and document the way of life of Konso women in their different social positions, for Konso women are said to be socially and economically stratified. For example, they are identified as the wife of the *poqalla* (the ritual leader), the wife of the *etenta* (the cultivator), and the wife of the *hauda* (local crafts man) and others;
- to look into and document the different productive and reproductive sphere in which Konso women are engaged in, and how their activities in domestic and non-domestic spheres like farming, marketing, and group labor and the like are perceived by the different groups of Konso men and women
- to explore the rights of women in marriage arrangements, their rights to inherit and own important economic assets such as land and livestock;

- to investigate women participation in the decision making processes and rituals at household and community levels in the past and at present.

By looking into the above-mentioned issues, this research tries to show the general conditions of Konso women and establish their multifaceted contributions to their family and community.

1.4. Significance of the study

It is assumed that this study will provide a brief account about the women in Konso and their place in the society. As there is not much written account on the Konso women, it will contribute a little by serving as a background study for those who are interested to make further research on the area. Besides, it will also be a useful material for policy makers and developers to use it as a source document for improving the living standard of the Konso women in particular and Konso people in general on sustainable terms.

1.5. Research site selection

For this research the site chosen is the village called 'Borqudayya'. It is situated on a hilly ground 3 km away from the Konso capital Karat. This site was chosen because it is the center for many activities. It has market place and it is also a ground to perform different cultural activities like transfer of power from one

generation to another. The villagers also hold group mourning songs and dance like performance there.

There is also an important public place known as *mora Chemote*, where important meetings and community activities of high importance are conducted. It is also a dwelling place where both the farmers- *etenta* and craftsmen- *hauda* live harmoniously. There is also a special house called *Fuldo* house which is the head office of the craftsmen the *hauda* association *boha hauda*. Besides, it is also a passage that leads to the different villages and kebeles of the Konso.

1.6. Research methods

The research methods used to conduct this study in the area includes key-informant method, case study, focus group discussion especially with the craftsmen, the *haudas*, participant observation and survey method for the quantitative information gathered from 30 randomly selected house holds. Camera and recording devices have also been used.

The major research method used was key informant method. It is used to know deeply about the Konso women in regard to their child bearing and child rearing practices, to know how marriage is arranged in Konso, to know by whom, in what ways is the wedding event arranged, what special values and norms are attached to it by the society. I also used key informant method to better

understand the relation between the farmers' *etenta* and the craftsmen the *hauda*.

The other method used is focus group discussion on relevant issues like the history of the craftsmen- the *haudas* and their relation with the farmers- the *etentas*, and with groups of craftsmen- *haudas*, which are the representatives of the craftsmen association, the *fuldo* house. This method was also applied to talk to some farmers' *etentas* and craftsmen *haudas* about marriage in Konso and also about childbirth and initiation ceremony. This was conducted with the presence and participation of both sexes.

Participant observation was another method used in conducting this study. This was particularly done on several occasions that involve various activities that the women in Konso perform, specially this is conducted on Konso women's household chores, in their outdoor activities like doing farm work, market activities, in wedding and mourning ceremonies. This method was also used when I went to see the mummified body of the dead *Aferta* (the dead clan leader) in Turo. I also conducted some case study on selected individuals on their living condition.

Survey method was also employed on randomly selected thirty households, to know about the gender division of labor, marital and parental status, the living condition, the household ownership of movable and immovable property.

Besides this, I traveled frequently to different Konso towns like Gamole (where the *Poqalla* and *Poqalttetta* of the Konso reside), to the market place of Gewada, Fasha, Kolme, Karat, to Debena (to observe a weeding procession), to Gocha town to observe hide workers, to Fasha and Saugame to observe potters. Camera and recording devices were used to capture and record some of the interesting activities and events.

1.7. Research experience

My field experience in Konso was very interesting. I had a chance to meet several people who are very much willing to share their experience and what they know about Konso with me.

Since I have prior experience as a result of establishing the first acquaintance with the people, this made my site selection, and my second visit fairly easy. I had no problem in identifying the people I wanted to work with. Mostly, since I had close acquaintance and good relationship with the respected and prominent members of the Dokatu and Borqudayya town, I easily got acceptance by the people in the town. Most of them were very open and very much willing to respond to my incessant questions and inquiries.

One thing I found to be very much interesting is the physical strength of the Konso women. The Konso women are so strong that they could carry a load of

70kg- 80kg and travel long in hilly places for up-to 35-40 km, especially when they go to the markets and to the granary.

The other surprising thing I observed was, despite I have seen it in photographs and read a written account of it is the experience of looking at the mummified body of the dead clan leader the *Aferta* of the Turo town. Formerly, I had the chance to look at the picture of the mummified body of *Poqalla, Kennazmach* Kayote Kalla from the Kalla family, one of the prominent figures in Konso, and the father of the current *Poqalla, Woldedawit* Kayote. But seeing it real was my first experience and it was so different, and I was a bit appalled at first, but I felt happy later after realizing that this kind of chance is very rare which can happen once in lifetime.

The other experience, which was a bit discomforting was that in Konso a person who came from outside Konso especially from the center, is considered as stranger. So, at first I had this problem when people stared at me constantly, I felt some uneasiness, especially in market days. Sometimes, I break this feeling by saying some Konso greeting words like *negaida?* Or *assham* literally meaning how are you? and hello respectively, or in the morning I used the words *ahadene* or *ahade* to say good morning. When I uttered these words they would laugh and greet me back, so, this would break the uneasiness.



Plate 1.1. The mummified body of Aferta in Turo



Plate 1.2. The Aferta with his guardians

While in Konso I was very much welcomed by the Konso adult and relatively elderly people of both sexes. Usually, I was invited to people's house to have the local drink *chakka*, which I took in small amount. Since I was invited in so many houses, I did not want to become drunk. I was also invited to a not fermented honey drink *birrz*, boiled soybean and a meal prepared from cabbage like plant, *shlegaida*, boiled with meat and maize dough, called *kurkufa*. Honey was also offered to me.

Most of the time they told me that, it is good that I am there to study their culture. They were very much surprised that I came, especially being a woman and alone, all the way from Addis to know about the Konso people and culture. So, every time I met some of the elders in the town they would inquire about the progress of my work and said I have to be strong and to keep it up. In any way they could, they said, they are willing to provide me with any information. This gave me great strength while doing my work. One day one elderly father who has many married daughters say, "I wish I had one daughter like you". The way he said it is so touching, and I was so moved, because I can clearly understand what he meant.

So, the longer I stayed in Konso the more closer I felt towards the people. I did not feel any strangeness that I felt in the beginning. Everywhere I went sometimes even without my translator around people would greet me, inquire

about my work and offered if they could be of some assistance. This kind of gesture moved me a lot and made me feel at home.

1.8. Limitations of the study

Due to shortage of time, I was unable to observe the burial ceremony of the dead *Aferta*. Also in a certain town I was not able to stay long to observe the burial processions of the wife of the *Poqalla* -the *Poqaltetta* who died recently,

There are so many interesting features among the Konso people that need to be recorded. These among others include, the inaugural ceremony of the public place (the *mora*) in the lower Dokatu town, which was again newly constructed. Due to time limitation I could not also observe the *sogeda*, the coming out of maternity, a traditional ceremony of a woman who gave birth. As it is an occasional event, I could not able to observe it, but I had much oral account on it from my informants.

As my research mainly depends on my research base town of Borqudayya, it could not been taken as a general Konso women's account. Also I tried to go to many different towns, especially on market days, I could not cover all the Konso towns. So, there might be cases in other towns different from that I have described.

The other limitation was, as the Konso women are very busy and engaged in many activities, sometimes it is very difficult to sit and chat with them for a longer

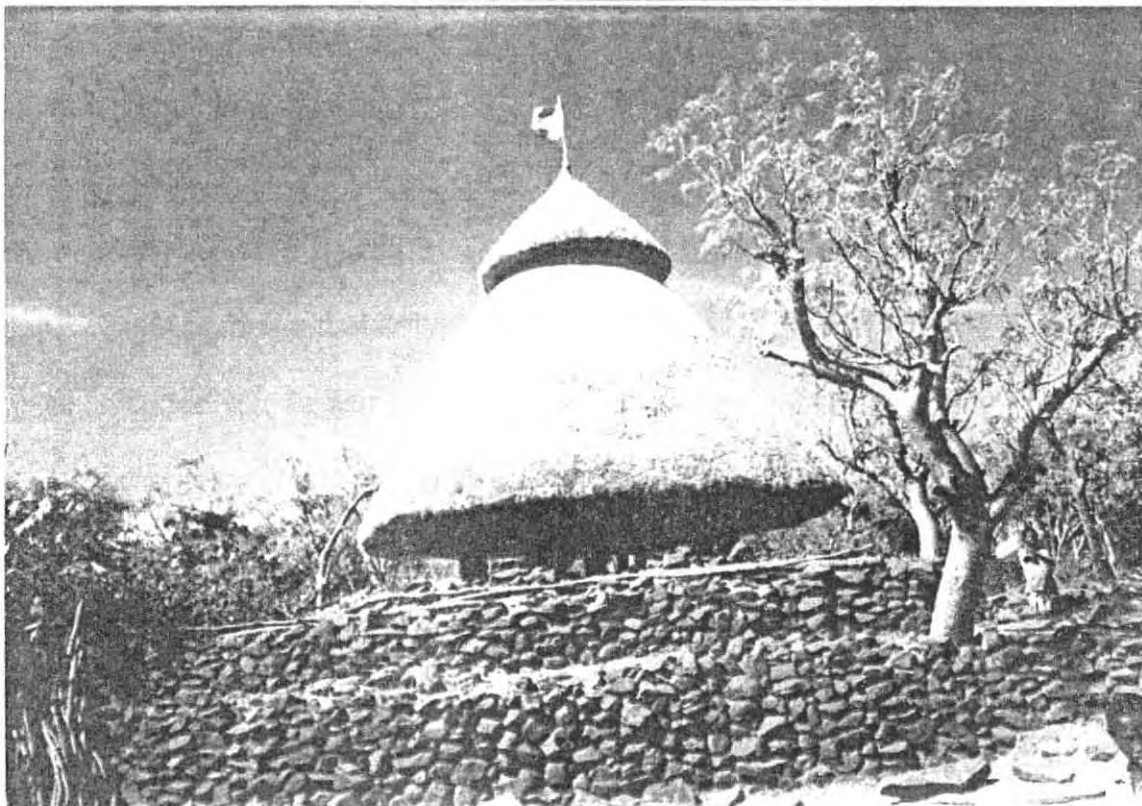


Plate 1.3 The newly reconstructed public place */moral*

period of time. They are very much time conscious. So, I tried hard to get as much of their time as possible, in which I fairly succeeded. Apart from that I spend considerable time talking to the men who have ample time to talk and chat. Besides, the women in Konso are not that much open towards giving information, they are giving brief answers, not much detail. So, I tried to fill the gap through participant observation and group discussion. In addition to this, the other limitation was language problem. As most Konso people speak *Afan* Konso I was compelled to talk to them through translator. However, some of my informants could speak Amharic, so with them I did not have any problem communicating.

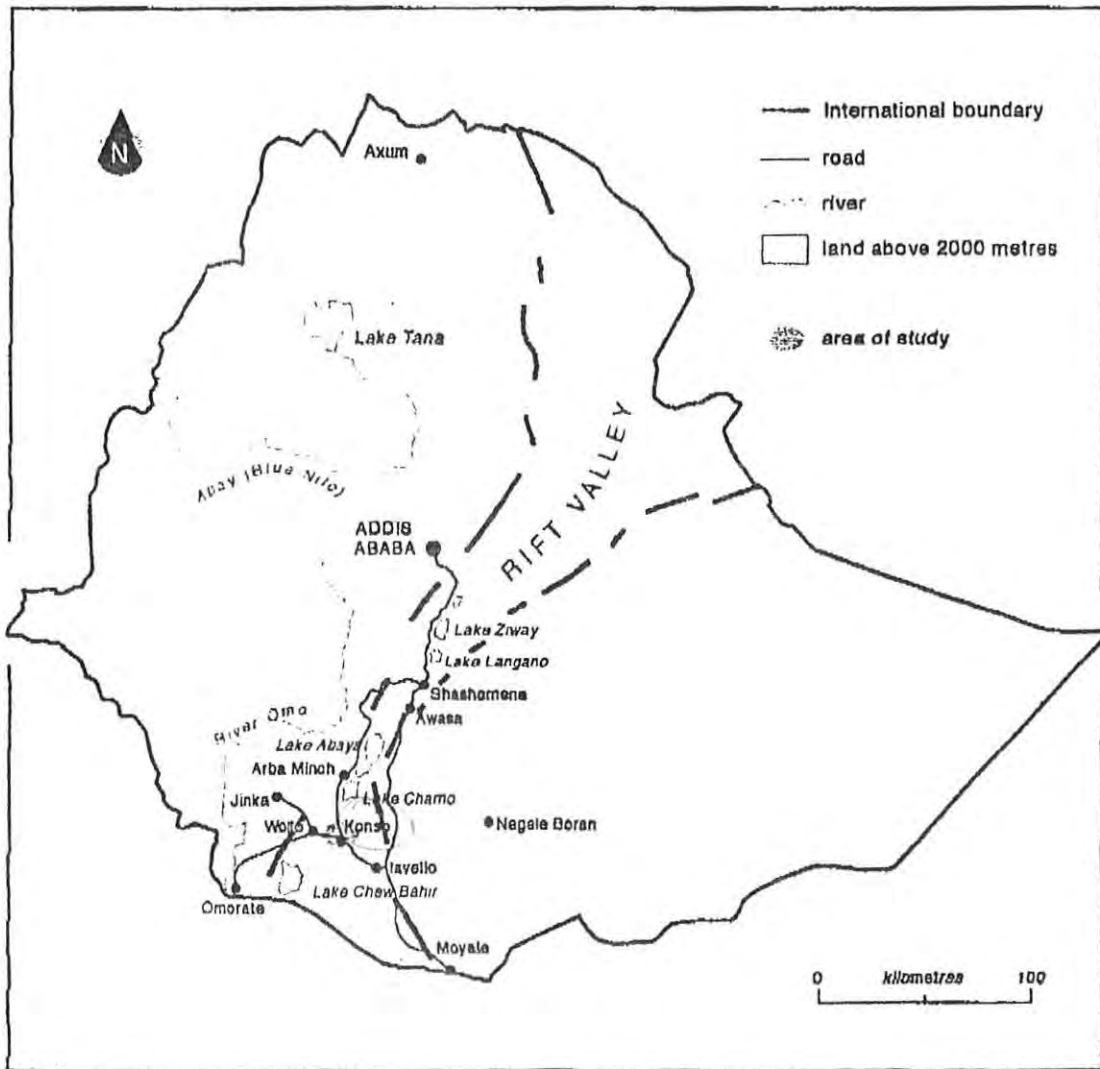
CHAPTER 2 - BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY AREA

2.1. Geographic location, population

The Konso land is located in the Southwestern part of Ethiopia. It is inhabited by people called Konso, who speaks Konsinna language that belongs to the Eastern Cushitic language family (Cerulli, 1956; Hallpike, 1974, Shinohara, 1993; Watson, 1998). Previously, the Konso territory had been administered under Gamogofa region. Currently, following the country's Federal structure it has become one of the five special woreda's (districts) under the Southern Nations and Nationalities and People's Regional Government (SNNPR). Its capital Karati (formerly Beqawle) is situated 595km away from Addis Ababa via Arba Minch on the way to Jinka. The Segen River in the South, the Woyeto River in the West, the Derashe special woreda in the North, Gumaide in the East and Burji in the South East, bound Konso.

The Konso land lies between 5015' and 5030' latitude North and 37015 and 37030; longitude East. It has a total area of 2657 sq km, and a population of 157,585 people (CSA 1996). Although Amborn (1989) had estimated the konso population to reach 100,000 and Elizabeth Watson estimated the Konso population between 120,000 and 125,000(Watson, 1998), the 1994 CSA (Central Statistics Authority) census estimated the population to reach 157,585 (CSA 1996).

Map 1 : Location of Konso in Ethiopia



Teferi Abate, 1992, explained Konso as follows,

The Konso ecology is mainly characterized by stony soil, rugged features, hot temperature, and a remarkably high population density. This has resulted in shortages of fertile soil, grazing land, rainfall, water reserve, and other resources. In spite of all these shortages and problems, the Konso have managed to create a way of life for themselves on the rocky hilltops through their wise utilization of available local resources. They engage in intensive hoe cultivation, bee keeping, trade, craft, etc and developed a remarkable culture(1992: 23).

Traditionally the Konso land is divided into three regions, namely Karati, Takadi and Turo. Each of these regions constitutes a number of different autonomous walled towns. The Konso are distinguished among many other features by their stone walled towns called *Kawata*, and more by their stone terraces called *Kabata* that covers almost the whole mountain ranges (Cerulli, 1956; Hallpike, 1972; Metasebia, 1998; Shinohara, 1993, Watson, 1998).

The houses in the Konso villages are crowded together and a circular wall of stones, like fortress, surrounds the village. The village is built with one or more gates, so that a watch can be kept on people entering into the village compound (Shinohara, 1993).

The Konso land is also an important site for palaeo-anthropological studies of human origin. Important hominids remains like *Homo erectus*, *Australopithecus Boise* and stone tools dated between 1.4 million years and 1.5 million years also found there (Yonas Beyene, 1998). A joint team of Ethiopian, American and

Japanese researchers have conducted a vast palaeo-anthropological work. An American research group from Florida University has also conducted an ethno-archaeology research especially on the tradition of using stone tool materials for hide working. Konso is one of the few areas in Ethiopia, where stone-tool is still used for scraping leather. Besides these activities, the Ministry of Culture and UNESCO have conducted groundwork on the Konso history and ethnography, with an objective of including Konso in the world heritage list.

2.2. Origin of the Konso people

The Konso have their ancestors originally from various parts of the surrounding territory, such as Liban, Borana, Gauwada, Ala and Ilota (the range of the mountain to the north-east) (Hallpike, 1972).

There is a mythical history concerning the origin of the Konso people. One of these is the myth of the Calabash. According to this myth, one day God came to the Konso land and opened the Calabash from which came out first, the farmer *etenta* with his farming tools in his hands, next the craftsman- the *hauda* -having weaving materials and other craftsman objects in his hands. So, these two kinds of people filled the land of Konso (WK, KG). Stratification in current Konso society seems to be a reflection of this myth.

2.3. Konso Social Organization

There are three main social organizations, which govern the lives of Konso. These are, the kinship organization, the neighborhood organization, and the Konso type of age-grading system (Shinohara, 1993). Amborn also supported the idea that, the Konso socio-political system can be divided into three principles, territorial units, uni-lineal descent groups and a generation group system (Amborn, 1989).

The Konso have a patrilineal descent with the practice of exogamy. Almost all clans are exogamous (Hallpike, 1972, Shako Otto, 1994; Shinohara, 1993). The largest social category is the clan *kaffa*. The Konso have nine patrilineal clans *kaffa*, namely:

1. Keertitta
2. Argamaida
3. Tokomaleida
4. Tekeisaitta
5. Sawdatta
6. Pasanta
7. Elaida
8. Mahaleida
9. Eshalaida

Inheritance within the clan is patrilineal, and its residential pattern is patrilocal (Hallpike, 1972, Shako Otto, 1994, Shinohara, 1993). Clan membership is transmitted patrilineally.

Obligation to fellow ward members, and to one's own town in general, is important in daily life as kinship obligations. Members of a clan are regarded as brothers and sisters, and for them to have sexual relations is incest, *manyera*. On the basis of this closeness they have terms of kinship which one addresses the other like any male of one's mother's clan as '*abuya*' 'mother's brother'. He replies '*ashuma*' 'sister's son' (Hallpike, 1972). I also witnessed this kind of addressing with my key informant and translator KG who used this term often with his clan members, and being addressed by it.

The nine clans also have totems of their own. According to my informants KG and others, the lists at the next page are some of the terms for the totems. These totems are assumed to be relatives of the consecutive clans.

TABLE. 1 - TOTEMS' OF THE KONSO CLANS

Clan name	Totem	Konso word	Hallpike's term
Kertitta	Kalabash, fox	Kanda	Kara (burrowing animal), leopard, heart
Argamaida	Vaulcher Camel Sun	Alatteda Kalla Latta	Sun, kite, camel, razzota (small plant)
Togomaleida	Sheep (short tailed)	Sunge	Porcupine, sheep,
Tekeisaita	Little stones(pebbles), plant	Kunitta	Small stones, kunita(a tree)
Sawdata	Baboon Elephant Locust Earth Wood	Keldaida Arba Toraida Tidibaya Karsata	Elephant, monkey, locust, baboon, karsata (plant)
Pasanta	Wood Lion Fox Kidney	Tibetta Karma Kallta Halla	Fox, yam, kidney
Elaida	Meat(internal)	Holmeida	Hyna
Mahaleida	Hyna	Oraida	Hyna
Shalaida	Kind of worm Inshu (dik dik)	Radoda Sagaritta	Dik dik

Source: Interview with informants, January, 2002.

In the past, the konso believed that clan heads were naturally selected at birth by the presence of a bracelet like skin mark on the right wrist. Such skin marks often detected on the first sons (Shako Otto, 1994).

“The *Poqalla* families” according to Shako Otto, “were among the first ancient immigrants to konso and are believed to have begotten the rest of the Konso”

(Shako Otto, 1994: 82, Metasebia, 1998). In Konso the clan heads are known as *Poqalla*, a term that indicates the highest rank and honor among members of the society. But after the conquest of Emperor Menilek II, some of the clan heads awarded the title of *Graazmatch*, *Qennazmatch* and the like (Shako Otto, 1994, Metsebia, 1998, Watson, 1998). This is clearly understood from the title of the former *Poqalla* of the *kalla* family who had the title *Qennazmatch*.

According to Shako Otto, "A clan head is called *Poqalla tuma* or simply *Poqalla*. *Tuma* is the broad silver bracelet worn on the right wrist by a *poqalla*" (1994:82). The bracelet *tuma*, which I have observed was worn by *Poqalla Woldedawit*, and the successor of the dead *Aferta* in Turo.

Long ago, people including the *poqallas*, are believed to have turned away from God. As a result the eldest sons of the clan heads are born without bracelet-like mark. So, to substitute this symbol, it became a necessity of wearing a broad silver bracelet (Shako Otto, 1994).

The eldest son of the *Poqalla* family, *Quarta Poqalla* is free as any other ordinary Konso until he has taken clan leadership procedurally... Once the son has been anointed and has become *Poqalla*, he enters a chapter of life characterized by many ritually imposed restrictions known as *musa*, taboos. Konso food and drink, whether prepared by his own wife or other persons are all forbidden. He only takes food and drink prepared by his clan's virgin daughters (Shako Otto, 1994:82).

I also witnessed this in the residence of *Poqalla Woldedawit* who is being served only by the virgin daughter from his family. Several times I came across to *Woldedawit* in the Karat town and I repeatedly offered to buy him a drink, which

he politely declined by saying that he is not supposed to take anything outside of his home.

The functions of the clan heads include administering justice, reconciling warring factions and serving as cultural and religious leaders. According to Shako Otto, "With the establishment of towns, the town council took over a major part of justice administration. Clan heads, since then, have retained their functions of internal clan administration, reconciliation and ritual roles. Blessing, advice, dispute settlement and reconciliation of warring towns are their chief functions" (Shako Otto, 1994: 85).

Likewise, *Poqalla* Woldedawit also told me that peace making and praying for the people are his major responsibilities. During my field work and interview with Woldedawit, he told me that the previous year there was land and border disputes between Jarso and Gandibba, two neighboring towns, that he, together with his counselors, the *dawra* had to go to the specific place to stop the conflict.

The *poqalla* and the *dawra* succeeded in mediating between the two fighting towns and made peace by performing the necessary rituals. Five lives were lost during the conflict, and therefore it was important to purify the land, which was stained by the human blood with a sacrificed old cow² blood. Hence, a cow was slain for the occasion. The members of the two sides, who were present at the

² The old cow that should be slaughtered for the occasion should be mono color, but not white. (in Konso white is believed to be the color of death). her two ears should be intact, not cut, and her two horns also should not be broken.

site, ate the meat. But, at first the food should be tested by the *dawras*, (the counselors), the *Sara* (the advisors and messengers of the clan leader, the *poqalla*) and the community elders. After the feast, the bones of the old cow, which are not broken, would be buried at the border of the two fighting villages. This symbolizes the burying of their conflict in the ground. According to Woldedawit, sometimes after the reconciliation, the rain would come and wash the blood and the stained land. When this happens the land is thought to be clean. From then on there should not be any fight and no retaliation for the dead persons. (WK)

When Shako Otto further explained the role of the *poqalla*, "For the sake of administrative efficiency, they bless and legitimize the formation of a lineage head office *Poqalla a'kafa* on the basis of adequate family branches. The new lineage head will be given a *pillaa kafa*, the lineage knife, and will wear five iron rings called *mukla* on the right wrist from the festival day onwards" (1994: 85). A juniper tree called *ulahita* will also be erected to commemorate the occasion.

Lineage heads of other clans wear five iron rings. Though the *kalla* family is the *kantayta* head of the *keertitta*, it seems that they are the head of all clans because of the great respect and love they command from almost all the konso (Shako Otto, 1994). Besides, the *kalla* family is still considered to be the senior *poqalla*, due to the numbers of towns and the large size of population under his authority (Metasebia, 1998).

The members of a lineage *kaffa* all tend, with few exceptions, to live in the same town. They are also bound together by their allegiance to a common lineage priest. A man's greatest obligations are to his lineage in one hand, and to his ward on the other (Hallpike, 1972, Shinohara, 1993).

But while residence in one's father's town is the norm, the high concentration of settlement in towns means that while an eldest son inherits his father's homestead, and lives with him after marriage, a younger son will not normally be able to live next to his father's homestead when he comes to marry and will set up home in his own (Hallpike, 1972, Shinohara, 1993).

An extended family generally lives in one compound, and the first son has priority in inheriting the compound and farmland of his father. The second son and other brothers also have hereditary rights, but inheritances are significantly smaller than the eldest son's (Shinohara, 1993).

The priest is the focus of the lineage, since his essential duty is to bring life, health, fertility, and peace to his members. This was done in two ways. First by preventing the outbreak of serious quarrel among its members by mediating in their disputes; and second by officiating at two ceremonies at the beginning of the great rains, called the *Arhata ILA* and the *logida* (Hallpike, 1972). They say that if a lineage has no priest, it will suffer from disease, crop-failure, and its women and cattle will become sterile and will die out.

One of the most important distinguishing features of the priests is that they alone have retained their family names unchanged down the generations- a most important factor in preserving their social identities (Hallpike 1972). The *Kalla* family could be cited as an example of this, because the present *kalla* Woldedawit is the 18th *kalla* from the family that inherited the name (WK).

2.3.1. Traditional authorities in Konso

The Konso are a traditional kind of people that gave much weight to traditional administration and practice "age grading system". The grading systems are of central importance in Konso life. In the Konso the important administrative systems could be classified as follows:

2.3.1.1. *Hella* (the warrior group)

Hella is an age grade group that is responsible for the administration of the towns. The *hella* is responsible for the administration of the towns, maintaining the town walls *kawata*, keeping and cleaning the water wells, *harda*, defending the town from enemy. Metasebia in his report of the Konso explained the *hella* group as follows:

Men, major actors in this system, are divided into two major age groups known as *hela*, which are generally called *Hirba* and *Kalkusa*. Each *hela* is divided into two sub-*helas*. Males are initiated to these distinct groups during a special ceremony called *Kara*, which takes place twice in eighteen years (every seven and eleven years) and marks the transfer of responsibilities from the retiring major *hela* to the other (Metasebia, 1998: 8).

A senior sub-*hella* stays in power for the first seven years and the junior sub-*hella* would be responsible for the last eleven years. The other major *hella* would assume responsibility for the next eighteen years. Each sub-*hella* has its own name, which is given always after its members killed either a lion or leopard.

During my fieldwork in Konso, I met Metasebia who is doing his PHD in France, conducting his research on the Konso. Metasebia is one of the few non-Konso individuals who got acceptance by the society and who is serving in their age grading system. Metasebia is currently serving in the *hella* group that killed a lion during the *kara* ceremony, which took place four years ago. Therefore, their *hella* group name is *Karmoha* (*karma* means, lion in *konsinna*). I heard this group addressing term several times. Members of the group addressed Metasebia by saying *karmoha*. I never hear them using his name for addressing, and likewise, Metasebia used the same term for addressing his *hella* members.

According to Metasebia the major responsibilities of the *hella* group are the following:

- It is responsible to ensure the security of the people and the towns. In case of attack from neighboring villages or from other non-Konso people, it is the obligation of *hella* members to defend their people or to take part in armed conflict during its term of office, thus it is a warrior group. Besides, protecting the towns' walls or their restoration in case of damage or deterioration is also its responsibilities.

- To look after the well-being of the *mora* (public places), when necessary, building *mora* and *pafta* (a kind of hut in the *mora*) at places previously allotted for this purpose.
- When the need arises, building of *harda* (water ponds), controlling fire accidents and performing almost all the various community works are tasks of the responsible *hella* (Metasebia, 1998). This idea was also supported by Hallpike, as he explained the group as follows, "...the warriors, who acted also as a police force before the arrival of the *Amhara*, arresting and punishing criminals on the orders of the elders' councils of the towns. They can marry, and are in all other respects full members of the society" (Hallpike, 1968: 261).

2.3.1.2. Senkeleta

Each sub-*hella* has its own elect leader, called *senkeleta*. Although a *senkeleta* appears to be elected by the *hella* members, the council of elders decides his actual recruitment and selection. According to Metasebia, "The basic criteria for election are good behavior and ones capability to assume responsibility...A good knowledge of Konso tradition is also a requirement. The most important institutional role of a *senkeleta* is to act as chief coordinator of the responsible *hela*" (Metasebia, 1998: 9).

2.3.1.3. Council of elders

Elders play a vital role in the traditional administration. Two kinds of councils exist in each of the Konso towns. These include ward and town councils. Ward council is responsible for the administration of neighboring families (mostly between ten to fifteen house holds), who share the same *mora* that belongs to a certain ward (Metasebia 1998).

A town council is a congregation of elderly people from the various wards in the same town and responsible for the administration of the whole town. They are these council of elders who generally run routine affairs of their respective towns.

Besides, it is the responsibility of these elders to ensure the promotion of each *hela* to the next higher grade and the handing over of authority from retiring to succeeding age groups to take place according to tradition (Metasebia, 1998).

2.3.1.4. Apa Timba

The idea of *Apa Timba* literally means the father of drum, and the *timba*, the drum, as a symbol of authority originated after the decision made by elders of the initial settlers. The *timba* is an emblem of the traditional administration. A person who keeps the *timba* becomes in charge of the *Apa timba* office for a certain period of time. The *Apa Timba* administered each Konso town respectively (Metasebia, 1998). The system continued to function on the basis of these established traditional rules. *Apa Timba* has no clan base. People from different

clans used to serve as *Apa Timba*. However, the authority of *Apa Timba* rotates only between certain households or families, with the earlier experience of such services. Since the beginning of the system People or persons who do not belong to these families have never assumed *Apa Timba's* office. The selection of *Apa Timba* depends upon a good conduct, acceptance by the community, ability to handle community affairs and good knowledge of Konso tradition. Usually the duration for the office of *Apa Timba* is one year, however with the consent of the council elders and certain circumstances, it could be extended to more years (Metasebia 1998).

Members of the craftsmen the *hauda* are not entitled to hold position in the office of *Apa Timba*, as it is a position filled only by the cultivator, *etenta*.

2.3.1.5. The retired old men group

The last group of the Konso age grading system is the older men who retired from service. These old men mostly spend their time drinking *chakka*, sitting in the *mora*, spinning cotton and enjoying the sun. Sometimes they play *gebetta*, chess- like traditional game with their colleagues. They do not have that much active involvement in the community activities.

2.3.1.6. Dawra

The *dawra* who have a role of mediation and reconciliation among the society are one of the active units in Konso traditional administration. The *dawra* usually plays a positive role.

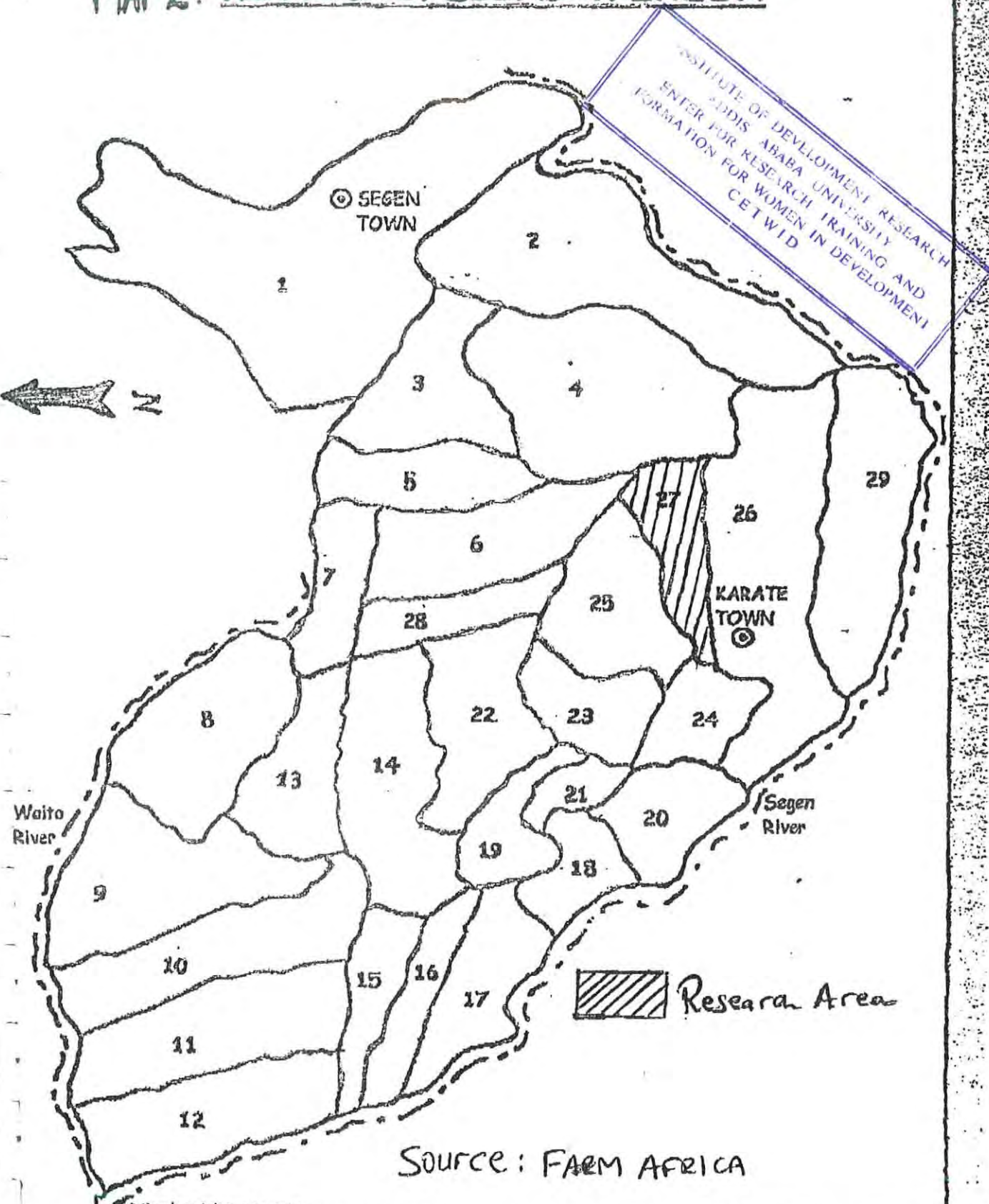
Dawra are believed to be honest, pure and have a spiritual power. Due to this they are highly respected and have the acceptance of the people. *Dawra* pray and bless the people. One of the most important functions of the *dawra* is their conciliatory role. Their mediation between conflicting parties almost all the time are successful for they have the obedience and the respect of the society (Hallpike, 1972, Metasebia 1998).

They are considered as guardian of peace. The long sticks they usually carry have been understood as a symbol of peace. During every clash or any armed conflict *dawra* appear in the middle of the fight and install the stick in the middle. Upon seeing this gesture and display of authority, the conflicting parties are compelled to stop their fighting immediately and follow the step of reconciliation (Metasebia, 1998).

2.4. Administrative Organization

The Konso special *woreda* has a total of 44 rural and two urban *kebeles* (Karat and Segen). The *kebele* council both in the rural and urban areas is the smallest administrative body of the formal political and administrative organization. These rural and urban *kebeles* are organized under six service cooperatives known as *agelglots*, namely Karat, Fasha, Turo, Gawada, Kolme and Gumayde. Each *agelgelot* is divided into a number of *kebeles*. Each *kebele* is also divided into a number of sub villages' *kantas*. *Kebeles* and various *woreda* offices are accountable to the *woreda* council (draft report Farm Africa 2001).

MAP 2: KONSO SPECIAL WEREDA*



Source: FARM AFRICA

Konso Peasant Associations

1. Arsha Segen 3	9. Awassa	17. Keshale	25. Sorabo Gocha & Gamole 3
2. Birbrsha	10. Maderia & Gizaba	18. Aybele - 2	26. Mermere - 3
3. Ailafa Dokotu	11. Gaigale & Kolmata	19. Fasha	27. Dokotu
4. Ultu	12. Tabale & Kuchale	20. Aberoba - 2	28. Arfacde & Lehale 2
5. Baie & Fuchucha	13. Gawada	21. Maga	29. Jarso
6. Turo	14. Dorara & Gugnera - 2	22. Kamela	
7. Agmale	15. Doha	23. Debara	
8. Tagaito	16. Gaserjio	24. Bura	

Institute of Development Research
 Addis Ababa University
 Center for Research Training and
 Information for Women in Development
 CETWID

Wereda boundary
 Peasant Association boundary

0 10
 Kilometres

NGAME
 KASHILE
 GIIYO

Research Area

Adapted from Elizabeth E. Watson (1998)

2.5. Climate, Calendar

The Konso special *woreda* has two agro-climatic zones namely *Kola* (lowland), which accounts for 30% of the area, and the *woinadega* (mid attitude), which covers 70% of the *woreda* (draft report Farm Africa, 2001). *Belg* extends mainly from mid-February to April; in Konso they call it *Robba Hagayya*, which means *hagayya* rain. *Meher* extends from August to mid October, which in Konso is called *Robba Kadanna*, the annual rainy season. These are the two main rainy seasons in Konso. It is wet between February to April and dry from May to July. August to September is the main rainy seasons. The average annual rainfall is 750mm. Due to forest clearing (deforestation) for farming, fuel-wood and construction, reports show that it is only 1% of the *woreda*, which is covered with forest. The natural vegetation is poor in the highland areas, while the lowland areas are covered with bush and shrubs (draft report Farm Africa, 2001).

The only area in Konso relatively densely forested is the *poqalla* forest. As it is sacred and never touched by the people to any use, it is still in a relatively good condition. During my stay at Konso, I got the chance to visit the *Kalla* forest at Gamole, which could be spotted from far off place. This forest is sacred and it also served as the burial place for the previous *poqallas'* and their wives. No body would touch even a broken twig from the forest. Wood can only be obtained from the *poqalla* forest for ceremonial purposes like for the erection of *ulahita*, for the warrior grade, with the consent and permission of the *poqalla*. But, if one disobeyed and took the branch from the forest without permission, something

bad would happen to the person, his family or to the community members in general. So, it is the duty of the advisory councils, the *dawra*, to pray and ask God forgiveness for the evil doer, and not to punish the people and the person.

The Konso calendar is divided in to twelve months with its own local name. The Konso calendar unlike the Ethiopian calendar does not start at Meskerem (September) and end at Nehasse (August). But, instead it started at Tir (January) and end at Tahsas (December) similar to that of the Gregorian calendar.

TABLE. 2 Names of Konso months, Ethiopian and Gregorian Equivalents

No.	Konso Months	Ethiopian Months	Gregorian Months
1.	Oybba	Tir	January
2.	Sagannogamma	Yekatit	February
3.	Murenno	Megabit	March
4.	Pallallo	Miazia	April
5.	Harri	Ginbot	May
6.	Tolla	Sene	June
7.	Orhalssa	Hamle	July
8.	Sesaissa	Nehase	August
9.	Partukkatta	Meskerem	September
10.	Kissa	Tikimt	October
11.	Hullindalla	Hidar	November
12.	Porrinnga	Tahsas	December

Source: Interview with Kusse Guita, January 2002.

2.6. Religion

The dominant religions in the area are three. These are traditional religion, Orthodox and Protestant Christianity. According to Farm Africa's draft report of 2001, more than 60% of the population are not followers of any religious sect,

which means Christianity, but they are the followers of traditional religion. But 30% of the population is Christian religion followers, of which 24.5% are protestant and the rest 5.5% are Orthodox Christian (draft report Farm Africa, 2001).

2.7. Economy

The Konso economy is greatly dependent on agriculture, supplemented by cattle breeding. Hence, mixed economy characterizes the economy of the area. Their main crops include sorghum, maize, *teff*, barely, soybean, sunflower, cotton, chat, coffee, *shelgaida* (a kind of cabbage like plant) and others (Field data, 2002). As staple food sorghum, millet and maize contains the majority of the agricultural land (Metasabia 1998, Farm Africa, 2001).

Weaving also occupies an important place in the economy of Konso. They are major suppliers of *shamma* (costumes) to the markets of South Omo, Gardulla and Mega (Borena). They are also suppliers of cloth to the markets of Wolaieta and the towns of Kofele in Arsi, certain sections of the community have also been engaged in other activities which include iron-working, pottery and tanning to support their lives (Metsabia, 1998).

2.8. Education, Health and other facilities

Education

The overall adult literacy rate of Konso special Woreda is 8.1% (13.2% for males and 3.3% for females). The distribution of education in the region indicates that there are 34 elementary, 3 junior secondary and 1 senior secondary schools and one small kindergarten (draft report, Farm Africa, 2001). In the 2000/2001 academic year, a total of 12,806 students were enrolled in the schools (excluding students in the kindergarten) of which 10,255 were males and 2551 females. In other words male students account for 80.1% while female students account for only 19.9% of school participation. These figures obviously show that girls are disadvantaged in having opportunity of learning in the Konso community (draft report, Farm Africa, 2001).

Health

Konso woreda has one health center, nine health stations and six health posts with 60% and 43% health facility and health service coverage respectively (Farm Africa, 2001). However, during my stay in Konso I learned that as most people using traditional medicine.

Other facilities

Karat and Segen are the two towns in the Konso special woreda. Karat the main town of the woreda has all weather roads that connect it with Addis Ababa via

Arbaminch to Jinka and to Yabello. Karat gets a 5-hour electric supply from a diesel generator from 6.00pm-11.00pm. Karat has also a telephone service through operator. However, few offices, some new hotels and shops in the town have an automatic telephone service. Access to safe water supply is very limited and scarce. To my knowledge I have not seen any postal office, though, the draft report of Farm Africa mentioned, "postal service in the town is at the level of postal agent" (Farm Africa 2001).

Chapter Three: Women in Konso and Gender Division of Labor

3.1. Women in Konso

The Konso women are very strong and hard working. Almost there is not any work as such that the women are not involved in. They are involved in farming using digging hoe and other important farming implements. As the Konso mostly farm on the hilly stony terraces, they do not usually use ox drawn ploughs; rather, they mostly use digging hoes. But in some flat areas the farmers' used ox-drawn ploughs. The women are also involved in selling small marketable items like grains, *shleigaida*, soybean, oil seeds like sunflower, cotton, salt, boiled soybean, house prepared food, *chakka*, local beverage, *areke*, local alcoholic drink and the like. There are only few activities such as beehive hanging, livestock selling, construction of houses and wells that women do not participate in.

The women in Konso are stratified in three social categories as farmer *etenta* women, craftswomen or *hauda* women and as *poqalltetta* wives of the *Poqalla*, the ritual leader.

3.1.1. Farmer *letental* women

The farmer *etenta* women are mostly engaged in cultivating, in performing the usual household chores and in preparing and tending the household needs.

Farming is regarded as a prestigious and respected occupation in the Konso. So, the Konso people somehow have high regard for the farmers' *etentas*. Hence, as

wives of the farmer *etenta*, they are also considered farmers, and they get respect in the society, and they are very proud for being a farmer.

3.1.2. Craftsmen *hauda* women

The second large division in the Konso women's category is the craft-working women or *hauda* women. These *hauda* women, unlike the farmer women the *etentas*, who are engaged mostly in farming activities, do not involve much in farming. In the past the crafts men *haudas*, were not entitled to possess farmland, so, the woman are mostly involved in craftwork either helping their husbands or work independently by them selves. The craft women or *hauda* women are mostly involved in activities like pot making, skin tanning, weaving, selling marketable items and the like.

3.1.3. The *Poqaltetta*

The *poqaltetta* are wives of the *Poqalla*, the Konso ritual and clan leaders. They are the third category in the Konso women's social stratification. Socially, the *poqaltetta* holds a high status and are respected very much.

The *poqaltettas* are not expected to be engaged in the daily routine works, which are usually covered by the ordinary Konso women. They mostly concentrate on their household chores especially on attending to the needs of their husbands, the *poqalla*.

The *poqaltetta* also serves her husband being as mediator in transmitting his message to the local people. For instance, if there is farming activities to be held in the *poqalla's* farm and cooperative labor is needed; it is the duty of the *poqaltetta* to go to the community. The *poqaltetta*, bearing the *poqalla's* message, would go to the community and his clan members and inform them the set date for the cooperative work. For this cooperative work, she prepares food and drink for the participants. She also sometimes, organizes a women task - force to assist in the cooperative work.

If the *poqalla* is also invited to a certain weeding, it is the role of his wife to go on his behalf, as he is not allowed to eat and drink outside of his own house. But, the *poqaltetta* is allowed to eat anywhere, and drink *chakka* the traditional local drink with a dry gourd. That is a gourd, which has not been used by another person before her. Likewise, if certain assistance is requested and a member of the *poqalla's* clan or community member needs contribution, the *poqalla* will send his wife, the *poqaltetta*, on his behalf with the contribution.

3.2. Gender division of labor

3.2.1. Farming

Gender division of labor is a socially constructed phenomenon. It is the society's allotment for dividing work for both sexes. It is not an unchanged established fact, but it is a socially made and a socially accepted fact.

Ester Boserup (1970) in her book entitled Women's Role in Economic Development argues that in the shifting hoe-based agriculture women do the bulk of the agricultural work and men do little farm activities, while in plough agriculture men do much of the agricultural work. This explanation is some how related to the condition of farming activity in Konso. Farming in Konso, as elsewhere in other parts of Africa, is said to be men's activity. Even if, it is said to be men's work, women do the majority of the farm work in Konso.

I can say, from the information I obtained from the Konso people, women do more than 95% of the farm work. The women in Konso are involved in digging, planting, weeding, harvesting, transporting and storage activities. It is only at the stage of storing that men have the relatively greater share. At this stage, the women would assist them carrying the product to the granary and the men performed the accumulation activity.

As it is tried to explain briefly above, apart from the household chores, working in the farm is the responsibility of the Konso women, especially of the *etentas*. More than 60% of their working time is spent on the farms. In the morning after fetching water, tending the cattle and serving breakfast in the house, the women go to the field for weeding, and digging till late in the afternoon. Then, they collect firewood and fodder for the cattle and return home to prepare dinner for the family.



Plate 3.1. konso woman carrying animal fodder



Plate 3.2 Konso woman carrying grain

It is generally believed that carrying heavy load or any work that requires greater strength is the domain of men. However, the Konso case is different. The Konso women are very strong and have the capacity of carrying and transporting grain from the fields to the granary. Even the men in Konso themselves testify that their women are very strong and hardworking. On an average the Konso woman can carry 50kg - 80kg and travel long distance up to 30km - 40km to markets or granary on a hilly ground. In Konso, sometimes the men said jokingly, that having two strong wives' is considered as having two strong lorries.

Although farming is thought to be, by and large the domain of the farmer's *etentas* in Konso, nowadays due to change in attitude, some members of the craftsmen- the *haudas* have started buying and cultivating land. However, as status is conferred by birth, the switching of their activity does not change their status in the society (Hallpike, 1968).

Hallpike in his article entitled "the Status of Craftsmen Among the Konso of South-Western Ethiopia", explained the change as follows:

Before 1897 they (the *hauda*) owned little or no land, and *edanda* would not eat and or drink with them (the *hauda*) and certainly not marry them. This situation has slowly changed over the years, and many *hauda* now have land, and eat and drink with *edanda*, but *edanda* still regard marriage with them as disgraceful...the rigidity of the distinction between the *edanda* and the *hauda* has become softened, like that between the sexes and generations (1968:259).

This change is witnessed specially after the 1974 Ethiopian revolution. The situation has become very lax since then. Therefore, the wives of the *haudas*,

apart from assisting their husbands in craftwork, they are involved in small scale farming activity. During my fieldwork in Konso, I observed the smooth and healthy relationship between the farmers' *etenta* and the craftsmen, the *hauda*.

These two groups usually spend a lot of time together either in their community activity or leisure time, eating and playing. I did not witness any contempt or disgust when they eat, play or work together. This situation is even seen in marriages. For instance, one of my key informants and host at Dokatu is a *hauda*, whose current wife is from an *etenta* family. They have five children. I heard his wife sometimes teases him by saying she is mad marrying a *hauda*. However, when she uttered these words, she pretended to show a kind of tone and facial expression of contempt. She said she is very much proud for being a farmer, an *etenta*. Then, her husband responded (for her teasing) by saying you women are like flies, you can land where-ever you like, so you are lucky marrying me. Apart from this particular incident in a single family, I did not witness any negative attitude between the two groups during my stay. I also observed this lady together with her husband and other community members participating in the craftsman *hauda*-mourning dance, *shleita* ceremony that was conducted at Dokatu.

Farming activity is considered as a prestigious occupation among the Konso. According to the myth of the origin of the Konso and the story of the gourd, the farmers, *etenta* are the first to come out of the gourd holding their farming tools in

their hands, followed by the craftsmen the *haudas*, with their craft implements. As the Konso farmer's- *etentas* are believed to come out of the gourd first, they are considered to be the seniors.

3.2.2. Craftwork

Craftwork is largely the domain of the craftsmen, the *haudas*. The *haudas* are involved in weaving, pottery, iron working, animal slaughtering, skin tanning and the like. According to Hallpike, the allocation of these four crafts (skin, cotton, iron, pottery) between the sexes is therefore predominantly symbolic. He tried to indicate that craft work is divided in accordance with gender, that is, he assigned weaving, iron work and animal slaughtering as being mostly the works of men whereas pottery and skin tanning to be the women's domain. He even further goes saying that the products are also used by their respective makers; like iron and weaving products largely used by men, whereas pottery and skin products have been predominantly used by women (Hallpike, 1968).

However, I think Hallpike's assumption is a bit generalized. This is because, the Konso women largely use weavers' products for their traditional skirt *iwwa* made of colorful cotton, and they also use iron farming products in their farming activity. Similarly, the men use skin products for carrying and for sleeping mat, and pots for decorating the rooftop of their house.

As the farmers are greatly responsible for providing the society with the necessary grain and food stuff, in the same manner, the craftsmen are important for the society for producing clothing, making farming utensils for the farmer, making pottery for household use, scraping hide and making various useful objects.

Weavers (*Hauda Ohawa*) - The Konso craftsmen the *haudas*, especially the weavers, are known for their best production of cotton cloth. Apart from providing the Konso market with their cotton product, they are also suppliers of these cotton products to the markets of Wolayta, Arsi, Yabello and other markets. Weaving is said to be mostly the men occupation, but the women are also involved in weaving to a certain degree, usually by assisting their husbands in spinning and other weaving activities. Their children also assist them. The weavers are said to be dominant in number among the craftsmen *hauda* of the Konso. As the demand of cotton cloth is high, the number of people who are engaged in this activity is relatively higher. It is not only the craftsmen the *hauda* that are involved in this weaving activity, but some members from the farmers the- *etenta* are also involved. This is because the income from weaving could supplement their livelihood. Besides, they are less prejudiced towards weaving than they are to other activities.

Potters (*Hauda Okotta*) - pottery is by and large the domain of women. It is usually the women who make pots. Sometimes they were assisted by their

husbands while preparing the pots. The husbands help their wives particularly by bringing them the kind of soil, which is appropriate for making pots, and by firing the pots.

The potters usually make pots for cooking, preparing *chakka* the local beverage, and also for decorating the roof top *Kegasha*. So, in the market of the Konso it is usually these types of pots that are available for sale. The pots are mostly made and sold by the women. Potters in Konso are predominantly found in the towns of Gewada, Sawgame and Fasha.

Hide workers (*Hauda Kollaya*)- In Konso, hide scraping or tanning is also mostly the domain of women. During my stay in Konso I have tried to talk to two hide-scrapers, one in Burqudayya town and the other in Gocha town. The Buruqudaya hide-scraping woman told me that her mother-in-law, who was also involved in these activities, taught her the craft. She prepares leather bed cover, ladies carrying bag, *treita*, which is a very important object for the women in Konso, women's clothing *turandaga* and *kora*, and a hat called *kolalla*. For her scraping work she uses pieces of bottles. She said that in the past they were using obsidian stone for scraping the hide, however, through time they stopped using the stone and began to scrape with pieces of bottles. The other hide scraper that I have talked to lives in the Gotcha town. She is very much skilled and she uses obsidian stone scrapers for scraping. This is a good proof that stone is still in use in the Konso area, one of the few places in the world where



Plate 3.3. Potter woman burning pots in Fasha



Plate 3.4. A potter woman after burning pots in Fasha

stone is still believed to be in use. It is also living evidence, against the archaeologists' assumption that it is only men that are makers of stone tools. In Konso there are women in different towns who are using stone to scrape leather. However, due to the difficulty involved in making stone tools, this industry might be stopped and replaced with bottles in the long run. So, it is very important to document it.

In Konso area, there are some archaeological sites that possess Acheulian stone tools dated over 1.5. Million years (Yonas Beyene, 1998). This shows that stone tool usage is a living tradition among the Konso, started in the long past and continued till the present.

This tanner also make things like women's clothes, *turandaga* and *Kora*, carrying bag *treita*, a sort of hat, *kolalla* and other useful material for carrying and sleeping. The woman I talked to SC said that she has learned the skill from her mother and her grandmother, and currently she is training and trying to transfer the skill to one of her daughters. She said she would not have any intention of passing the skill to her sons and other daughters. This is because the rest of them do not appreciate her skill and hard work.

Hallpike in his article commented on the use of skin as a regular woman's dress all the time. He said, "...In the past women only wore skins and still today the great majority have skin skirts and caps. On ceremonial occasions they also

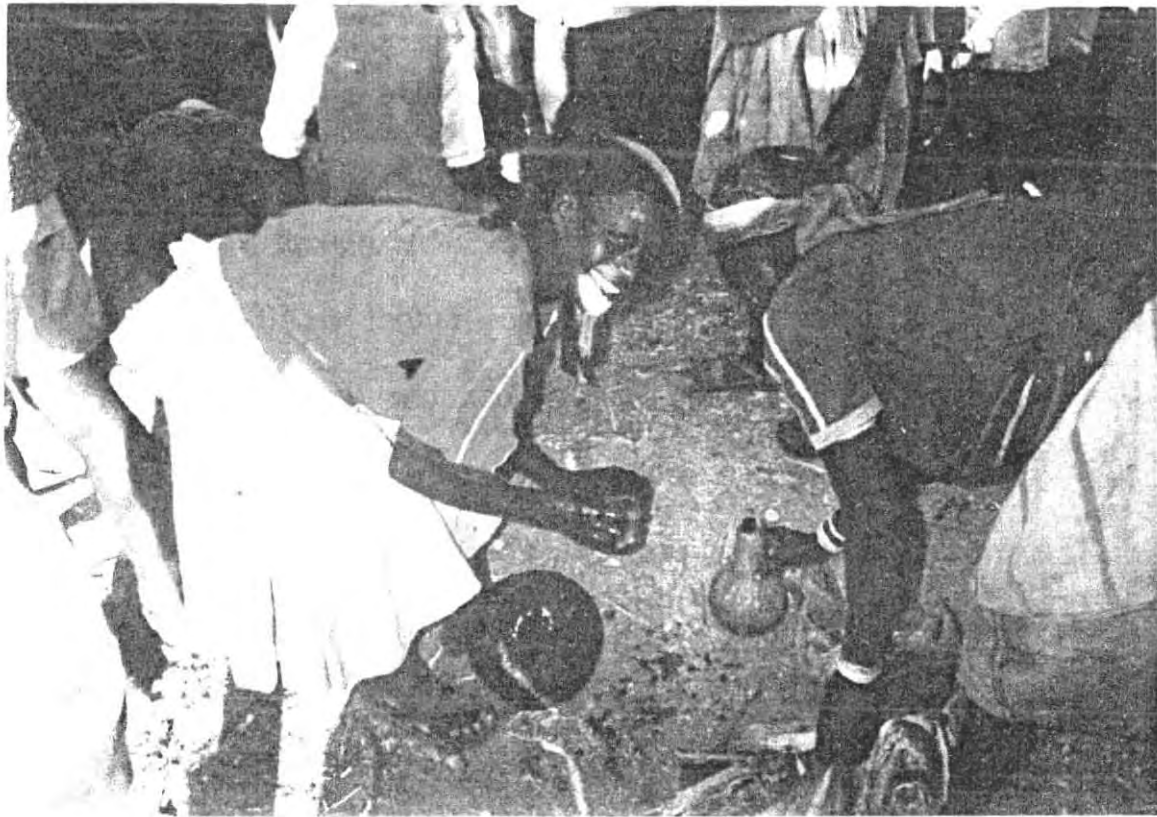


Plate 3.5. A girl selling blood at the market in Gewada

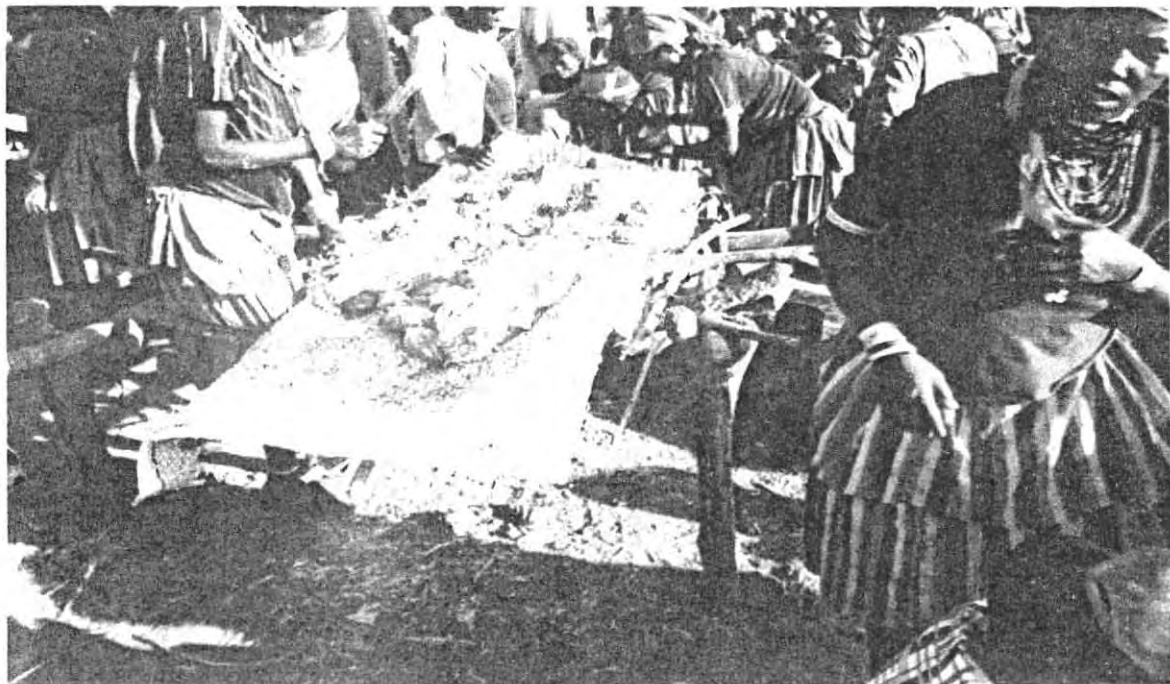


Plate 3.6. A woman selling meat at Gewada market

wear skin capes, though ordinarily they have cotton blankets to keep out the cold" (1968: 263). He further commented that traditionally women are not allowed to wear cotton and confined only to skins, which completely has changed presently. During my stay in Konso I never came across women who had worn skin skirt at any of the area that I have visited. I tried to inquire about it, but the response I got was, in the past women used to wear skin clothes. However, at present except in some ceremonial occasions and for burial purpose, women in Konso do not wear skin cloth. The skin skirt is replaced by the cotton skirt *iwwa*, and the hat *kollalla*, is also replaced by modern head covering cloth.

It is only at Gamolle at the residence of *Poqalla* Woldedawit, that upon my request that his wife the *poqaltetta*, kindly wore and showed me the traditional skin dress the *turandaga* and *kora*, which is used in the *sogeda*, the coming out of maternity ceremony. Apart from this either at ordinary times or during occasions like weeding and the like the Konso women wear only cotton dresses.

Presently the Konso women wear a traditional cotton cloth or skirt called *iwwa*, which is made up of colorful cotton thread and also from white sheet cloth, embedded on it green, yellow and red ribbon, which is like the Ethiopian flag.

My informants told me that the Konso women wear skin skirts only in ceremonial occasions like the *sogeda*, and in burial occasions. When a woman dies she will be wrapped with skin and her skin clothes would be buried with her.

Blacksmith (*Hauda tuma*) - Iron working is strictly the prerogative of the men. The *hauda* of Konso play an important role in the economy of an agrarian konso. They produced various tools useful for agricultural production and household equipment, ranging from farming tools to cooking utensils. During my stay in Konso, I did not encounter any women who are participating in iron working. The black smith *hauda tuma* produced different types of tools such as hand axe, hoe, spear, knife, *kellasha*, (a symbol worn by the clan chief, the *poqalla* on his forehead, as that of the *Gada* leader of the Oromo). The *Kellasha* for Borana *Gada* leaders are usually made by the Konso blacksmiths.

Butchers (*Hauda ollota*) - Animal slaughtering as that of iron work mostly performed by men. Sharing the meat, distributing and selling it usually considered being men's duty. However, during my stay in Konso, in the Gawada market I came across women who were selling the internal part of the cattle, like intestine, liver and the like. To my surprise it was not only one but also two or three women, who were participating in this meat selling activity. Usually women and little girls are involved in selling blood at the market, to both the farmers and craftsmen. Sometimes, the women will change the blood with variety of things of their needs like grain and other necessities. The blood of fat cow or bull is said to be very important, to a woman who gave birth or sick people, as it is vital as a food. This is a good indicator that, the blood of cattle has great demand in the Konso market, by both the farmers' *etenta* and the craftsmen the *hauda*.

3.2.3. Market

In the economy of the Konso, market is an important category. In the Konso different towns, markets are usually bi-weekly events. If we take Dokatu and Karat the markets take place on Tuesday and Saturday. In most towns, usually Saturday is a favorite and important market day. If we take Fasha, the market day is also on Tuesday and Saturday, as that of Karat and Dokatu. The Konso markets usually become active and lively after 2.00 P.M. in the afternoon, and stay till late in the afternoon. For those people who are coming from all over the towns traveling long distances, the afternoon market is the convenient time.

It usually takes them from two hours to eight hours to walk, carrying heavy loads to reach the market place. Sometimes, en route to returning home from the market, they are compelled to stay overnight in the nearby village to spend the night there, due to the distance of their residence. In the markets there is also a noticeable gender division of labor in the items they sell. Men usually sell cereals and livestock. For comparison purpose I will try to present the division as follows:

TABLE 3 – Gender Division of Marketable Items

Men's marketable item	Women's marketable item
- Cereal (maize, sorghum etc.)	- Soybean
- Cattle (oxen, sheep, goat)	- Chicken
- Honey, butter	- Butter (if a man is with her)
- Meat	- Blood (in some area intestine)
- Coffee	- Cotton, chakka , areke (local drink)

Source: Interview with informants (January, 2002).

According to my informants, coffee, honey, oxen, especially sheep are not sold without the presence of the male household head. The husband also sells butter, but if he is not around and if it is necessary to sell the butter, the wife must go with another man to sell it. If there is not any man to go with her to the market, she does not have the right to go by herself and sell the butter. So, she must have a certain man to go with her.

3.2.4. Decision making activities / community work

As the Konso are patrilineal society, male members at the community level make decisions. Community works like terrace making, wall maintenance, well building, *mora (pafta)* and house constructing are largely the activities of men. In this occasion the women are only involved in preparing and providing food and drinks to the workers. I have learnt that community work and public decision-making activities are the few areas, in which women do not have an active participation.

But, at the household level, according to my informants, decision is made mutually (WK, KG, GM). According to WK, if they want to use their grain reserve, the two spouses discuss and make a decision. There is a measurement for the grain, so that if the wife needs to take grain for dinner, she brings the gourd assigned for that particular purpose. In this case the gourd is known as *tarra edoda*, literally meaning "dinner gourd". Then, the woman measures the necessary quantity and makes it to a proper use. My informant also told me that if they want to sell grain from the reserve for different purposes like buying oxen

or cow, farming utensils, or clothing for the family, they would discuss together and decide. (KG, WK).

From the sell of *chakka* and *areke*, the women will buy salt, *shelegaida*. They also use the money for both household purposes and sometimes for their personal use, like buying clothing and ornaments for their children and for themselves. But, with the remaining money they will buy cattle, farmland, construct additional house or saving it by depositing it in money saving associations like *iqub*. In Konso unless the husbands are ill mannered or drunkard, they do not usually take money obtained from the sell of *chakka* and *areke* from their wives. But, the women sometimes voluntarily offer the money to their husbands to buy meat for the family consumption. But, there are few cases in which the husbands take the money from their wives for drinking purposes. There are also cases, according to my informants, where women, who have bad drinking habit, would sell the grain without the knowledge of their husbands and spend the money for drinking (KAG).

Community work like farming cooperatives, *debbo*, is usually done by men and sometimes assisted by the women. But, mostly the role of the women is to prepare and serve food and drink for the participants. But, families could hire working parties called in Konso *parga*, if they could afford the payment. From the information I obtained from my informants, most families hire working labor especially during the peak farming season and where there is much work at the

fields. But, for hiring working group *parga*, the household would first discuss the importance and would try to raise the money, either by selling grain, livestock or sometimes by using their saving from the sale of *chakka* and *areke*.

It is not only the male headed household that hires working group *parga*, but the female headed household also uses this means, as long as they have the money to pay and get the work done. In Konso whether the women are widowed or divorced, they get respect and fair treatment by the society. They would not be alienated.

The other decision-making activity in the Konso is punishment for those who commit mistakes. This is settled by the arbitration of male members of the society. If two women come to disagreement, they will present their cases to the male court. The women can ask for justice by putting fine money known in Konso as *korata* in front of the elders. But, while presenting their cases, the women are not allowed to sit in front of the elders, but instead they sit aside and wait for the decision of the elders. Depending on the seriousness of the case, the elders decide punishment. The women usually are not allowed to go where the men are gathering to discuss issues. On this kind of decision making activities the women do not participate in, which is one of the areas the women's status does not change. This is because as the Konso are patrilineal society, the power of decision-making is only exercised by the male members of the society.

One of the cases that I was told by my informant can be taken as an example. A certain man talked in the *mora*, at the men-gathering place, that he slept with somebody's wife. Consequently, he was accused and sued by the husband and was fined 500.00 *birr* as punishment, *Korata*.

If the accused did not accept this charge and continued denying, both the accuser and the accused would go to the sacred swearing place called *haha*. But, before reaching this last stage, the accused and the accuser would be persuaded or begged by the people to reach an agreement. If they stick to their differences, they would be made to swear on the stone known as *dinga diruma* in Konso designated for this purpose. After swearing, they would return taking opposite directions. The Konso believed that, if one falsely swore in the *haha*. God would penalize the wrong doer in a short period of time. He might encounter an accident; illness or he would certainly die (KG, KAG).

One thing that I have learned during my stay in Konso was, prostitution is not practiced and the society does not allow it. So, during my stay in Konso I did not come across any prostitutes. Single and widowed women can lead their lives without any interference and negative attitude from the society. The other surprising thing that I heard in Konso was abduction is a very rare occurrence, and an act that does not have acceptance by the Konso society.

In the Konso society the things that are considered serious misconduct which disregard the Konso value systems are theft, burning some one's house, or the public gathering place *pafta* at the *mora*. These kinds of offences might result in punishment of 500-1000 *birr*, but if the offence is much more serious the decision could reach up-to the expulsion of the offender from the area and been ostracized. Especially if a member from the community brings a branch of a certain cactus plant and throws it on the wrong doer's house, upon seeing this signal the offender has to leave the surrounding and flee to other area and should never come back. After this signal he is not supposed to stay in that neighborhood any longer. But, if he refused to leave the area and ignored the signal, his house would certainly be burnt and his homestead would become abandoned.

3.2.5. Household chores

Women in Konso mainly perform the household chores. Apart from other engagement, like farming and market activity, the primary duties of the women are to follow the household routines like fetching water, fire wood, fodder for the cattle, preparing breakfast and serve the family, They go to the fields to do farm work spending considerable time there. On the way back home they collect firewood and fodder for the cattle and go again to the wells to bring water and start to prepare dinner. After serving dinner, they perform the remaining work in the house. The women are always the last to sleep, among the household.

According to a report by Farm Africa, and finding of my survey assessment, the women in Konso almost spend more than 16 hours a day performing the household activities. Women in Konso, beginning from early age- that is at an average of 4 or 5 years- are engaged in works like fetching water with small and medium water carrying gourd, looking after the cattle, especially goats and sheep, collecting fire wood and animal fodder. The heavy workload rest on the young girls who are more than 13 years old, adult and elder women. The older women too, unless they are too old to move, are engaged in these daily routine household chores.

KAG, one of my key informants narrated about the Konso women routine work as follows: -

- A woman is supposed to start work at 4.00 A.M. in the morning and grinds flour. Then at break of dawn near 6.00 A.M, she goes to the wells to fetch water and then sets out to collect animal fodder.
- Then prepares breakfast for the family. After feeding the family she eats whatever food remains, and seizing her carrying leather bag *treita*, tying rope and different digging objects she goes to the farmland. Then, she stays there digging, weeding till 6.00 P.M. in the afternoon. Then, she collects fodder for the cattle and sets out to come back home to fetch water and prepare dinner for the family. In the house hold there is a certain rule in sharing the food among the families. As the Konso are patrilineal society giving considerable value for seniority, the food that is prepared in the house is allotted and distributed to the family members,

according to sex and seniority. If in the household there were grandfather, father and son, they would be served first according to their seniority, with their own separate bowls, that is, with the grand father's bowl called *toma aka* and the father's bowl *toma apa*. The women including the grand mother if she is around, the mother and her daughters share whatever left from the men, communally. For kids less than 5 years old a special food called *ludutta* is prepared. In the house if there are unmarried girls, after eating dinner and helping their mother, they go to their friends house and pass the night there. In the morning, these groups of unmarried girls go to the water well to fetch water, grind flour and to perform all their usual daily chores.

➤ According to KAG, usually it is the women who go to the farm, and do the majority of the farm work. The role of men, according to KAG, is very limited. Men are expected to be involved in community work, so they devote their time to commitments like, mending fence *kawata*, the maintaining and cleaning of the wells, building stone terraces, building the communal gathering and recreation place *mora* or *pafta*.

Chapter 4: Women's Reproductive role

4.1. Marriage

As the Konso are exogamous, marriage with in the same clan is forbidden. So, they have to marry out side of their own clan.

4.1.1. Types of marriage

In Konso predominantly, there are two types of marriage. The first type is a marriage that is arranged by the family of the groom, selecting a suitable bride for their son; and the other type is a marriage that is arranged by the agreement between the bride and the groom. Among the Konso early marriage is forbidden, so, the boys and girls are expected to reach the accepted age by the society. The average minimum age for marriage is 13 for girls and 15 for boys. When we compare the Konso marriage age with the practice of the Northern part of the country, where children were supposed to marry as early as 8 or 9 years old, I believe the Konso age even if it is not good, could be taken as relatively better.

As I was told by my informants, there used to be a third type of marriage, that is exchange marriage. This type of marriage was practiced specially between two disputing families to bring peace. However, at present, this kind of marriage is not practiced much.

In the Konso age grading system for a marriage to take place between a certain couples, it is important for the couples to reach at a determined age set group. In

Hallpike's article the following important points were raised regarding marriage, "...the most prominent characteristics are the prohibition of marriage to men and women who have not yet reached a certain grade, and the determination of one's grade by the grade of one's father"(1968: 260).

According to my informants, once the first son is got married, his parents, even if they are in child-bearing age, should stop having a child. It is forbidden in Konso for the parents and their sons to have a child simultaneously. For Hallpike one possible explanation for this would be,

... for sometimes that it was 'bad' for young people and their parents to be getting children simultaneously. Thus, one object is to keep the children from marrying until their parents have ceased to procreate. Still today a mother is not supposed to bear children after her son has married, and there is good reason to suppose that this applied to men in the past, though it has fallen to disuse (1968: 261).

This age category is known in Konso as *Faraida*. Couples who are in a *faraida* category are by no means allowed to participate in game hunting and in the community affairs. In general they are considered un-mature and they are not even held liable for the damage they have made to the community. Hallpike tried to relate this situation in the following manner, "The first (of the generations) is that of the useless youngsters, who can not marry, claim a game animal if they kill it, take part in councils, or sacrifice, are not held responsible for damage caused by negligence" (1968: 261). If a boy and a girl in this category performed cohabitation, and if the girl gets pregnant, she is expected to perform an abortion.

Sometimes, they are even expelled from the town and forced to stay till they reach the required age.

However, my informants told me that this condition has become a bit lax at present. During my stay in Konso I have learnt from my informant that he himself tried to marry a girl while they were in the *faraida* stage. Consequently they were forced to leave their residential village, advised and pressured by the elders of the community members to make an abortion. But, my informant said he and his fiancée refused the plea and command of the elders. By moving to another residential area they gave birth to a male child, which they consequently gave a name, which was very much related to their refusal experience.

When Hallpike explained the condition in Garati in relation to abortion, "It is above all in Garati, where there is the largest delay on average before marriage, and where girls below the authorized grade for marriage who conceive children are compelled to have abortions..." (1968: 261).

4.1.2. Bride-wealth

For the first type of marriage, the parents of the bride would be requested by the groom's family formally, and if the bride's family agrees to the marriage proposal, they will buy a skirt made up of skin, a necklace made from glass beads called *chiriwana* and *chimra*, a hand ornament made from a giraffe's tail that will be

given to the bride. Once she accepts these presents and wears them it is a sign that she is engaged.

However, if the marriage is of the second type, that is, if the bride and the groom are engaged without the knowledge of their respective parents, when the time for the marriage approaches, the groom's family will send elders to the family of the would be bride. The family of the bride would ask for fine money called *Korata*, and the parents of the groom will agree to pay. After they agree on the amount of the fine money, which will not be much ranges between 15 to 85 *birr*- the groom's family will give the agreed amount of money to the bride's family.

Mostly the payment is a kind of nominal, because accepting large amount of money from a suitor is considered in Konso as selling one's daughter, which is considered to be negative, and opposite to the konso social value. So, because of this reason they do not believe in asking a big sum of money, especially in the past and continued till the present. According to Hallpike, the konso have a deep dislike of putting a monetary value on a person (1968). After the requested amount is paid, a date for the marriage would be decided between the bride's family and the elders from the groom's side. When the day of the wedding approaches, the family of the groom will prepare *chakka*, the traditional local drink prepared from honey. A calabash full honey and big cotton wrapping cloth, (*bulluko*) and one full calabash butter will be brought for the father and the mother of the bride respectively.



Plate 4.1. Elders bringing bride-wealth in Debanna



Plate4.2. The brides and the grooms sitting on a skin mat for the butter ceremony

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For the wedding members of both families are invited and everybody present on the occasion eats, drinks and sings. A special traditional food called *kurkufa* is prepared from meat, and *haleko/shelgaida*, a cabbage like plant mixed or boiled with butter and a sort of maize dough.

In the afternoon, after the feast has taken place there is a blessing ceremony. The bride's parents would make the first blessing. Their blessing according to my informant KAG, can be translated as follows, "from this day on this child of ours, will become your seed, let them (the bride and the groom) give a daughter, we will hope for the seed tree to continue, we give our daughter to you, may she give birth to many children." Then, every body present in the ceremony will give their blessing accordingly.

The mother of the bride would then show her belly to her daughter, the bride will kiss her mother's belly and then the mother will spray saliva on her daughter's belly and says, "oh, my daughter, you have my blessing". Next, the daughter will kiss the knee of her father, and he would say, "oh daughter, you worked so hard for me without reserving your labor, so now, I bless you to have children, both boys and girls." The family would perform these blessing after all the presents from the groom's side arrived and accepted. Then, after the blessing, they would go to the groom's house.

In the bride parent's house, after the feast, they would prepare melted butter with a wooden bowl, and both the bride and the groom are made to sit on a skin mat. If the grandmother and the mother are there, they will put their hands in the butter and smear the bride respectively starting from her face to her feet three times, and then the groom starting from his feet and end it at his face. This is done ritually three times. While blessing the couple they say, "let a boy be born" in Konsinna, "*horma oita enodaleddu*". Then, the father of the bride would repeat the same process as the former, followed by other male relatives according to seniority. Then, the nearest female relatives on the basis of their seniority, the grand mother, the mother, the aunts, and all women who are present in the occasion will put their hands in the butter three times, and smear their faces and hairs with it. However, men relatives will not participate in this butter smearing on the hair and face ceremony.

There was one event that I followed and participated in the Debanna town was the case of twin sisters who had been married and came to their parents' house for reunion ceremony. When we arrived at the place the first spouse had already arrived in the house and they were drinking *chakka* in a separate room reserved for them. The elders from the groom's family, who brought the customary gifts to the bride's family, sat at a separate hut drinking *chakka*. Besides them on a skin mat is seen *bulloko*, the traditional cloth for the bride's father and a calabash full honey, but unfortunately the elder, who is supposed to bring the butter for the

mother was a bit late, and the elders were expecting his arrival as the gift expected to be complete.

Till the arrival of the other couple, the participants' chanted traditional songs mixed with modern *Amharic* music. The women, the relatives and neighbors of the family sang and danced in Konsinna, where as the nephew of the brides' who is living in the city had a cassette player with an *Amharic* tape playing. Some of the participants tried to sing in *Amharic* and to dance. I also witnessed this kind of performance -young friends and relatives of the groom, having a tape recorder and a modern *Amharic* music playing and singing and dancing with it - when I attended a certain wedding ceremony during my first trip to Konso.

Some times after a little while the other bride and groom arrived preceded by the elders with the presents. The first elder carried the *bulluko*, the traditional cloth for the father, on his shoulder followed by the other elders who carried the honey and the butter. There was also a girl carrying a pot of *chakka*, which is prepared from honey. Then arrived the couple followed by their friends and relatives. Their wedding attire and the change that was displayed was very clear. The two brides wore the traditional colorful skirt *iwwa* with a modern t-shirt on which "Los Angeles" is written on its front. On this trip of mine I was able to observe so many of the Konso women wearing the same "Los Angeles" t-shirt in different colors. In my previous visit to Konso before two years, the women were wearing colorful three striped t-shirts on its side or in front. But during this fieldwork almost the

majority of the women and girls were wearing Los-Angeles t-shirts. One would be surprised to come all the way to Konso and see most of the women and the men wearing these t-shirts. I was also a bit surprised at this display, which is for me an indication of their tendency in using more imported materials from the neighboring Kenya and other places. This clearly indicates their preference of imported items than the locally produced clothes.

Coming to my point, the two girls wore white socks with white sneakers and a white designed modern headdress. The two grooms also wore modern shirts and trousers and one of them wore hat. The elders who arrived last also joined the previous elders in the hut and after putting the parent's gifts on the skin mat they sat and began to drink *chakka*, which was provided to them by the household.

After a little while, a black goat was brought by the brides' family to be slaughtered for the occasion. As the family of the bride is believers of traditional religion, they first asked for someone from our group to slaughter the goat for which our driver volunteered. They did this because they were aware of the presence of Orthodox Christians in our group. But, one surprising thing that I observed in this occasion was, before the goat was slaughtered, they brought pieces of leaves in a wooden bowl and on it they added salt. They then gave it to the goat, which consumed it immediately. It was then slaughtered. When I asked my translator and key informant KG why they did this, he told me that this is a ritual performed as a sort of gesture of blessing for the couples. That is, the

green leaves signify their wish for the couples to be “green” and fertile, and the symbol of the salt is to wish the couples for their marriage to be as tasty as the salt. This is the meaning of the performance that I obtained from my informant.

Sometime later, the elder who had been late with the butter also arrived and joined the elders' group. They put all the presents on a skin mat prepared for the occasion and presented what they brought to the brides' parents. So, after a while the goat was prepared for a meal, some of it cooked and some of it raw and was offered to those present on the occasion. Our group was also offered with its share of the meat with a hot sauce, which they call *datt'a*, which is made from green and red paper. It is very tasty but very hot. So, we consumed our share in the company of the brides' father and their nephew. The *chakka* made of honey, which was brought by the couples', was also served.

Following the feast, they brought a skin mat and melted butter in a wooden bowl. Then, they brought the two couples and made them sit on the skin side by side. Starting from the elder men in the family and their father they smeared their hands in the butter and then they smeared the couples. They first smeared the grooms starting from their feet all the way to their faces and then the brides' going in opposite direction i.e. starting from their faces and ending it at their feet. This was done three times. On the basis of seniority and sex, everybody repeated the same process turn by turn. The mother and the elder women relatives also performed this ritual. While doing this, they blessed the couples.

Then follow the distribution of the melted butter to the women relatives who were present on the occasion, and who smeared it on their faces and hairs.

As it is tried to explain above the male members, apart from blessing the couples' while smearing the butter on their body and face, they did not apply or smear the butter on their faces and hairs unlike the women. Then, the blessing ceremony continued beginning from elder men relatives' including the father and other male members according to seniority, and then by the mother and female relatives.

After receiving the gift brought by the grooms, the brides' parents gave the brides *treita*, a skin bag that is useful for carrying things, *herodda*, an ornament that the brides would wear on their feet when they give birth, *turendega* and *kora*, a skin skirt that they would wear when they come out of maternity. Apart from these presents, there was not any other gift or property that the brides would receive from their family.

My informant KAG told me that when her son married, she prepared one pot of *chakka*, the local drink made of honey and one-liter local alcoholic drink *areke*, and a big cotton rapper *bulluko*. As the parent's of the bride both died honey and butter were not given, it was only the *bulluko* and the *areke* that was given to the bride's brother. A certain elderly man from the groom's clan gave the blessing.

If the bride is pregnant, in the wedding day when they are going to the bride's family, the *chakka* is not taken with a pot, but, instead with a calabash. The bride also is not allowed to wear the bead necklace called *frodda*; she is allowed only to wear the necklaces known as *chiriwana* and *chimra*. But, if she is not pregnant the *chakka* would be taken with a pot, and she may wear all her necklaces and other ornaments.

4.1.3. Residence

As the Konso are patrilineal society, residence after marriage is at the husband's house. Especially, if the husband is the first-born son, he is expected to live in his parent's house. The elder son has a responsibility of caring for the family after the death of his father. So, the newly wed should live with the husband's family. However, if the husband is the younger son, he is not expected to live with his family. Hence, by taking his share of land, he will build on his own residence. The bride, after she joins or settles at her husband's residence, begins preparing food and *chakka*. However, after preparing the meal and the drink, if the mother-in-law or grand mother-in-law are present and living with them, she is expected to hand the food and the drink to them, and they will perform the distribution of food and drink to the family. If they are around, the wife does not have the right to distribute food and drink to the family by her self.

The bride who is living with her in-laws is expected also to respect them. My key informant, who has her son and his wife living with her, narrated the situation as follows:

It has been 14 years since my husband passed away, and leaving the responsibility of raising the children with me. So, I succeeded in raising my children by myself, being both mother and father to them. In raising them as a single parent, the children have great respect for me. If occasionally the wife of my elder son showed some disrespect, my son would chided her that, how dare you mistreat my mother, you should respect her. He would tell her that, our mother troubled a lot and worked so hard to raise us, and she is very strong and courageous. It is due to her hard work that now we could able to have so many beehives and the necessary things those are important for our livelihood. So, she deserves your respect (KAG).

When my informant was narrating this to me she was very proud of her son, who is not letting his wife to disrespect her.

As polygyny is practiced among the Konso, a man can marry more than one wife, depending upon his wealth or income. The reason mostly given for marrying more than one wife is to have as many children as possible, as children are considered good investment and vital labor force. The husband who has more than one wife can build different houses to his wives in different areas. This is because if they are in the same area they might end up quarrelling. During my stay in Konso I encounter a certain man who has eight wives and more than thirty children, and another person who has five wives and more than twenty children. So, in Konso it is not uncommon to have multiple wives.

When the husband allocates his wealth, especially farmland, he will allocate around two third of the land to his first wife. And the remaining one third will be divided among the rest of his wives. He will never take from the first wife's share, even if the second or the other wife has more children. What he will do is try to increase the other wife's or wives' share by buying some more land and give it or share it among them.

4.1.4. Divorce

Divorce is not a big issue among the Konso. If a husband and a wife quarrel because of any disagreement, it is up-to the two spouses to make the final decision. If they reach at the stage of separation, it is the wife who is expected to leave the house. In the course of her living the house, she is not supposed to take anything or allowed to take any property with her, except some personal items and household kitchen utensils.

If the divorced woman leaves the house of her husband and marries another man, her husband will sue or ask the newly wed husband the expense he had spent on his ex-wife while they were living together. This is known in Konso as *massa*.

4.2. Childbirth and child rearing

Children are considered as a big asset among the Konso. The Konso like to have as many children as possible as they think it is important to reserve labor force,

which would give helping hand for the family. They regard having many children as a good investment for the family at an older age.

4.2.1. Pregnancy and food taboo

During pregnancy the Konso women do not get any special treatment. What I want to say here by special treatment are things like the reduction of work or getting time to rest. They are rather expected to work till the day they give birth. They are expected to perform both their usual household responsibilities as well as the farm work. It is generally believed that if they rest much, the fetus in their womb might get bigger and become difficult during labor.

My informants told me that there were incidents that some women giving birth while working in the farms, bringing their newborn baby by wrapping him/her with their leather carrying bag *treita*. During this time the umbilical cord would not be cut, so it is very important to have the groom's mother or grandmother around, as it is their responsibility to cut the umbilical cord. Even if the bride and her in laws are not in good terms, it is a must that they perform this task. If the mother or grandmother of the husband refuses to cut the umbilical cord, she will be begged and be given an indemnity money, *korata*. But, during all these arguments the newborn baby is expected to wait till they settle the matter to get his/her umbilical cord cut.

The Konso women, during pregnancy, are not allowed to eat fat. Because, it is believed that if they eat too much fat the fetus in his mother's womb would get big and fat and would become difficult for the mother during labor.

As it is tried to explain briefly on the marriage part of this thesis, in former times konso girls and boys who do not reach the required age were not allowed to have a child. In Konso they do not attach much value to virginity, however, they do not allow pregnancy and childbirth before the required age. A couple that commits this mistake is expected to leave the area and perform an abortion. My informant told me from her experience about those girls who had to go to other place to abort because of getting pregnant before the required age in former times. For those who were residing in Dokatu and Bourqudayya the place where they usually performed the abortion is in Machello town. There is an old woman there, who was performing the abortion. While performing the abortion, I was told; she did not use any medication but only used her hands massaging the pregnant woman's abdomen. My other informants also confirmed this information.

However, according to my informants, at present due to the introduction and expansion of religion and education, this practice has been decreased considerably. And the Konso society is not that much serious on the issue of pregnancy as it was as before, and through time showed considerable change in attitude.

4.2.2. Childbirth

The Konso women are giving birth or expected to give birth in their marital residence. During labor the woman is not supposed to go out of her house or in to seclusion to different place outside of the house to give birth.

When the woman reaches the stage of giving birth or during her labor, a traditional birth attendant who is living around will be called. Then, after washing her hands, the traditional birth attendant will massage the body specially the back of the woman with warm water. Hot drink, a kind of porridge made from cereal is given to her or, if there is *chakka*, hot water will be added to it and will be given to her. If there is no *chakka* in the house a drink called *holla* made from coffee leaves and with some salt, will be offered to her while it is hot to quicken the labour. The coffee leave used for this purpose is called *hasha bunnita* in Konso.

The husband's mother, her mother-in-law will be called, because she is the one who is supposed to cut the child's umbilical cord. If the mother in law is not around or if she has passed away, a nearby close female relative in the husband's side will be present to perform the customary ritual. Hence, the mother-in-law or the nearest female relative will cut the umbilical cord.

Then, the mother would be offered a hot porridge like drink called *tanda*, in it added butter, which is made from barely or finger millet. But, if the family cannot afford butter, a melted fat of a cow would be added as a replacement for the

butter. The family, if they can afford, will slaughter cattle and feed the mother well. She will also be given the blood of a fat cow, which is thought to be important for its medicinal value. Meat, butter and fat are the main food types that are believed to be important to make the mother stronger during her maternity. So, with this kind of treatment, the woman would stay in doors in a special hut called *manna*³ in the homestead, which is warm for about three to five months depending on the wealth and income of the family. But, if the family is in a low-income category, the woman will be taken care of for only about two months or less.

During the maternity period, especially during the first weeks, the woman is not expected to work. Her daughters, who have reached working stage, will take care of the household duty that is, caring for the mother as well as doing the rest of the work. Besides, if her mother-in-law is alive it is her responsibility to feed her till the umbilical cord or *kusumtta* fell or detached from the infant's abdomen. But, if her mother-in-law is not around or passed away, it is the responsibility of her own mother to take care of her for about a month. However, if both mothers are dead, it is the husband's responsibility to feed her and also to work in the house till the umbilical cord fell. Therefore, he is expected to fetch water, cook food and perform other works. But if he has sisters or female relatives they would assist him. After that she could resume work specially the in door activity while the husband is performing the out door work.

³ Manna is one of the konso huts built in the compound and used specially for mothers during maternity. This hut is covered with grass from top to bottom and is a warm place.

During maternity, the Konso woman will be properly fed and taken care of, because, it is considered very prestigious among the Konso that their women come out of maternity looking very fat and big. This shows the family's capacity for taking good care of the woman and in a way it shows her family's social and economic status. So, due to this belief the Konso women come out of maternity looking very fat and bulky.

Till the child's umbilical cord falls off, the woman is not allowed to touch any household utensils. Food is prepared and given to her by family members. The umbilical cord, *kusumtta* might fall within four or five days, when it does, it will be smeared with butter, wrapped with a piece of cloth and put carefully in a certain gourd. The gourd used for this purpose has a narrow and thin neck and it is sealed with a dung of a cow, which has not yet given birth to a calf. Then, the elder women hold the sealed gourd high above their head and bless the child by saying, "be big like this". The gourd that contains the child's umbilical cord will be put under the roof of the hut, on the second round, which they call *orotitta*. Then, the older women would cook the meat and share it among the family. The meat that is bought for this occasion includes every part of the inner body of the cattle. This includes liver, intestine, rib bone and red meat. Everybody present is entitled to get a piece from every type of the meat.

On this occasion from the woman's side it is only her mother that will be present. But the rest are all the relatives of the husband and the traditional birth attendant. The only men participants are her father-in-law and her husband, and they would get their share of food with their own wooden bowl *toma aka* (the father's bowl) and *toma apa* (the husband's bowl) respectively, and would eat separately from the women's group.

Then the older women, after the feast, would bless the mother by saying raise the child well, we will come when you come out of maternity. Till then play with your kid, in *konsinna* they said, "*auta sogeda lakinna*" roughly translated as follows, "we will come at your *sogeda* or coming out of maternity ceremony."

When it is time to come out of maternity, her best friend's family prepares the local drink *chakka* and brings it to her house with a clay pot. It is called *araida* in *konso*. The *chakka* pot is opened by the one who cut the umbilical cord- it could be her mother in law or grand mother in law or her husband's close female relative that performed the cutting, which is called in *Konso okeda kusumtaa*. After the lady takes her share *murada okoda kusumtaa*, the remaining will be distributed among the rest of the family. After this, the next step is the *sogeda*, the coming out of maternity ceremony.

On this day they also hold a naming ceremony for the newborn child known as *maha ashekotta*. The name is given to the child by the one who has cut the

umbilical cord. Then, the father brings a certain type of leaf called *argaida* in konso. Two of these leaves are put at the threshold of the house at one corner of the entrance door mixed with a certain branch or piece of stick known as *woibetta*. Then, the traditional birth attendant will pierce the *argaida* in to three spots and bury it.

Then, the birth attendant would first tie some of the string- like part from false banana which is known as *sohaita* on her own arms, then she will tie the *sohaita* on the mother's two feet above her ankles. Next, the *sohaita* will also be tied on each arm of the child who would accompany the woman. A leg ornament called *herodda*, which is made from a shell of an ostrich egg mixed with certain blue beads known, as *chiriwanna* would be prepared, and she wore it on her two ankles. The *chiriwanna* is a sign that showed the type of children the woman has, that is, if it is a female two blue beads would be mixed, in front and at the back which makes it four, and if she added a boy another two beads would be inserted on the sides, which would be about eight. The *sohaita*, the false banana thread like thing also serves as an indicator whether she has born a girl or a boy, that is, if it is a girl, she would have put in 5 rounds and if it were a boy it would make 7 rounds. So, here we can tell by the number of beads and the round of *sohaita* that, there is differentiation and favor among the sexes, which clearly showed that it is a boy that is preferred most.

When the woman gets pregnant again, she takes of the *sohaita* from her feet, but the *herodda* remains. There are certain myths that were told in Konso regarding a woman in maternity. One of this is, while the woman is on maternity, she is not allowed to drink clean water. But, if she insists on drinking, she should put certain fruit seed in it. The reason, it is believed, is if she drinks plain water, her eyesight might get weaker.

There is also another belief that goes on like this; if she collected firewood that was brought by flood and cooked with it, her child might snore. To stop the child's snoring, she has to boil water with the wood that she brought, after which the child's snoring would stop.

The woman at maternity also would have different hairstyle. That is a hair of a woman that gave birth would be modeled or made by dividing it in to six parts, that is, two parts in each side, two parts in front and one at the back. The Konso married women has a hairstyle known in konso as *lehha*. But before she gave birth it is only made in one part, or her hair would be covered with a piece of cloth.

Grand mothers' who have grand children, would wear a hat called *kulleda*, made from black woolen thread, or they would make their hairstyle with sort of step like style, like the city girl's French style, which is called *kassara*.

4.2.3. Initiation ceremony

The Konso women are expected to come out of maternity only after an initiation ceremony is conducted. It is forbidden to go out of the house before this ceremony.

The initiation ceremony would take place after three months of maternity. For this occasion there would be certain preparation or process. These include preparing a certain wood called *woibetta* and buying a skirt made of skin called *turandaga* and *kora*. An ornament called *herodda* made of ostrich egg mixed with blue beads will be presented for the mother. A necklace made up of beads called *forodda* is also given to her.

When she wears the skin skirt *turandaga*, from the waist above she would be bare. But she would apply a certain charcoal like thing mixed with butter called *nabba* on her forehead, on one round and three stripe marks on her breasts. This is believed to protect her from an evil eye. She wore the skin skirt *turandaga*, and *kora*, which is put on top of the *turandaga*. The *kora*, which had a rectangle shape, would be painted vertically with a black paint, on its middle part. Then, to begin the ritual she was made to go outside of the house and came back. This is to enable her to make practice of going out door.

The woman, after coming out of the house with her followers, will directly go to her parent's house, if they are nearby. But, if her parents are far, a close relative

or clan member on her family side that lives near prepares food and drink and host her. She would then spent some time eating and drinking there, with her followers. As it is the custom, no clan member would reject the hosting of the woman upon request. When she started this journey, young children of both sexes would follow her. If she gave birth to a boy, a younger boy would go in front of her, and herself followed by the young girls. But if it is a girl, the position of the followers would be reversed, that is, the girls would come in front, the boys at the back, and in the middle the woman. Her followers would be selected from a family that did not have a child death record previously.

This procession or her followers are known in Konso as *ambattodda*. Then, she would go to her parent's house and would be served with food and drink. The food is *kurkufa*, *shelgaida* boiled with meat, and *chakka*, the traditional drink. If the parent's failed to prepare *chakka* for the occasion, they are expected to buy from some other place.

Then, after the feast she would return to her home, but on the way home her followers, the children, would gather some small fire sticks like what we called in *Amharic chiraro*, and *shelgaida*. The *shelgaida* could be taken from any body's holding without any permission from the owner. However, the owners knew that it is the custom so, they would not complain. The children after collecting the wood and the *shelgaida* they would give it to the woman and, she will distribute it among the children. When they reach home, the elder women would welcome



Plate 4.3. *Poqalla* Wodedawit Kayote, standing at his residence at Gamolle



Plate 4.4. *Poqaltetta* wearing *kora* and *turandaga*, a skin skirt worn by a mother at the *sogeda* ceremony, and a leg ornament *herodda*

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them by saying *ogadda assam*, did you eat well? they would inquire. Then, her followers will throw the sticks and the *shelegaida* in to the house to the waiting family members.

Then the old women would separate the stick from the *shelgaida* and would cook the latter with meat and prepare *kurkufa*. As the children do not drink *chakka* due to its alcoholic behavior, a porridge like drink made from cereal called *chebotta*, would be prepared a day earlier for the occasion, and would be given to them together with *kurkuffa*. This drink would be provided to the children before they set out to her parent's house and after they return to the house.

Meat would be bought for this occasion, and the women in the house would prepare food and distributed it among family members. The traditional birth attendant would perform the allocation. The woman and her followers would eat and drink and after that, they set out to the river or well near by to bring water, carrying water containers.

Upon reaching the river, she would perform a sort of prayer in konsinna as follows, "*erayyu hella bammalaya kallasha baddaqa kurro ella gutta addai geddai captin okkate*", literally means "you are big river, a river of children, please give us the mud *Ikegennata*", she would say this prayer repeatedly, upon saying this the children would send their hands in to the river and came out with hands full of the mud *kegennata*. The children will try again and again till they get the required

mud. Then, the children put the mud in the leaf they prepared and the woman would smear some of it on her two feet, starting from her toe up to her knee, and take the remaining to the house. Upon reaching the house the old women would inquire if the river gave them what they are looking for, that is, the *kegennatta* and the children would respond yes, she gave us. Then the old women would again smear the mud on the belly of the mother.

From this ceremony on, the woman could go to the river unaccompanied. After this ritual the woman would also take her skin carrying bag *treita* and set out to the farm, there, she would collect cattle fodder, fire stick and *shelgaida /halekol* and returned back to the house.

When she reaches home she would be welcomed by the family members and her followers that stayed home, and waiting for her arrival would greeted her by saying "*assham*" literally meant "hallo, did you come back safely"? They would inquire, and she would respond, yes. Then, the *shelgaida* that she brought would be cooked, butter added in it. After she has served food to her followers, she would take her maternity clothes off. From this performance of ritual onwards, she can resume her usual house hold chores and the new born child is also allowed to go outside, but before the child goes outside an ornament made of cowry shell would be put on his wrist and two feet and *sohaita* also tied around his waist, so as to cast of the evil eye.

4.2.4. Child rearing

Child rearing is a communal task among the Konso. The Konso do not make that much fuss on raising a child. Based on my observation, I saw children from around seven or eight months sitting and playing outdoors, in the absence of their mothers or guardians around. I am used to see children under three years being looked after carefully; however, the Konso case is completely beyond my experience. In Konso, seeing a child less than one year old, and who barely started walking playing by him/herself in the markets and by the road-side is usually common. I found this a bit shocking.

During my stay in the area, when I saw kids at an edge of a certain stair, or a cow or bull coming towards them or towards where they sat or played, I usually yelled or shouted to the surprise of their parents or observers who would laugh and said, 'Mame do not worry that much, we do not worry or bothered much about the kids; they are used to it'. It is only surprising for you, because you are comparing them with the children of the city, where you made much fuss over them.

Children in Konso beginning from an early age, made to learn their roles through socialization and the division of labor set by the society. So, children starting from an early age knew their duty and perform it accordingly. I saw small girls not more than five or six years going to the wells to fetch water, to tend cattle, collecting fire sticks, helping the family on the farms, looking after kids and the

like. Young boys also look after the cattle, collect fodder to the cattle and fire wood, helping in the farm.

The Konso considered their children as vital labor forces, which are handy in their different activities. But, there are some parents who tried to send their children to school. From the people I talked to, what I have learnt is, the Konso family would send one or two boys to school, among many children. The rest would help in the house, or in the outdoor activities. When I asked them why they are not sending all their children to school, they would respond, we do not have enough money to send all our children, so we sent only those children we could afford to pay. But, in this course the most disadvantaged like that of children of the other parts of the country, the continent and some part of the world, are the female children. Most families do not send their daughters to school.

When I asked them why, they respond, "if we teach our daughters it does not have any use for us because, they will take their knowledge to their husbands, their knowledge or education does not remain with us". Hence, it is no use to invest on the female children. Besides, the labor of female child is very important to the family, they would help a lot in the household till they get married. So, before she is taking her labor to her husband, the family must benefited from her labor, as much as possible, so they are not willing to send them to school. It is a very small numbers of female children that attend school compared with male children.

Even after starting school and continuing some how, in the middle of it the girls would quit learning and get married. I met two girls who were attending school, but discontinued later upon marrying. One of them, GH, was in the eleventh grade and the other in the seventh grade. When I asked them why, the former responded that, she has to get married, so she has to stop. Her marriage was arranged between her family and her husband's family. So, it was an arranged type of marriage. Now, she has given birth to five children, but said, she has plans in the future to continue her education and to complete 12th grade. At present, GH is residing with her parent's-in-law, as she is the wife of the elder son, and assisted the family in the household activities, especially in brewing and selling the honey mead, *tej*. As she is active and hard working she is very much liked and trusted by the family, specially by her father in law, who in trust with her care the important keys of the house hold.

The latter MM has attended school up to the 7th grade, and quit school to get married. Unlike the former, the respective families do not arrange this marriage, but instead the girl has eloped. Her mother was so furious, because she very much wanted, she told me, her daughter to reach 12th grade. But, instead her daughter has failed her, and ended up eloped by a man who already has two wives and became the third wife. This made the mother to be very furious, and during my stay in Konso, they were not even in speaking terms. When I asked the mother why did not she forgive her daughter she said, "it would have been

better for me instead of privileging and sending her to school, which she was not properly used, rather use her labor, it is a total loss for me”.

But to my surprise the mother also told me, at present as she has having a son who is currently in the eleventh grade, who has a fiancée living in the house eloping from her family, whom they are taking good care of, and on the process of sending elders to the girl’s family. But when I asked my informant that her daughter also did the same thing as her son did, so, what is wrong with it, she responded, her boy’s case as being different, because he is male, but her daughter should not do this and disappointed her, that she swore that she would never wanted to speak to her again.

As I understood from my observation in Konso it is obvious that the male child has the right to do whatever he pleases, and gets the support of his family and the community at large. However, when it came to the case of female child, she is not allowed to do what she pleases and do not get much support of her decision, neither from her family nor the society. Even if she did, the family and the society would scorn her.

4.3. Death/Mourning

Among the Konso death and mourning depends on the age and the social status of the individuals. They very much knew that death is a natural phenomenon. So, they accepted death with grace, performing the necessary requirements. Their

mourning is not that much bitter and intensive, except for the death of a young man of a marriage age and one who have not given birth to a child yet. The mourning in this occasion would be bitter. Intense mourning preparation would be held by the society for the *poqalla*.

4.3.1. *Poqalla*

The death of a *poqalla* in Konso is a serious matter and a big event. As the *poqalla* are the ritual and clan leaders among the Konso, their death and burial ceremony has its own unique characters. When a certain *poqalla* dies, at first there will not be any sign of mourning displayed, till whatever necessary for the burial and mourning ceremony is prepared. It is only his nearest family, his advisors /counselors *Sarra* and his clan members that would be notified of his death.

The body of the *poqalla* would then be taken to a certain separate hut, constructed for this purpose outside the homestead. His condition is announced to the public, as if he has been very sick. In due time the necessary arrangement for the funeral ceremony would be made. Certain and known members from the craftsmen the *hauda* family, would prepare the body of the *poqalla* by mummification.

The mummified body of the *poqalla* would stay in the hut for nine months before his burial. During this time, after the body is mummified and ready for visit, the

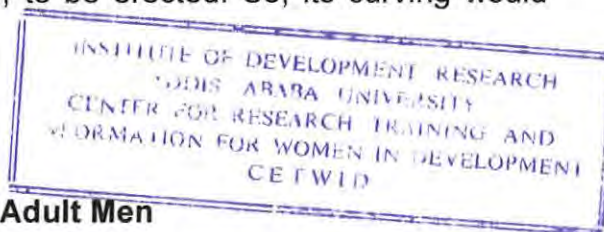
public would be allowed to visit him. The visitor would inquire about the health of the *poqalla*, and would ask how the old man is feeling today? The response they might get from his keepers / guardians is, 'he is felling better today'. Anyone who visits the mummified body of the *poqalla* is expected to make some sort of payment or contribution starting from 1.50 *birr* and above to his guardians. During my stay in Konso, I got the chance to see the mummified body of a *poqalla* in Turo. Prior to this, I had only seen the picture of the mummified body of *Qennazmach Kayote*, from the *Kalla* family. During my visit, the body was in its 8 months and, preparation was underway for his burial, which was to take place after a month, While I was there, his grave was begun to be dug, and also, the *waka*, the wooden statue, was started to be sculptured.

According to my informants, in former times when a *poqalla* died, he was supposed to stay for about nine years before his burial. However, through time, due to drought and other natural causes, the duration of the stay was reduced to 9 months, each month representing one year. In other words the nine months were considered as nine years. I tried to inquire why the number 9 is significant to the Konso, I could not get a satisfactory response or explanation.

During these nine months, the guardians, the selected *hauda* members would be treated well and were offered by the family of the *poqalla* whatever they need. The guardians acted as if the *poqalla* is alive and demand on his behalf certain things which they wanted to have, like the old man wanted a goat to be

slaughtered for him, or he demanded honey and butter, and their request would be fulfilled. Hence, it is the duty of the *poqalla's* family, his clan members and concerned members of the society to fulfill these demands of the guardians / the *haudas*.

When the nine month approaches, a certain preparation would be started like the digging of his grave a month earlier to his burial, and also as he is a leader, it is mandatory that a wooden statue, a *waka*, to be erected. So, its curving would also began a month earlier.



4.3.2. Children, Young and Adult Men

The mourning of children and young person who have not reached a marriage age, would take only three days. After three days, there will not be any mourning. Especially, if the dead child is an infant and did not come out of the house, or for whom the *sogeda* ritual did not take place, there would not be any crying or mourning, and the infant would be buried at his parent's homestead. But, if the *sogeda*, the coming out of the maternity ceremony has taken place, he/she would be treated as a young child and would be mourned for three days, and a mourning cry is also allowed. Sometimes when a kid, who does not come out of the house is sick and be on the verge of death, and if the old women are active and wise, they would quickly arrange the *sogeda*, the coming out of maternity ceremony to the mother to take place. After the accomplishment of the ceremony, if the child dies, he/she is entitled to be buried in the family farm, like

that of an adult, out side of his parent's homestead. A three-day mourning also would be held, and the family is allowed to mourn.

But, if the dead person is a young man with in the range of marrying age, or a one who was married but not yet have children, the mourning would be very serious and deeply felt. When people die in Konso, they would be buried in their own farms. There is not any separate burial area that is designated for this purpose. But if one does not have a farm especially the craftsmen the *haudas*, as they do not usually own land, they would be buried in the *dina*, a wooden area, the common place in Konso that is used for garbage accumulation and excretion.

The mourning period for adult men is nine days. If the dead person were a hero, a *waka*, a wooden statue would be erected on his grave. Mostly these *wakas* are erected either at the entrance of the village or at the public gathering place, at the *mora*, where people could see them. The *wakas* erected in the memory of the heroes sometimes also include the statue of the wife or wives' of the dead hero. If the dead person only has one wife, her statue would be erected next to him, at his right side. If he has more than one wife, the rest would be erected next to his first wife. It is the custom in Konso that, even if the wives of the man are alive, it is a must that there statues *wakas* should stand next to their husband's. If the dead person killed an enemy, the statue of the enemy would also be erected at the left side of the man. The only mark that distinguished the enemy from the man is his genitals /the mark of his manhood/ would be mutilated. So, he would

not have a genital and he does not also have a look of grace, he would have a sort of crumble like personality.

Moreover, if the man also killed a lion or a leopard, their statue were also made and displayed on the grave, in front of the man. The difference between the lion's statue and the leopard is that the lion is plain, where as the leopard's body is spotted. Besides these statues the man's land holding also represented with the medium of pebbles or stones. That is, each of his land holdings would be represented through one stone, so, the number of stones in one's grave clearly show the number of his land holdings. To indicate his braveness or being a hero a spear and a shield showed in his grave together with the rest of the items.

During the *waka* erecting process, a feast should be prepared depending upon the wealth or the income of the family. According to my informants, to perform this ritual or the festivity, the preparation might take months and in some cases years, till the family of the deceased are ready. When they are ready they would send messengers to their close relatives, so that their relatives upon receiving the message would prepare and bring *chakka*, the traditional drink, honey and butter, as custom requires.

The preparing of the *waka* would also start a month earlier before the feasting ceremony. It is during the *waka* erecting stage that the feast would take place. Without the feast the *waka* would not be erected. But, if the feast has taken place

and a goat ritually slain and consumed, it is believed that the house is purified, and the soul of the dead rested. But, till the goat is slain whatever time it took, the dead person is considered alive. It is only after the sacrifice of the goat that the person is considered dead.

If the dead person has married sons, they are expected to contribute to the mourning feast. Especially, the first son from the first wife is supposed to contribute a bull or an ox, and the same goes for the first son/sons of the second wife / wives. But, the younger sons and married daughters are only required to contribute goats. If they could not afford to bring goat they can give 1.50 *birr*. This is considered to be equal to the value of the goat. But, currently due to the increase in price, the amount is raised to three *birr*.

In the event of the death of a father, the mourning ceremony would take place at the first wife's residence. So, the other wives' and their children would bring whatever they have to the first wife's house and mourned there. There will not be a separate mourning for each household.

4.3.3. Female/Women

The mourning of a woman would take six days. Especially, if the one who has passed is a mother, she would be buried with the skin cloth, which she wore during, her maternity or *sogeda* ceremony, and she would be wrapped with the skin-sleeping mat, on which she used to sleep. Raw butter is put on her head.

If the dead woman is a *poqaltetta*, she would be buried in the sacred forest of the *poqalla*, and a *waka*, a wooden statue would also be erected on her grave. When I was in Konso, I had the chance to visit the burial places of the *poqallas*, at the *kalla* forest, which is a sacred forest kept by the *kalla* family for generations. In this forest there are burial places of the different *poqalla* and *poqaltetta* of the *kalla* family. In their graves there are different wooden statues, *wakas*. The *waka* of a *poqaltetta* would show their bust, bare waist above, with their breasts clearly showing. On their neck showed mark of beads, and their hairstyle also showed it's division into six, the type-married women in Konso wore, the *lehha*. Besides a spear like wooden pole is also erected on their grave to show that they are wives' of heroes.

Upon their death the *waka* is erected only for the wives of the *poqalla*, the *poqaltetta*. But, for the ordinary Konso women, *waka* is erected only in-association to their husbands. That is if the husband is a warrior or a hero.

4.3.4. Old men and women

The death of grandfather or grandmother is taken very easily in Konso. Their deaths do not that much mourned with bitterness. It is believed that they have seen enough and achieved every thing in life, what they would really miss is thought to be only their meal. Especially, if the dead man or woman has so many grand children, especially grand sons, an occasion called *shleitta*, in which relatives and clan members from different villages participate, would take place

at a public place like market. *Shleitta* is a song like performance, in which members of the clan and close relatives sing and dance almost for a day. *Shleitta* is performed only for those who have grand sons. If the grand parents only have grand daughters the *shleitta* would not take place.

While I was in Konso, I got the chance to attend a *shleitta* of an old lady GB from the *hauda*, who has passed at the age of 103, in the Bourqudayya village. She had many sons and grand sons. Fortunately one of her grand sons' was my informant. For this occasion a messenger from the *hauda* association, a horn honker was sent to the different near by villages, three days earlier to inform the members to come to the ceremony. On this occasion except for those who are sick, in maternity or far from the village, the rest should be present or expected to attend the ceremony. If some one failed to attend the ceremony with out good reason, he/she would be penalized, scorned and even sometimes their property would be looted for disobeying the norm.

Hence, on the occasion horn would be honked, and the sign is made for the villagers to get ready for the journey to the occasion. After the person in charge honked three times, the villagers would in-group start the journey to the place of the event. As this specific event was taken place in the Bourqudayya village, the first *shleitta* performance was started by the craftsmen *haudas* of Bourqudayya. Their performance, the dance and the singing were very interesting and enjoyable. After this come the *haudas* of the Gamolle village. But, before the



Plate 4.5. Konso men singing heroic songs at the mourning /shleitta/ Ceremony at Dokatu



Plate 4.6. Konso women and men at the *shleitta* ceremony at Dokatu

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Gamolle joined the dancing group, the mourners first directly went to the dead old lady's house and paid their respect by crying, and then came back and replace the first performers, the Bourqudayya's. The Bourquddaya *haudas* being the host village would leave the performance floor to the mourners of Gamolle.

After the performance of the Gamolle mourners, there come mourners of the *haudas* of Gotcha village. The Gocha like the Gamolle first went in to the mourning house to cry. In the mean time, the mourners of the Bouqudayya came to relieve the Gamolle performers and took over the scene of the performance and started the singing and the dancing. The relieved Gamolle mourners scattered to the village drink house, to drink *chakka*, the traditional Konso drink, before they set out to their respective villages. For this occasion the family of the deceased expected to allocate money for drink around 3.50 *birr*. It is the minimum amount, but if the family could afford they can give more. Besides, the family of the mourners and the relatives also expected to contribute to the performers. Hence, the money would be placed in the middle of the dancing and chanting grounds. Then, the performers would collect from each individual donor some amount of money. An elderly man a representative from the group would collect the money and gave it to the young members to divide it among the group, according to gender and age. The Young men then would buy *chakka* for the elders, women and young men categorically in different *chakka* houses. The remaining money would be distributed to the group's lead singer of the *shleitta*, amounted to 2-4 *birr*, and the horn honker, *sarra*, would also get 1-2 *birr*.

Next came the Gotcha *hauda* mourners and replaced the Bourqudayya group and started their performance. The performance was so interesting and colorful sometimes, I even tend to forget it was mourning and started clapping and chanting with them. On that day due to the attractiveness of the performance, I have spent more than four hours watching, so my konso friends were compelled to pull me out of the crowd, by telling me that I have had enough. After performing for sometime the Gotcha were again replaced by the host village mourning group, the Bourqudayya. The Gotcha group also as that of the former, the Gamolle, took their share of the money and went to different drinking place. So, the *shleitta* has ended by the performance of the host village the Bourqudayya mourners.

On that day, I also went to the house of the deceased to comfort and express my condolence to my informant AH, one of the grand son's of the deceased. There I met my informant, all the grand sons' of the old lady including my informant wore black hat, shaved their head and also wore a cotton made blanket or wrapper, *bulluko*, black cloth sewed on its edge. This attire showed that they are in mourning. After I talked with my informant AH, as the custom required I contributed ten *birr* for the mourners.

4.4. Inheritance

In Konso inheritance is made on the basis of sex and seniority. That is the ones who entitled to inherit their families property are mostly male children. Even

among them, the biggest share goes to the eldest son's, who is the successor of his father, and residing with his family. Mostly, the younger sons upon marriage got their share, so they would not get much upon the death of their father.

When property is shared among the family, the biggest share, that is about 2/3 of the property, will be given to the first wife, which directly involved the first son. The remaining property would be divided among the rest of the wives and the children. However, the father if he has a number of farms, would divide it among his sons on the basis of the terraces.

When talking of inheritance, female child do not inherit the property of the family especially the land, neither from her parents' nor her husband. Surprisingly, if the man has only daughters, upon his death the daughters' or their mother are not entitled to inherit the land, as they are considered outsiders. So, a certain male relative, it could be his nephew or the sons of some close relative or some male member among his close kin should be found, and inherit the land. Sometimes, if there is no male children found among the nearest relative, it should be traced till the great grand father's line. The one's who usually inherited the land sometimes assist the family during farming season, but after the death of the wife, the inheritor would take over and own the land to him self.

Daughters might only inherit *shelgaida/haleko* tree and coffee plant, and can utilize what they got from the plants. These plants they could use, so long as they

are alive, but if the women die their daughters could not inherit it, or they could not pass it to any one with their will. If the family has number of farmlands, in rare occasions, they could give it to their favorite daughters to make use of it, while they are alive. But upon their death, they will not have any right to transfer it to whom they like. The male members of the family would decide its utilization.

If the father has many beehives, he would share it among his sons. Daughters are never entitled to have or to inherit beehives, as it is the custom that only male has to do with beehives. The man also can distribute his cattle among his sons, leaving the biggest share to the first son. As the father has distributed his property mostly land and cattle, when his younger sons got married, the remaining wealth would be given to the elder son from the first wife. But, if the father has a favorite younger son that he loved more, he can leave him additional property upon his death in his will.

As it is understood from the results of the study, inheritance of property is gender differentiated. That is, important resources like land and cattle are the prerogative of male child. Where as the female child is only entitled to get very few things, with small value like that of the *shelgaida* plant. Those skin clothes and beads she received from her parents, considered also as her share of the family property.

CHAPTER 5 – SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Different researchers in a considerable period of time tried to come up with ideas and justification for the lower status of women. Some of the variables for this cause believed to be biological, social and cultural biases towards women in a certain society. And a lesser participation of women in a traditional warfare, lesser economic benefit and their contribution to subsistence and non-subsistence production, especially in the first phases of agricultural production are presented as justifications (Boserup, 1970, Sanday, 1973,).

However wide the explanation concerning the subordinate status of women, sometimes it is difficult to make generalization as the variables vary cross culturally. It was believed in earlier times that the difference between men and women to be biological, and the division of labor also to be decided on the basis of their biological difference. However, this argument greatly criticized by many anthropologists as being rhetorical, that the main cause for the male and female difference is not only biology, but rather to be social and cultural. That is one learns to acquire its gender roles of being a man or a woman through a task assigned to him or her through society's socialization process. These social roles were not inherited or conferred to some one by birth, but acquired gradually through the society's task allocation.

When we take the case of Konso women, the main focus of this study, and from the information obtained from the empirical data which this research come up with, even if it is thought their tasks are considered to be gender divided, that is, to be a women's or men's specific task. If we take farming and any work that demands high energy and labor, is considered to be men's duty. However, in reality the majority of the farm work in Konso, is being done by women. Likewise, carrying heavy load of grain and the like from the fields to the granary supposed to be men's duty. But, this task is mostly done by women, which is a fact that does not denied by the Konso men themselves. However, performing these tasks do not confer high or better status, or brought high regard to Konso women in the society. These high performance of work by the Konso women taken by the society for granted. It does not bestow on them any special privilege.

Theory of warfare is also considered as being one variable that contributed to a lower status of women, and made the women to hold the subordinate position in the society. As this study is also interested with the issue of warfare in relation to Konso women, as the Konso in former times used to be warriors and have high regard to war heroes. The result that this study come up with in regard to warfare is, currently in Konso except for occasional land disputes, almost there is no war among the Konso clans or neighbors. However, the stereo-type of the Konso of being great warriors in former times highly embedded in the minds of the Konso people, including the Konso women. So, up to now the konso regarded themselves as being active warriors. This belief of warrior-ship greatly repeats and

made visible it self through the Konso age-grading system, especially the *hella* group, which are still believed to be a warrior and town defending group.

The continuing tradition for this group to erect a stone of manhood, *dinga diruma*, during the generation transition and also the living tradition of erecting *waka*, the wooden statue erected on the grave of heroes, is considered to be some of the symbols for the Konso men's superiority. Besides, the sleeping of these warrior groups, the *hella*, in the public gathering place in the *mora/pafta*, and been in alert to defend the town from unexpected danger and sudden attack is also one explanation for the Konso high regard for the warrior class.

The main reason for the *hella* members of the warrior class to sleep in the *mora/pafta* is said to be in order to mobilize easily in time of danger or attack. The other explanation for their sleeping outdoors is, if these groups of men continuously slept with their wives, there is a belief that they might get weaker (Hallpike, 1974). Hence, women are considered as a cause for men's weakness.

So, this myth perpetuates it self and seems real, in reality I do not think it has any scientific ground. This is because as most Konso men marry more than one wife and spending their time with their different wives', the justification that they will be getting weaker by sleeping with their wives', for me does not make that much sense. So, I believe it is simply used as a pretext to make believe the Konso

women to stick to their subordinate position, and always to look for their husband's attention.

It is through continuous and repetitive men's action that is: a) by distancing women from the important and "sacred" men gathering place, the *mora*, b) by not allowing the Konso women to participate in the age grading system and public/community decision-making activities that I think, the Konso men succeeded in convincing them to be agreeable to their subordinated status.

Moreover, as women are marrying outside of their clan, they are not considered to be a full member of the society,

However, as discussed above, apart from the myth of warfare and certain rituals, as that of the transition of age grading ceremony and the display of warrior-ship by killing game animals by the succeeding responsible *hela* group, presently there is no continued and frequent warfare in Konso. But, the male members of the society succeeded in convincing or making believe the women in Konso to be content with the prestigious and high status of men. So, the myth of warfare and high regard to war heroes, I believe contributed as one variable for the subordinate status of Konso women.

When we look in to the current status of Konso women, even if the women in Konso participated in many household and outdoor activities like farming, market and the like, their not participating in the community work like that of wall

building, terrace mending, well cleaning and important community decision making activities, which are considered to be only men's domain, also contributed for their law status. Because, these duties are considered passed from one male generation to the next male generation through time.

Hence, as the Konso are patrilineal society this keeping of the generation task and passing it to the next is considered as being the prime and sole duty of the male. But, in reality while the men were performing these tasks, the women are at the background preparing food and drink for the participants and looking after their needs. During the men's community activities, it is the task of the women to perform the household and the outdoor activities, covering also the men's share. However, these enormous contribution and responsibilities of Konso women did not get due consideration and acknowledgement by the male members of the society and the Konso people in general. Surprisingly, the women in Konso themselves take the tasks assigned for them by the society, as their prime and sole duties and accepted it for granted, without any remorse and further question, and they seldom complained.

When we come to the ownership of property, as it is tried to discussed in the preceding chapters, women in Konso are not entitled to own important properties like land, livestock, and even products like honey, chat, oil seeds, coffee, relatively high valued marketable items. These items are considered to be only the prerogative of men. The women are only allowed to have small marketable

items like cotton, salt, *chakka* and *areke* and from domestic animal they are only allowed to own chicken.

This division of ownership of resources greatly showed us the segregation of women not to have access to basic resources. Even what is worse is, the women how much hard labor they invested on their land, if their husband passed away and do not have sons, who would ultimately inherit the family's property, the women and their female children are not entitled to inherit the land. But, some male member from the husband's clan would be traced and made to inherit the land.

In general when we see women in Konso and their status in the society, despite their hard work and participation in almost all the activities in production and reproduction except few areas, their effort and hard work do not that much taken in to consideration and appreciated by the Konso society. Their hard work and disadvantaged position with relation to lesser income and lack of access to basic resources seemed the price they have to pay or paying for being a women.

Even children from an early age shaped in a way to be aware of their gender difference and role allocation and brought up likewise. That is a boy child socialized to be a future responsible member of the society and a one who is expected to carry on the patrilineal line and welfare of the society. Whereas the girl child beginning from early childhood trained to be a good performer of house-

hold and outdoor activities like farming and trained to be a good wife and child raiser.

Hence, Konso women in every stage are marginalized and forced to take a subordinated status to that of the men. This tendency I believe is, the cumulative effect of the women's disadvantaged position economically, culturally and socially. The Konso women's subordinated and secondary status also firmly rooted in the society and by the women's themselves who passively accepted their subordinated position for granted and thinking that it is a fact which could not be changed.

As the prime objective of this study is to record the ethnography of women in Konso and to document their activities and try to show their role and contribution to the society, and what status they hold, which I think this study fairly succeeded in doing to some degree.

The konso women are socially categorized as farmer women, craft women and the wives of the Konso spiritual leader the *poqalla*. These different categories of women in konso contributed a lot to their family and the Konso society in general.

As it is time and again tried to discuss it throughout this paper, there is no work as such that women in Konso do not participate in except few. The Konso women greatly involved in every step of farm work starting from digging, weeding, harvesting and storing. Likewise in the craft activity also they are

dominantly engaged in pottery, tanning, weaving and also involving in market activity. It is only in community work like terrace building, wall maintaining, well clearing, construction of houses and *mora/pafta* building and in the community decision making and other cultural activities that women are not actively involved in. However, they are always present underground catering for the men's needs.

However hard working the women are and their enormous contribution to the subsistence of the family and the society, they are given a secondary and a subordinated status lower to men. They specially are not allowed to participate in the community's decision-making activities. They are not also entitled to inherit important resources like land and livestock. To involve in community affairs they are considered as outsiders as they are marrying outside of their clans, and not to be trusted for fear of passing of the community's secret information to the clan of their respective husbands.

They are entitled only to have small monetary income from the sell of local house made beverages and some few marketable items. Specially they are not allowed to sell livestock, grain and honey, but confined to the sell of kind of items like cotton, *shelgaida*, chicken and other small items.

When we also look into the konso women's reproduction role they are responsible for child raising and continuing of the lineage seed tree. But as polygamy is practiced in Konso, the men can marry as many wives' as their resources allowed, stretching and dispersing the resource of the household.

What the husband care is getting as many children as possible, and to have an additional labor force. The having of multiple wives' is also beneficial, as the women would greatly assisted in carrying the farm and craftwork activities.

Concerning education and health service the women are disadvantaged. It is true that there is problem for both sexes but, when we make comparison between the two sexes the more disadvantaged are the women. They are also expected to get married and expected to give birth to numbers of children.

Even if there are negative traits and factors for the women's disadvantaged position, I also could observe some positive things among the Konso. That is specially when it comes to the household decision making activity contrary to that of the community decision making, the wife has the right to voice her concern in regard to the sell of grain, livestock or hiring *parga*, the work group, the two spouses discussed it and decided mutually. Besides in Konso, a single and female headed house-hold also can lead their life according to their income and means without encountering opposition or contempt from the society.

There observed certain areas that have great potential for the Konso women's status change like: 1) in the house-hold decision making activities; 2) in their area of occupation, that is they can easily switch from one area of occupation to another, depending upon its potential for better income. For example they can switch from weaving or pot making to small scale marketing activities and the like, to make a better income for their families'; 3) through marriage, that is by

getting married to a person who has a considerable wealth or income, the women can also change their status.

Another important positive condition is, even if the Konso women work hard till they gave birth, after giving birth they would be well taken care of. It is not only for their care sake, but as it is also for prestige purpose. The Konso men/family wanted their women to appear well taken care of, when they come out of maternity. Moreover, the women in Konso are not secluded from their homestead during maternity, that is, they are not expected to stay in seclusion during maternity period. They would be staying in the same compound as the rest of the family in the special hut called, *manna*.

Finally I would like to mention the following few remarks. The Konso people are very strong, hard working and keen towards maintaining their important strong culture of managing scarce natural resources like stone terrace building, use of water wells or ponds, the maintenance of town walls that are passing from generation to generation. So, it needs the improvement and establishment of basic infrastructures like all weather roads, hospitals, health centers schools, water and light, modern mills, means of transport and the like, for the betterment of their life. Especially lack of these infrastructures imposed heavy load and extra burden on the Konso women, who in average working 16 hours a day, but could not be beneficiaries of the fruit of their hard labor.

There are certain areas, which I believe have potentials for the Konso women's status change like: 1) Education – It could be taken as one potential area for the status change of Konso women. That is if the Konso women acquired knowledge through education, they might have a chance to get work in the government and non-government offices, and to lead a better life.

2) Health institution- it is another potential area for the Konso women's status change. That is during my field-work I have learned that most Konso women used traditional medicine and traditional birth attendant during child birth. But, if the health center facilities are well equipped and gives service for the broader mass, there is a very big possibility that the Konso women make a better use of it. By doing so they can keep their health and their off-springs and families health in a better way.

3) Religion - I believe is also another area that has potential for the Konso women's status change. That is it could serve as the means and ground to meet people in the religious institution, which they attend, exchanging ideas and get some work opportunities. It could serve also as a ground for the Konso women to exchange views with other women, and increasing their awareness.

4) State apparatus – with the government's focus and policy on developing and improving the living standard of women the establishment of certain associations' like women's association, cooperative groups and the like are vital for the women. Through this associations and cooperatives, women could benefit certain privileges and could earn a relatively better work and better income. Besides, these associations could enable them to share their ideas with other fellow members, and by doing so they would develop awareness and strive for a better living condition.

Hence, the above discussed issues are some of the positive and negative traits and reflections of the status of Konso women that this study come up with. It also tries to indicate the potential areas for the Konso women's status change. So, it requires the combined effort, intervention and support of the government policy-makers, non-governmental organizations and developers to improve the living standard and the subordinated position of Konso women in particular, and the Konso people in general.

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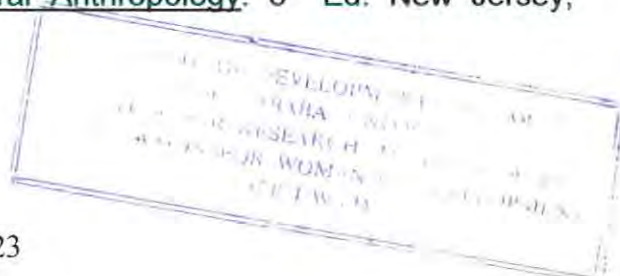
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