

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**Inter-Ethnic Conflicts in Ethiopia: The Case of Karrayu
Oromo and Argobba Groups**

By: MeleseTeshome

**December, 2012
Addis Ababa**

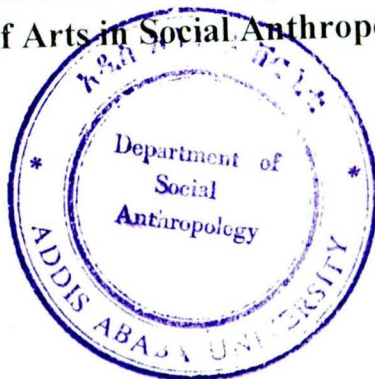
ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTEMENT OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

**Inter-Ethnic Conflicts in Ethiopia: The Case of Karrayu
Oromo and Argobba Groups**

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**A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Addis Ababa
University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master
of Arts in Social Anthropology**



December, 2012

Addis Ababa

Addis Ababa University

School of Graduate Study

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Melese Teshome, entitled: *Inter-Ethnic Conflicts in Ethiopia: the case of Karrayu Oromo and Argobba* and submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts(in social anthropology) complies with the regulation of the University and meets the accepted standard with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the Examining Committee ☐

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Abstract

This thesis delved itself to explain the causes, actors and dynamics of the Karrayu-Argobba conflict. It also targeted at analyzing the micro and macro level approaches used to redress the conflict. This study is based on primary and secondary data sources. The primary data is collected via interviews, FGD, case histories and systematic observation. The study was conducted in three districts, Minjar-Shenkora, Berhet and Fentale.

The study has found out that the Karrayu and Argobba people have both amicable and conflictual relations. Their conflict is conceived in the wombs of multifarious factors. As such, inappropriate development policy and competition over scarce resources are the cardinal economic factors in the conflict. In the political realm, lack of good governance and the politicization of ethnicity, mainly a post 1991 reality, have fueled the conflict. This development has transformed their conflict from temporal use of resources to a permanent control of territory.

In addition, the warrior ethos of the study people and their contemporary convergence in their social concept of solid boundary has played a role in their conflict. The final structural cause of the conflict is issue of security, i.e. the proliferation of SALWs and question of territorial ownership.

Apart from the structural causes there are also triggering causes in the conflict. The triggering factors which this study identified are homicides, cattle raiding and rustling, drought and famine, and the role of spoilers.

In order to redress the stated conflict both customary and state centered approach has been used. The once effective customary conflict resolution has proved inadequate to redress the root causes of the conflict. Its weakening is attributed to its marginalization by the state and issue of territorial ownership proved beyond its reach. Similarly the attempts made by the state did not bear its fruits. In this regard, the JPC, which is meant to keep peace in the area, has proved ineffective in dealing with issue of boundary.

Finally based on its finding this study recommended that there is an imperative need to promote customary conflict resolution. The community should return raided animals and handover culprits to the Woreda administration. The Woreda should arrange regular awareness creation forums and teach about the adverse effect of conflict. Moreover, the regional and federal government should control the proliferation of SALWs. And finally the federal government should delineate the boundary of conflict territory.

Acknowledgement

Though the cover of this study paper refers my name, I did not do it by a single hand. It is squarely difficult, if not totally impossible, to successfully accomplish it without getting supports from others. Thus, many individuals have put their fingerprint in realizing the final fruit of this study paper. Here, I cannot, however, mention them all in name, not because of bigotry but simply they are many.

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Table of Contents

Contents	Page
Abstract-----	i
Acknowledgement	ii
Table of contents-----	iii
Acronyms	vii
Glossary.....	viii
CHAPTER ONE	1
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. General background of the study	1
1.2. Statement of the problem.....	3
1.3. Objectives of the study.....	5
1.3.1. General objectives.....	5
1.3.2. Specific objectives	5
1.4. Research questions-----	5
1.5. Scope of the study	6
1.6. Significance of the study.....	6
1.7. Research methodology.....	7
1.7.1. Research design	7
1.7.2. Data sources	8
1.7.3. Methods of data collection.....	8
1.7.3.1. In -depth interviews	8
1.7.3.2. Focus group discussions (FGDs)	9
1.7.3.3. Case history.....	9
1.7.3.4. Systematic observation	10
1.7.4. Method of data analysis	10
1.8. Limitations and field experience.....	11
1.9. Organization of the paper.....	13

CHAPTER TWO	14
2. Theoretical perspectives and literature review-----	14
2.1. Defining Ethnic groups and theoretical discourse on ethnicity	14
2.1.1. Defining ethnic groups (communities)	14
2.1.2. Theoretical discourses on ethnicity.....	16
2.1.2.1. The Instrumentalist approach.....	16
2.1.2.2. The primordialist approach	18
2.2. Approaching inter- ethnic conflicts	18
2.2.1. Summing up.....	21
2.3. Ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia: A critical overview.....	22
2.3.1. Ethnic conflicts in the pre- federal Ethiopia	23
2.3.2. Ethnic federalism and emerging trends of Ethnic conflicts	25
2.3.2.1. The federal venture	25
2.3.2.2. Emerging trends of inter- Ethnic conflicts.....	27
2.3.2.3. Ethnic conflicts in the Awash Valley: An assessment.....	29
Chapter Three.....	33
3. Setting the General Context of the Study	33
Introduction.....	33
3.1. Karrayu: Geography and the People	33
3.1.1. Geography.....	33
3.1.2. Karrayu: Myth of origin and settlement pattern	35
3.2. Socio- political organization.....	37
3.3. Economic activities.....	41
3.4. An overview of the <i>Argobba</i> society	43
3.4.1. History of origins	43
3.4.2. Early settlements and Mobility	45
3.5. The Argobba: Language and religion	50
3.6. Social Structure.....	53
3.7. Economy of the Argobba.....	54
3.8. Multiple lenses to capture the conflict.....	55

CHAPTER FOUR.....	59
4. The Predisposing and Proximate Factors in the Karrayu-Argobba Conflict	59
Introduction.....	59
4.1. The Karrayu and Argobba: History of Relationships	59
4.2. The Karrayu - Argobba conflict: Causal analysis.....	62
4.2.1. Structural causes of the conflict.....	62
4.2.1.1. Economic factors	62
4.2.1.1.1. Partial centre development policy.....	63
4.2.1.1.2. Competition over scarce resources	65
4.2.1.2. Socio-cultural factors.....	68
4.2.1.2.1. Revered ideology of war.....	68
4.2.1.2.2. Convergence on conception of solid boundary.....	72
4.2.1.3. Political variables in the conflict.....	74
4.2.1.3.1. Exclusionary political environment	74
4.2.1.3.2. Governance problematiques.....	76
4.2.1.3.3. Exploitation of ethnic differences.....	77
4.2.1.4. Security- centered factors	80
4.2.1.4.1. Proliferations of small arms and light weapons.....	80
4.2.1.4.2. Issue of boundary and land ownership.....	83
4.3. Proximate causes of the conflict	86
4.3.1. Cattle raiding and rustling.....	86
4.3.2. Drought and famine	88
4.3.3. Inter- group homicides.....	91
4.3.4. Spoilers	91
CHAPTER FIVE	96
5. Actors and Dynamics of the Conflict.....	95
5.1. Actors-oriented analysis.....	95
5.1.1. Actors beyond the two Ethnic groups.....	95
5.1.1.1. Foreign concessionary company.....	95
5.1.1.2. The Ethiopian government.....	96
5.1.1.3. Political parties.....	96

5.1.1.4. Ethnic entrepreneurs	97
5.1.1.5. Federal army forces.....	98
5.1.1.6. Illicit arms traffickers.....	99
5.1.2. Karrayu and Argobba Groups.....	99
5.1.2.1. The youths: As core actors.....	100
5.2.2.2. The roles of women	102
5.2. Dynamics of the conflict.....	105
5.2.1. Long term trends: Changes and continuities.....	106
5.2.2. Intensity of the conflict: Escalation and de-escalation	109
CHAPTER SIX.....	112
6. Micro and Macro level Responses to the Karrayu-Argobba conflict	112
6.1. Micro level responses	112
6.2. Macro level Responses to the conflict	118
6.2.1. The Responses of the state: pre-federal reality	118
6.2.2. The State-centered approach in post-1991 period	119
6.2.2.1. The Joint Peace Committee: Role assessment	122
CHAPTER SEVEN	125
7. Conclusions and Recommendations	125
7.1. Conclusions.....	125
7.2. Recommendations.....	130
References	133
Appendix	

Acronyms

ANP-	Awash National Park
APDP-	Argobba People Democratic Party
AVA -	Awash Valley Authority
CSA-	Central Statistical Authority
DFID-	Department for International Development
EPLF-	Eritrean People Liberation Front
EPRDF -	Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front
FDRE-	The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FGD -	Focus Group Discussion
FWARDO -	FentaleWoreda Agriculture and Rural Development Office
HVA-	Handels Veneering Amsterdam
JPC-	Joint Peace Committee
MowR-	Ministry of Water Resources
NGOs -	None Governmental Organizations
OIDA-	Oromia Irrigation Development Association
OLF-	Oromo Liberation Front
ONC -	Oromo National Congress
ONLF-	Ogaden National Liberation Front
OPDO -	Oromo People Democratic Organization
OSSREA-	Organization of Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa
SALWs –	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SCA -	Strategic Conflict Assessment
SNNPRS-	Southern Nation, Nationality, and Peoples Regional State
TPLF-	Tigrayan People Liberation Front
WOGAGODA –	Wolayta, Gammo, Gofa, and Dawro language project.

Glossary of Terms

- Abba* - father, leader, head.
- Abba Gada* -head of the ruling Gada Assembly among the Oromo people.
- Abba Qallu* -head of Qallu institution (spiritual leader).
- Arbora* -a bracelet (made of ivory); a Karrayu man wears it as a sign of being good fighter.
- Bircha* -a bracelet (made of metal);likeArbora a Karrayu man wears it as a sign of being good fighter.
- Ato* -title given to a man, and is the same as mister.
- Dejjazmach* -‘Commander of the gate’ a politico-military title below *Ras*.
- Gada* - an age-grade socio-political system of the Oromo.
- Gasha* - a unit of measurement equivalent to forty hectares.
- Godaanna(n)* -is the Oromo term that refers a practice of seasonal transhumance in pastoral society from their environs in to another place with their animals.
- Godaantu(adj)* -it refers to the people who undertake the transhumance.
- Guma* -is a blood compensation that is paid in case of homicide based on the conventional penalty act of the community. It is a popular tradition of the Oromo.
- Ibbida boona* – it means,in the language of the Oromo, fire of the dry period.
- Jaala*- among the Karrayu Oromo refers to a bond relationship they establish within similar and/or different ethnic groups.
- Kebele*- the lowest administrative unit in Ethiopia.
- Manjolla*- Karrayu’a appellation of a hero who raided livestock from their enemy.

Ona- temporarily abandoned settlement places of the Karrayu.

Onna booba - dry period settlement area of the Karrayu.

Qadi- religious title among the Muslim Argobba.

Rarraga - the name the Karrayu gives to their man who killed his enemy.

Ras -‘head’ the highest traditional title next to *negus*(King).

Rist -a lineage based system of land ownership, giving usufruct rights to the claimant based on genealogical descent, it is common in Northern part of Ethiopia.

Woreda- the administrative unit in Ethiopia, which is below Zone but it is above *Kebele*.

CHAPTER ONE

1. Introduction

1.1. General background of the study

It is a necked reality that conflicts are intrinsic, inevitable, and unavoidable aspects of social change and human interactions (Fombad, 2004). Based on their nature it is argued that conflicts can play both positive and negative roles. However, most of the time, they play an adverse roles in causing widespread destructions (Fombad, 2004; Sikod, 2008).

Viewing it from same vein but more from the points of its utilitarian and existential conceptions, conflicts are considered as an important part of human existence and a natural part of our daily lives (Amadou, 1999; Conteth et al, 1999).

Conflicts are multifarious and diversified in their many aspects. However, in terms of their prevalence, Ryan (1995) contends that “. . . if anyone forms of violence has been more predominant than any other it seems to be ethnic conflict”. This is because in the contemporary world ethnic conflict has become a global social phenomena and one of the internationally recognized social conflicts.

That is why now a days, scholars and politicians are legitimizing ethnicity and ethnic conflict as a valid factor of national politics vis-à-vis to the once dominant views that it is an outdated remnant of the past (Salih and Markakis, 1998).

Formerly, social scientists held wrong assumption about ethnicity and ethnic conflict altogether. They considered it as a social phenomenon whose existence is confined to the less developed countries. However, such views have squarely become obsolete, and hence have no more acceptances within the academia. This is because, as it proved to be, ethnicity has become a potent force and inter-ethnic conflicts knew no geographic and /or economic boundary (Hussein, 2005). To put it differently, conflict of the stated sort has become a global phenomenon and politically sensitive issue both in the developed and developing countries.

Of these turbulent ethnic conflicts, Africa perhaps takes the lion's share. As such, currently most multi-ethnic African countries suffer inter- ethnic conflicts of different kinds. Scholars argued that these conflicts have become serious threats to the state building and process of democratic transformations in post-cold war Africa (Johnston, 1993 in Christie, 1998). What is more threatening to Africa is the fact that it remains the continent with the highest number of destructive conflicts in the world. Whilst in other parts of the world, the number of conflicts, especially intra state, has reduced while in Africa, these conflicts have continued to increase dramatically (Fombad, 2004; Mazuri, 2008).

Moreover, such pervasive ethnic conflicts are also common in the Horn of Africa, where Ethiopia is a part. Befekadu and Diribsa (2005), on their part, stated that most of the wars in this politically volatile region of Africa during the last decade have been described in terms of ethnic conflicts; the civil wars in the Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Djibouti are good points in case.

However, explaining the causes of ethnic conflict yet remains debatable among scholars. Although several causes of ethnic conflict could be identified, the persisting arguments swing between the two extremes of thought on ethnicity. On the first "polar extreme" are those contending ethnicity *per se* as the cause of inter- ethnic conflict, which is part of the primordial thought (Banks, 1996; Merera, 2003). On the other extreme are the common instrumentalist notion of elite manipulation of group differences and state involvement in instigating rivalries between groups for political advantage (Udogu, 2001). In between these positions are also some who attribute ethnic conflict to competition over scarce resources and the nature of states structures, "situational perspective" which Markakis (1994) used to explain ethnic conflict in the Horn of Africa.

So far, issues of ethnicity and ethnic conflict have captured some of the best brains in the field of social sciences but yet it remains a highly contentious subject. It is a concept in a flux and hence, needs to be enriched via rigorous research work, as it is a hot cake of academic study. Corroborating this view, Ryan (1995) asserted that ".... nowhere is the

need for contemporary insight *more urgent* than in the study of ethnic conflict” (emphasis added in the original.).But while doing that, Doornbos (1998) states that ethnicity and inter-ethnic conflicts throughout Africa should be studied contextually. He maintains the idea that such conflicts should be understood in its own situation and cultural reality. It is this tenable academic ramification that motivated me to undertake empirical study on inter-ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia focusing on *Karrayu - Argobba* conflict in the Awash Valley area.

1.2. Statement of the problem

Ethiopia is a multicultural and multi ethnic state made up of over “eighty” ethnic and numerous sub- ethnic groups. The history of Ethiopia is riddled by both intra- and inter - state conflicts. So understanding this taxing reality, Merera (2000:117) has characterized the history of the country as the history of conflicts. In terms of its forms, conflicts in Ethiopia have class, ethnic, religious and regional dimensions (Asnake, 2004). At this juncture, it should be asserted that state-society relations on one hand and intra- and inter-ethnic relations on the other count are replete with a history of multi-dimensional conflicts.

Ethnic conflict in Ethiopia has long history spanning over centuries. Hence, its proper understanding badly demands multidisciplinary approaches. The issue of ethnicity and inter-ethnic conflict has become more potent in post-federal Ethiopia. Just taking the sensitivities of the issue in to consideration, it could be said that the empirical studies conducted on it is lagging behind the matter. So there is an imperative need to enrich our understanding through rigorous empirical researches.

Apart from the specific case studies done on inter-ethnic conflict, there are also some comprehensive studies that uncovered the newly emerging trends of the aforementioned types of conflict. Such studies tried to box different cases of conflict under the rubric of specific cause. However, the wider cause- centered classifications is hit hard by some tangible short comings. Their focus on mono-factor led them to under explaining specific cases of conflict and subscribed to over generalization. Moreover, such categorization

also left the subjective factors and conflict dynamics untouched. In addition, as every conflict has its own cultural particularities, there is a need to study it in its own context. Viewed from such vantage point, much is still remained as far as the study of ethnic conflict is concerned. Thus, to fill such knowledge rift, we need to make comprehensive exploratory case study on any ethnic conflicts in the country. Here, the Karrayu- Argobba conflict is not exceptional in any sense of the term.

One of the areas in Ethiopia that has been vulnerable to ethnic conflict is the Awash Valley area. This area is inhabited by pastoralists, agro-pastoralists and agriculturalists whose relationships have been marked by both friendship and animosity. Of the many conflicts in this area, the *Karrayu - Argobba* conflict is the one that still continues unabated.

Studies aptly reveal that there has been traditional enmity between the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* groups (Buli 2001; Ayalew, 2001; 2009). And their conflict has virtually exhibited marked transformations in its type, nature and repercussions.

Regarding the causes, Buli (2001) in his study on the progressive impoverishment of the Karrayu, pointed out that cultural values and competition on scarce resources as factors for the conflict. Though it is informative Buli's work cannot give a clear picture of the conflict, as he dealt it in a passing reference. Moreover, he solely presented the Karrayu's version about the conflict and totally left the conflict dynamics. Particularly the post 1991 period is left untouched. So this needs to be researched.

In a far better detail and series of analytical anthropological expositions on the various aspects of the *Karrayu*, Ayalew (2001; 2009) confirmed the above causes of the conflict. In addition, he disclosed the fact that the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* conflict has been affected by the post 1991 state restructuring. Ayalew's works taken together are highly insightful and, hence, can be a solid spring board for a much more comprehensive study on the theme under review.

Generally, though the conflict between the Karrayu and Argobba groups is a fertile research theme, so far it has not received the scholarly attention it deserves. As such, there exists a self-evident knowledge lacuna as far as the comprehensive picture of the conflict is concerned. Therefore, this exploratory study, which delves itself to the exposition of the causes of the conflict, the actors and its complex dynamics, is meant to assume such a modest academic task of bridging the aforementioned knowledge gap.

1.3. Objectives of the study

1.3.1. General objectives

Generally, this research aims at:

- ❖ Exploring the context, causes and actors of the conflict between the *Karrayu-Argobba* groups.
- ❖ Understanding those cardinal determinants which occurred at the state level, that re-(shaped) and patterned relations of the two groups and sketch the dynamics of the conflict and its conflict management.

1.3.2. Specific objectives

On the basis of the above formulated problems, this study is specifically intended to:

- ❖ Investigate the multi-causal factors that account for the conflict between the two groups
- ❖ Identify the actors (primary parties and shadow groups) and their vested interests in the conflict
- ❖ Examine the customary mechanisms the two groups have been using for years to resolve/manage their conflict.
- ❖ Assess the role of state policy in influencing the course of the conflict, and in the peace making process

1.4. Research questions

This study has been guided by the following key questions:

- ❖ What are the factors that account for the conflict between the *Karrayu* Oromo and the *Argobba* groups?

- ❖ How state policies have affected the overall relation and conflict of the aforementioned groups?
- ❖ What customary and state-centered approaches have been used for to manage/resolve the conflict?
- ❖ Who are the actors (the primary and the secondary) in the stated conflict?

1.5. Scope of the study

The cardinal purpose of this exploratory case study is to examine the causes, actors, and dynamics of the *Karrayu - Argobba* conflict. It also addresses, via role assessment, the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms that the study people have made use of for years and comprehend its contemporary inadequacies. In its spatial coverage this study was conducted in three contiguous *Woredas* of Oromia and Amhara Regional States, namely Fentale *Woreda*, Berehet *Woreda* and Minjar- Shenkora *woreda*. For the sake of manageability, the data, however, was collected from some purposively selected *kebeles*- *Awra Godana*, *Gelcha*, *Qobo*, and *Haro Qersa*. In addition, the primary data was also collected at the towns of Arerti, Metebbla, and Metehara.

Regarding its temporal foci, the study was made to span over mainly the last five decades or so. This timeframe is set deliberately as it first helps to view the conflict diachronically with its temporal evolution; secondly, this period- 1950s was a time when the government started to make its unabated intervention in the Awash Valley through their commercial farm, and hence affected the conflict. Nevertheless, while setting the context to the conflict by ways of discussing the historical relation between the groups, the time is pushed back to some distant past. However, in analyzing the conflict much emphasis is accorded to the post -1991 periods for perceivable reason/s.

1.6. Significance of the study

It is a marked reality that there have been numerically increasing records of violent intra- and-inter- ethnic conflict in Ethiopia. Unless these conflicts are dealt in proper way, it would definitely hurdle any development endeavor of the country. However, it is quite difficult to proffer any practical solution for a conflict without a proper understanding of

the conflict in focus. In other words, the management and transformation of conflict will be in jeopardy if we are unable to carefully and correctly analyze the conflict we deal with. Viewed from such vantage point, the finding of this particular study would have paramount contributions.

To put its significance in more concrete term, the study, by intensely exploring the *Karrayu - Argobba* conflict diachronically going through the depth of time and by uncovering the reasons for the futility of the series interventions made so far in providing a lasting solution for the conflict between the two groups, the study may have the following significances;

- ❖ It may arouse the interests of other researchers who want to do more comprehensive study in the same theme. Thus, for them this study can offer structured base line information.
- ❖ The finding of this research could be used by NGOs and other stakeholders, who work on conflict. These groups may use this study as one element in their search for a proper entry point of intervention for the management and transformation of the perennial or recurrent conflicts between the two ethnic groups.
- ❖ The study by presenting the local version about the conflict and the solution suggested by the two groups would enable the disputing parties either to resolve or manage their conflict by using their local means i.e. their traditional mechanisms.

1.7. Research methodology

1.7.1. Research design

Understandably research design refers to the type of research i.e. whether it is being quantitative or qualitative, or a mixed one. Thus, this research which focus on the *Karrayu-Argobba* conflict is an exploratory case study that is entirely qualitative as far as its design is concerned.

1.7.2. Data sources

This study has made use of both primary and secondary data sources. The secondary data is used to state and explain the research problem in context, and it also offered conceptual framework for the analysis of this particular study. To this end, books, and journal articles that deals about ethnic group, ethnicity and inter-ethnic conflict was used extensively and reviewed critically. Moreover, empirical research works done on ethnic conflict in Ethiopia in general and in the Awash Valley area in particular is critically consulted. The primary data, on the other hand, was collected directly from informants who were selected in the course of my field work.

1.7.3. Methods of data collection

As stated above, this study is a qualitative case study. So the idea behind a qualitative research is to purposefully select data sources (informants and / or documents) or sites that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research questions (Cresswell, 2005). In addition, the reliability and validity of qualitative research like this can only be ensured through data triangulation. Triangulation in its broader sense entails the use of multiple observations, theoretical perspectives, sources of data, and methodologies (Bryman, 2007) and the emphasis has tended to be on methodological investigation and sources of data.

Accordingly, so as to glean the raw data which is a *sine qua non* for this study, I used multiple of data collection techniques. The complete lists of the instruments have comprised the followings.

1.7.3.1. In -depth interviews

The researcher has undertaken a series of in -depth interviews with a reasonable number of selected informants. As it can normally be anticipated, the selected informants cannot be equally articulate and perceptive of the problem in focus. So this, in turn, made the selection of key informants an imperative task. Thus, key informants were selected based on their relative possession of knowledge about the issue under review. Accordingly, in this study informants (comprising different age groups) were interviewed. In this study a

total of eighteen informants were interviewed by the researcher. The informants were used as primary resource persons and were asked to share their knowledge and world view about the conflict and other related issues pertinent to the research problem.

1.7.3.2. Focus group discussions (FGDs)

For the sake of data triangulation, I also employed FGDs as basic tool of data gleaning. FGD, as opposed to interview, has high face validity, in which information that comes from discussants could be automatically authenticated or corrected on the spot. So this technique was used to glean pertinent data pertaining to the research question formulated. Therefore, a total of two FGDs (one with each ethnic group) were undertaken. While determining the size of the discussants, I followed scholarly recommendation. In this respect Morgan, (1967, as cited in Bryman 2004:251) forwarded that 'researcher should take smaller number of participants when participants are likely to have a lot to say in the research theme and when gleaning their personal account is a major goal. It is uncontested that my researcher theme is sensitive, complex and controversial and hence, has an expected tendency of alluring participants' emotion towards it. As such, due to this tenable, ramification I used six discussants in each FGDs.

The FGD with the *Argobba* was undertaken at the town of Arerti-the capital of Minjar-Shenkora *Woreda* on February 17, 2012. Similarly the FGD with the pastoralist *Karrayu* elders was conducted at the town of Metehara. It was held on March 8, 2009. Each focus group discussion was used as a means to generate large body of data pertaining to, *inter alia*, the history of *Karrayu- Argobba* relations and the causes of their conflict across the horizon of time. While undertaking the two FGDs, I assumed a role of moderator. Thus, I forward the theme of the discussion and tried to give equal chances for every participant to speak their view about the issue underhand.

1.7.3.3. Case history

In order to offer some insightful illustrations of empirical facts about the conflict, I also carefully recorded the life histories of some key informants. These cases were collected from the key informants using oral history interview. Accordingly, informants were

asked to recall some major events about the *Karrayu- Argobba* conflict and to reflect their experiences on them. But it should be noted that the cases are simply extracted from the in-depth interviews. Thus, in this study a total of seventeen cases were used and presented in the middle of data analysis.

1.7.3.4. Systematic observation

I used this technique but in none of its broad sense of researcher's complete participation. So what the researcher rather attempted was to make critical, systematic observation about the daily lives of the study peoples; their livelihood, availability of resources and places of their confrontations. In doing so, this technique enabled me to make a perceivable sense regarding the study society and the research problem in particular. I made the observation for about two solid months.

1.7.4. Method of data analysis

The large body of data that was collected both from the primary and secondary sources were analyzed qualitatively. The data that was generated from the series of in-depth interviews, FGDs, case histories, and systematic observation was recorded and transcribed meticulously. As the information from the *Karrayu* was recorded in their language of *Orommiffa* the translation was made with much care. Though absolute translation is usually difficult to achieve, I used all possible means to avoid the distortions on the contents of the original messages. To that end, I used two MA students having a good knowledge of the language of the Oromo. In order to ascertain the correctness of the translation, I made use of both forward and backward translation systems. After that the raw data was classified using theme as a parameter of data classification. And finally the research report was written down systematically following its thematic route and logical coherence.

Although there are different models of conflict analysis, I preferred to use Strategic Conflict Assessment (SCA) developed by DFID (2002). This model is not a rigid prescriptive tool or framework. Thus, it can be adapted as per the need of the conflict case at hand. The model focuses on the analysis of conflict structures, actors and its

dynamics over time. Here, it should be noted that the three areas are divided for the sake of analytical purpose; otherwise they are closely inter-linked and should be approached holistically.

To make it more clear, the topic under our sober scrutiny- conflict- is not a static phenomenon. As such, the tool for its analysis must be flexible. Regarding this, Mitchell (1981:133) succinctly states that “....any satisfactory conflict analysis should essentially address the dynamic aspect of the conflict which alter both structure and interplay relationships over time.” Seen from such vantage point, the genesis of Karrayu –Argobba conflict is rooted in historic past and underwent diverse transformations in its nature, causes/s, scope, intensity and consequences. Thus, having a complete picture of the conflict badly demands a critical look at and analysis of the complex variables involved in the overall equation of the conflict between the two groups. To that end, SCA model which addresses, structure, actors, and dynamics of a conflict in its intricacies seems best for analyzing our particular case. Hence, born its selection.

1.8. Limitations and field experience

This study is done based on the researcher’s three-round fieldworks undertaken at different times and covered well over two months. While undertaking the fieldwork, I encountered tangible field and off-field challenges which became part of limitations of the study. The first problem was a serious financial constraint. The money which the University earmarked to my research project is meager, and hence proved quite insufficient to cover field expenditures. This hindered me not to cover many rural *Kebeles* in the study. It also compelled me to pragmatically reduce the number of individual informants, and the FGDs that I initially anticipated to undertake.

The issue of collecting data in the field is not always a simple task. I conducted the fieldwork by employing field assistants. The field assistants were selected based on their familiarity to the study people, and their geographical knowledge of the study area. The field assistants made my task of rapport building somehow easy. I started the fieldwork in Fentale *Woreda* among the *Karrayu*. The first challenge I faced there came from the

Woreda administration. Initially, I tried to brief the official about the theme of my study in a plain language. But he told me that the conflict is already resolved by the government and is over. But this is far from being true. And the official again asked me whether I speak *Oromiffa*(language of the Oromo) or not, and I said no. On this ground, he challenged me as ‘how could I do a research on the *Karrayu* without knowing their language. But I told him that I will use interpreter. At this point he agreed but ordered me to use informants which will only be selected by the administration. However, later with the help of my field assistant, I was able to use key informants from the rural *Kebeles* of the *Woreda*.

Initially the field assistants helped me much in the selection of some knowledgeable key informants from their respective community. But later on I used snowball sampling for the further selection of informants. In the course of data collection, I found the informants being insightful, perceptive of the research theme, and they are like a moving library. They speak what they have in mind openly. Thus, keeping anonymity, one of the cardinal ethical issues of research, was not a question to them. But what I encountered is that, some of my informants refused to be recorded by a tape-recorder.

The other situational challenge I faced in the time of data collection period is issue of security. To make it vivid, two of my fieldworks were coincided with the ‘incidental killings’ (as it is reported by officials) of one *Argobba* and one *Karrayu* individuals. This event led to the blockade of the transport route from Metehara to Metebela and Arerti at least for a week. This compelled me to take a relatively long journey to arrive at Berehet *Woreda*. This bounding reality hardly tested my thin pocket. Above all, it hurdled me not to collect the intended row data with the pace and time of my anticipation.

Finally, is beyond doubt that *Karrayu* and *Argobba* women have their own world view about the conflict. They also have an active role in the conflict which actually exceeds from the mere ululation and praising of their respective men. Nevertheless, owing to cultural factor my attempt to use them as informants proved quite impossible. So what I did in my paper is to critically analyze the direct and indirect roles of *Karrayu* and

Argobba women in the stated conflict, just relying of the data collected from key male informants.

1.9. Organization of the paper

The study is structured in to seven chapters. The first chapter sets the general background of the study, and formulates statement of the problem. As such, the objectives of the study and the research questions are outlined here. The methodological part- the data sources and its collection instruments, and the method of data analysis- is also described in this chapter. Moreover, the limitations of the study and the field experience I encountered during my fieldwork are also presented under this chapter.

The second chapter sets the theoretical framework to the study. Apart from that, the chapter also reviews some pertinent empirical literature pertaining to ethnic conflict. The general setting of the study, on the other hand, is described in chapter three. This particular chapter also outlines the multiple lenses that are set to capture the overall picture of the *Karrayu-Argobba* conflict.

Chapter four, the central part of the thesis, delves itself to the analysis of the underlying and proximate causes of the conflict. The next chapter gives a critical analysis on the actors of the *Karrayu-Argobba* conflict. It also discusses the dynamics of the conflict through pointing the marked transformations it undergone across the horizon of time.

The traditional conflict resolution mechanism the *Karrayu* and the *Argobba* have used for years to redress their conflict is presented in chapter six. This chapter also discuss the state-centered approach (macro-level) used to address the conflict and uncover its weaknesses.

The last chapter recapitulates the major themes of the thesis via giving a concluding summary. Based on its findings, this chapter also forwards tenable recommendations that can be helpfully used to salvage the aforementioned conflict.

CHAPTER TWO

2. Theoretical perspectives and literature review

This chapter considers the theoretical frameworks and reviews literatures pertaining to ethnicity and ethnic conflicts. It has three main sections. The first section defines an ethnic group and then sets the theoretical discourse on ethnicity via presenting the two polar extreme perspectives. The second discusses the theoretical debates on inter- ethnic conflicts and reviews some literatures which focus on ethnic conflicts. The third section critically overviews ethnic conflict in Ethiopian context moving across the horizon of time. This section also make a general, albeit a brief, assessment about the situation of inter- group conflicts in the pastoral and agro- pastoral setting of the Awash Valley area.

2.1. Defining Ethnic groups and theoretical discourse on ethnicity

Although scholars from different disciplines treat '*ethnicity*' as one of the most important phenomenon in politics, nothing close to a consensus has emerged about not only what its effects are but also what it is. To date, it continues to mean different things to different researchers. While describing the conundrum ethnicity bequeath as a concept and tools of social analysis, Horowitz (1985: xi) stated that "... *there is too much knowledge and not enough understanding*" about ethnicity. What is placed at the epicenter of the confusion is the hazy perception of the 'ethnic group' itself. Thus, to better conceptualize ethnicity, it is quite logical to define the constitute of an ethnic communities first.

2.1.1. Defining ethnic groups (communities)

Ethnic groups (communities) are defined in many ways by scholars. However, the sets of definitions provided about ethnic communities are neither diametrically opposite nor is so conflictual. What is rather controversial and debatable about ethnic group is not its definition as such but the nature of ethnic identity and its importance to a group categorized as a distinct "ethnic communities".

Many scholars used primordial traits as criteria while defining ethnic groups. Anthony, 2000 (cited in Brown 2005:211), defined an ethnic community as “a named human population with a myth of common ancestry, shared memories and cultural elements, a link with a historic territory or home land, and a measure of solidarity”. Based on Smith’s primordial approaches on ethnic categorization, Brown on his part identified six criteria that a group must fulfill so as to qualify and be named as an ethnic community. These criteria are name, belief in common ancestry, shared historical experiences, language, attachment to a specific piece of territory, and a thought of togetherness.

However, others argued that these sets of “ethnic criteria” alone are inadequate for categorizing ethnic communities (Abraham and Paula, 2001:313; Gurr, 2005:164). For them, the ‘ethnic criteria’ are what the in-groups claim, and hence needs to be complemented by outsiders’ ascription to and belief about that particular group. It is with this conception that Abraham and Paula (2001) define an ethnic group as “a group that shares common cultural norms, values, identities, patterns of behavior and language and moreover, the members of an ethnic group recognize themselves as separate groups and also are recognized as such by others. While supporting this view, Smith (1992:192) asserts that concepts of an ethnic group need, to borrow his statement, “concordance between the views of outsiders and those of members of such collectives concerning their distinctive ethnic status and identity”.

To bring the definitions of what constitute an ethnic group to home, the incumbent-EPRDF governments vividly subscribed to a ‘primordial’ view of identity and constitutionally defined it accordingly. Largely drawing on the Stalinist dictum and definitions of the ‘nationality question’, the 1995 constitution of FDRE in its controversial Article 39, defined the term ‘nation, nationality, and people’ as a community having the following characteristics; a common culture reflecting considerable uniformity or similarity of custom, a common language, belief in common bond and identity, and a common consciousness the majority of whom live within a common territory (Art 39:5). In EPRDF’s definition of peoplehood language, territory, and common psychological makeup are important parameters for one to qualify as a

distinct ethnic group. Seen in this light, the subjects of this paper the *Karrayu* Oromo and *Argobba* groups, meet the standards set and named as such.

2.1.2. Theoretical discourses on ethnicity

Ethnicity is an elusive term and much about it is controversial. The theoretical debates on it are usually divided into two camps dubbed as instrumentalism and primordialism. These two approaches, in fact, have emerged as alternatives to the general assumption held by many social scientists in the 1950s and the 1960s that modernization would lead to the breakdown of ethnic identities and groupings, and would replace them with loyalties to larger communities (Gurr and Harff, 1994:79; Brown, 2005:11). Unlike the prediction, however, ethnic identities and interests remained solid and conflicts based on the assertion of ethnic identities increased across the world.

The cardinal elements of the debates between the two approaches lie on the query whether ethnic identities have deep historical roots or not; whether ethnic identities significantly change over time or not, and whether ethnicity causes action or is supplemental to other factors to justification (Brown, 2005:211). Here, it should be noted that probing deep into the analysis of the discourses on ethnicity is beyond the scope of this study. But to have a better understanding about ethnic relations and conflict it is essential to offer a brief conceptual issue about ethnicity.

2.1.2.1. The Instrumentalist approach

The instrumentalist argued that ethnic identities are not historically given. Rather it is a highly malleable and adoptive phenomenon. For them, ethnic identities are recent artifacts. Moreover, what is central to the instrumentalist's approach to ethnicity is the assertion that material interests underlie ethnic identification (Gurr and Harff, 1994:79; Hempel, 2004: 253; Brown, 2005: 211).

Over-emphasizing the creationist aspect of ethnicity, the anthropologist Eriksen, 1993 (quoted in Merera, 2003:23) openly argued that 'to a great extent' the anthropologists' fieldwork is the locus where ethnicity is created and re-created and that ethnicity is

created by the analyst when he or she goes out in to the world and poses question about ethnicity. To him ethnicity is created and re- created at will.

In Africa, the discourse on ethnicity is conceptualized mainly in instrumentalist thought. This perspective was popularized by Ranger and Hobsbown who advocate the '*colonial invention theses* of Africa ethnicities. They asserted that ethnic identities in Africa were constructed by European missionaries, colonial officials and early anthropologists to meet the colonial imperative or to dissect African society for the purpose of study. Thus, ethnic identity is something essentially modern (Hastings, 1997: 147).

However, such 'colonial invention thesis' is convincingly put down by many scholars. One of major weakness of this school is that it gives too much agency to missionaries and colonialists in the 'naming and boxing of Africans in to ethnic groups'. The agency of the Africans in naming themselves prior and during the colonial period is missing (Gatsheni, 2008:180). Hastings (1997:148-149),on his part, criticized it being anti- colonial, unhistorical and reductionist in its view of Africa as a "rave ethnographic material".

Thus, nowadays, there is a consensus that European colonialist had altered, extended, reconstructed and even created new identities to Africa. Otherwise, as a self-identifying entity, ethnic groups existed in Africa even long before the period of slave trade and colonialism (Hastings, 1997; Daimon, 2008:300; Gatsheni, 2008:180).

What can be inferred from the above is that though ethnic identity is subject to change, it cannot be as Berman (1998, cited in Gatsheni, 2008:180) stated 'conjured out of thin air, it must be built on real cultural experience'. In a similar view, Mekuria (1996:54) contends that ethnic identity is not something that people assumes or discards as it suits them. Nor do people automatically absorb groups who lack social and cultural affinity with them.

The instrumentalists are of course criticized on many grounds. It is judged to give undue analytic priority to material interests; it under rates the emotional power of ethnic bonds, and it preempts deeper understanding of the social context and conditions in which

particular interests and modes of action emerge (Hempel, 2004: 54-55; Wimmer, 2008:986).

2.1.2.2. The primordialist approach

The primordialist approach argues that ethnicity is a collective identity, so deeply rooted in historical experience that it should properly be treated as a given in human relations (Esman,1994 cited in Merera 2003:23). They explain ethnicity on primordial elements, such as kinship, common psychological makeup, tradition, history, language, culture, religion and common territorial unity which bound together the group members as distinct. These primordial elements are objectively given and genetically determined. These elements are also used as marker for group's self-identification and ascription by others. Hence, the primordialist understanding of ethnic identities implies that the cultural communalities of the ethnic members, which are seen cohort, easily distinguishable, stable and permanent are the main characteristics and the reason for the common action of the group.

The primordialists have been meeting criticisms that come from a number of sources. The critics argue that these common traits cannot be seen as natural, inborn or determined genetically. As to the critics, there is consensus today that the primordial approach doesn't capture the essence of ethnic identities and cannot explain why ethnicity has remained the source of political action with interaction to others. And yet, as the critics goes, ethnicity is not given but it is rather dynamic and flexible phenomenon. Moreover, they ignored the material concern of group members and other socially constructed ambition in asserting belongingness to particular ethnic groups.

2.2. Approaching inter- ethnic conflicts

Ethnic conflicts pose a major threat to peace and stability in the twenty first century (Brancati, 2006:651). In terms of its scope, ethnic conflict has become a pervasive global phenomenon cutting across cultures and societies, in each case exhibiting its own specificity (Horowitz, 1985; Merera, 2003:26). Here, before reviewing some of the pertinent concepts on ethnic conflict, it seems mandatory to define it first. Ethnic conflict,

accordingly, is usually defined as a dispute between two or more ethnic groups based on the assertion of ethnic needs and interests (Brown, 2005:211). The ethnic needs and interests include, among others, political, economic, social, cultural, and territorial issues (Brown, 2005:211).

The scholarly arguments on causes of ethnic conflict on the whole swing between two extreme though on ethnicity; these are the primordial and instrumental perspectives. The primordialists contend that ethnic differences are stable 'givens' that often lead to tension and conflict in a society. This perspective focuses on the strength of ethnic identity and claims that the presence of ethnic divisions in a nation is a sufficient condition for the occurrence of ethnic conflict (Banks, 1996:183; Mauseau, 2001: 549; Merera, 2003:54).

Even though cultural factors cannot be downplayed in its totality, seeing such differences in themselves as a *sufficient cause* for conflict is debatable and to define the conflicts as priori as *ethnic* is questionable (Markakis, 1994:217). Supporting this, Turton (1994:17), in his study on the *Mursi* people, argued that ethnicity is not the cause of war but the reverse.

The other approach, which of course better explain our case, is the instrumental thought. Unlike the primordialists that emphasize psychological or biological aspects of ethnicity as mobilizing forces, instrumentalists underline socio- economic and political factors as major motivating causes of ethnic conflict. This perspective is more dynamic than the former because it stresses change, contextuality, and competition among ethnic groups for resources (Mckay, 1982; Mousseau, 2001:549). Put differently, the instrumentalist approach argued that ethnic conflict in the modern era is not a consequence of the politicizations of primordial needs but a result of the mobilization of ethnic interests to obtain access to social, political, and economic resources. This approach support the notion of elite manipulation of group differences (Hamesso, 2001:47) and states involvement in instigating rivalries between groups for political advantages (Udogue 2001:21,35).

In between the two 'polar extremes', there are some scholars that attributed ethnic conflict in the Horn of Africa to competition for resources in conditions of great scarcity

(Markakis, 1994:217; Hussein 2001:1), the role the states plays in controlling the allocation of such resources; and the nature of the state structure, particularly in Ethiopia (Hizkias, 1996). All these views inclined to the instrumentalist notion but Markakis (1994) called it “a *situationalist perspective*”

Here, under this rubric the resource scarcity model, which is under the instrumentalist thought, needs discussion on its own right. Scarcity of resources has historically proved to be a cardinal factor behind violent inter -ethnic conflict. In this case, scarcity is defined as “who gets to eat and who does not” (Hildyard, 1999:11). This tenably implies that competition over meager resources is simply a question of ensuring survival. This is particularly the case for pastoral and agro -pastoral communities who largely depend on environmental resources for their sustenance.

Among others, scarcity has natural and social dimensions (Hildyard, 1999:11). It is a common knowledge that pastoralists inhabit a peripheral environment, which is hostile for human settlement. However, pastoralists across the globe have managed to survive for centuries on it using their adaptive and time-tested institutions of resources management. Unfortunately, the general bias held against pastoralists made states to formulate policies and undertook interventions that endanger pastoralists’ socio-economic order. So this socially generated scarcity emanates largely from the much criticized but the popular conceptions of the ‘*Cattle Complex*’¹ and ‘*Tragedy of the commons*’². This reality is highly evident in the Awash Valley of Ethiopia, where the state made unabated intervention on the pastoral and agro -pastoral lands in the name of development but this adversely affected the dynamics of inter- group relations in the area.

In his conceptual work informed by instrumental perspective, Brown (2005:214-218), figured out and explained clusters of factors that would cause ethnic conflicts. Brown categorized the factors in to two as underlying and proximate; and explained sub factors belongings to each group. The underlying factors that produce ethnic conflict are

¹ A thesis that argued to show the economic irrationality of pastoralists. According to this view, pastoralists generally tend to maximize their herd size on the communal territory more for honorific than utilitarian values (Ayalew, 2001:54).

² The central idea of theory of ‘tragedy of the commons’ is that common property will suffer loss and degradation as a result of the’ abuse and overexploitation of resources by individual livestock owners.

structural, political, economic / social, and cultural / perceptual. Under the structural factors he mentioned the nature of the state and ethnic geography played important roles in the occurrence of ethnic conflict. The political factors encompass discriminatory political institutions, exclusionary national ideologies, inter- group politics, and elite politics are vital in understanding the causes of ethnic conflict. Within the economic / social factors, Brown mentioned economic problems, discriminatory economic systems, and economic development and modernization that produce thorough social changes as important instigators of ethnic conflicts. In his last causal category, cultural / perceptual facts, he mentioned cultural discrimination against minorities; and group histories and group perceptions of themselves and others as vital.

However, the possibility of disputes to erupt into violence depends on what Brown (2005:220) termed as the “proximate factors”. In this case, he over emphasized the role the elites played in triggering violent ethnic conflict.

Rothchild (1999:194), on his part, mentioned certain factors that would in particular cause ethnic conflicts. The factors which he termed as “psychological symbolic array of conflict producing factors”, include an assertion of group’s worth and place, a fear of systematic re -stratification and the loss of political dominance; the determination to resist a controlling groups effort to spread its culture; the existence of negative remembrance and images; and evidence of superiority on the part of a politically or economically dominant minority.

Furthermore, Stein (2005:193) has emphasized the role of enemy images hold by ethnic groups to one another in the instigation of ethnic conflicts. He stated that enemy images can be formed as a response to the persistence of aggressive action of one another state or group. It can also be reformed, as to him, without “solid, confirming evidence of hostile intention, and common cognitive biases”.

2.2.1. Summing up

The above discussion makes it vivid that ethnic conflicts are complex and are products of multiple causes and contexts. They arise mainly out of the combustible interplays of

objective and subjective factors, the incendiary combination of the material and socio-cultural conditions and political and psychological dispositions. Hence, the common universalist thoughts presented above cannot singularly explain each and every ethnic conflict cases. Therefore, there is a logical and imminent need to go beyond these paradigms and use them in an integrative manner. Otherwise, sticking to any one of the perspective would squarely lead to poor analysis of the conflict case and bad policy for salvaging the problem.

As it will be revealed in the analysis part (chapter, 4), I contend that the *Karrayu-Argobba* conflict should be understood contextually transcending the common thoughts. The notion that asserts ‘ethnic differences perpetuates hatred and justifies conflict’ sounds far from being convincing. Similarly the instrumentalists’ expression overlooks groups’ self- awareness and labels ethnic groups as only driven by elites to meet their materials gains. Rather, ethnic conflict may amalgamate both primordial feelings and instrumental strategies relying on the political, economic and social realities the actors operate. These wider context are largely constructed by the state but have marked repercussions on local conflicts, like our case. As such, it is an imperative task for researcher to bring the national level contexts down to the particularly Karrayu – Argobba conflict case and make appropriate meaning from it. To this end, the conflict is studied in its historic and contemporary conditions using the more comprehensive and dynamic model of conflict analysis -Strategic Conflict Assessment (SCA).

2.3. Ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia: A critical overview

Ethiopia is a multi- ethnic state that boasts cultural diversity which Conti Rossini (cited in Bahru, 2001) dubbed it as “*un museo di popoli*” (a museum of peoples). The manner in which the modern state of multi-ethnic Ethiopia evolved resulted in political, socio - economic and cultural interactions. Despite the harmonious relations among the people, the interactions have also been beset by perennial intra- and inter -groups’ conflicts. Cognizant of this situation, Merera (2003:117) fairly characterizes the history of the country as a history of conflicts. Of the many forms of intra -state conflicts, ethnic

conflict is the pervasive one that has got additional momentum in more recent time of the country's history.

A better understanding of ethnic conflict in Ethiopia, I argue, demands its placement in historical context and should be viewed at different level of self-government. The latter is meant conflicts of ethnic groups against the state and ethnic conflicts that occurred at the margin, like our case of conflict between *Karrayu* and *Argobba* groups. In doing so, the year 1991 is deliberately taken as a watershed period. This is because the post- 1991 period has brought the formalization of ethnicity and made it a more potent force in the country politics. As such, it has considerably affected inter- ethnic relations and has rendered a new emerging trends to the conflict. Accordingly, here below, the overview of ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia shall be presented in its chronological order.

2.3.1. Ethnic conflicts in the pre- federal Ethiopia

Before stating the causes of ethnic conflicts in pre- federal Ethiopia it is pertinent to expose the scholarly existentialist debates on it. Some scholars overtly associated the contemporary tide of ethnic issue of the country to the political experiment of the incumbent government instituted since 1991 (Hizkias, 1996; Zerihun 2004:123-124). Put differently, this argument tells us that ethnicity in the country is a new political artifact constructed by the state since 1991.

It is in line with these assertions that Hizkias (1996), in his Marxist oriented article about '*Ethnic Conflict in the Horn of Africa: Myth or Reality*' argued that conflicts in pre-federal Ethiopia were not against ethnic groups but were merely against exploitive class. Here, I contend that questioning the existence of ethnic conflicts *per se* before the stated time is anachronistic and, hence, holds no water. The fact that class distinction in the country crosscuts ethnic cleavage is a given reality. And during imperial period the ethnic and class divisions were mixed in an exploitive mixture and later rivaled for ideological primacy in the struggles of separate national groups against the state. But this cannot take as to raise a query of extentialism on ethnic conflicts. As such, Hizkias's argument is neither convincing nor it proffers sufficient explanation for the persistence of elite / ethnic domination in the country during the period under review.

On the other side of the debates, there are those scholars who held divergent view on ethnicity, and ultimately put down the aforementioned argument. This group contends that though ethnicity, as instrument of political mobilization, is a relatively recent phenomenon largely created and fostered by politically motivated elites, its birth, however, predated the 1991 period (Merera, 2003; Markakis 2003; Bahru, 2008). It reached political maturity during the military regime (Markakis, 2003:20).

In judging the divergent views, the writer of this thesis believes that ethnicity and ethnic conflicts were prevalent in pre-federal Ethiopia. What the post -1991 political experiment has brought is the formal institutionalization of ethnicity, and it added a momentum to the extent that it caused marked transformations (as shall be seen in the next sub- section) on inter- ethnic conflicts in the country.

So far, many factors have been given as causes of ethnic conflicts in pre- federal Ethiopia. To Markakis (2003:8-9) who considered the Ethiopians empire as a classical example of what Mazuri (1975) called “*Ethnocratic state*”, the factors that provided optimum conditions for the political maturity of ethnicity and causes ethnic conflicts were political exclusion and economic exploitation by an ethnically defined ruling class. Cultural suppression that sought to deny, if not to erase, the identity of all subordinate ethnic groups in its domain was also another factor.

Based on his critical observation, a notable Ethiopia historian Bahru Zewde (2008) has uncovered four major causes for ethnic conflict in the country. To Bahru, these factors are over centralization, marginalization, deliberate competition by the elites, and competition for scarce resources.

In his classification of the root causes of ethnic conflicts across some selected countries, Stavenhagen (1996:60, cited in Merera, 2005: 27) identified both the predisposing and triggering factor for ethnic conflict in Ethiopia. To him, elite (ethnic domination) was the underlying factor of the stated conflict; whereas the struggle for power and resources served as triggering factors. Corroborating the “ethnic domination thesis” but questioning its aspect of ‘cultural factor’ as a tenable explanation, Merera (2003:27), on his part, complemented religion as an emerging factor of ethnic conflict in the country.

Taken together the above factors give causal explanations to ethnic conflict in pre -1991 periods, and also clearly discern the multiplicity of its causes. These causes largely, if not exclusively, help to explain ethnic conflicts fought at the centre, i.e. against the state. Examples of conflicts within this category include the struggle of the various national movements, namely the Tigrayan People Liberation Front (TPLF), Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), and Eritrean People Liberation Front (EPLF).

There are, however, also ethnic conflicts which were fought at the margin i.e. among the subaltern groups. These conflicts have been particularly dominant among the pastoral and agro- pastoral communities of the country whose conflicts yet remain unabated.

Generally, pre- federal Ethiopia was hit hard by violent ethnic conflicts which emanated from multitudes of factors. Any endeavor in seeking a single theoretical explanation for ethnic conflicts is highly problematic. Neither the primordialist nor the instrumentalist perspective discussed above can singularly explain it. Therefore, there is a need to transcend the dichotomy and integrate the two and also deploy the ‘situationalist perspective’ used and advocated by Markakis (1994) in his explanation of ethnic conflicts in the Horn of Africa.

So far, attempt is made to sketch, albeit briefly, the situations of ethnic conflict in pre-federal Ethiopia. Ethnic conflict in the country, however, underscored diverse transformations born largely from the radical state re-structuring that induced new patterns to it. So this crucial aspect needs to be discussed on its own right, and hence, the next sub- section shall be devoted for this discussion.

2.3.2. Ethnic federalism and emerging trends of Ethnic conflicts

2.3.2.1. The federal venture

The post- 1991 period is a land mark in the history of Ethiopia as it brought radical reorganizing of the state. Since then, the Ethiopian state approaches ethnic diversity in a way unusual to many African countries (Asebe, 2007; Christopher, 2009; 117). Ethnic

diversity is officially recognized as a base to the state structure and has been institutionalized in the state institutions.

The architects of the ethnic-based federal structure model argue that it is a decisive remedy for the resolution of the perennial problem of the ethnic questions in the country. On the other hand, critics argue that the ethnic-based federal formula has been engineered for political control rather than a genuine desire for decentralization where the marginalized groups would empower to administer their own affairs (Walle 1993; Paul 2000; Merera 2003; Christopher 2009).

The federal state structure is presented as panaceas to manage inter- ethnic relations in the country. Its track record, however, has discerned that the federalization process aggravated the ethnicization of politics and pronounced inter- ethnic tension and conflict in the country (Merera, 2003; 2004; Asnake 2004; Bahru, 2008). Taking the issue to its extreme, Merera (2004:203) boldly argued that the “*federal venture has created a lot of problems rather than solved the existing ones*” (emphasis added in the original).

After evaluating its trackrecord, Vaughan (2003) stated that the ethnic based federal model has met with varying degree of success in solving inter -ethnic conflicts either inherent in the political experiment or obstacles thrown up by its implementation.

Some scholars questioned the relevance of our federal formula *per se* and taken it as cause of many malaises in the country. Bahru (2008:358), for instance, criticized it on the ground that it does not reflect historical reality, conform to economic rationality and facilitate efficient administration, and hence preferred the territorial federation as opposed to the ethnic federalism to the country. Here, it should, however, be noted that questioning the relevance of ethnic federalism is beyond the scope of this research. But what is rather attempted is to uncover some of its pitfalls that have significantly affected ethnic relations and rendered a new pattern to conflicts in the country.

To begin with, the policy is based on ethnic /linguistic criteria in demarcating ethnic boundaries. So the paradox is that though language is a basic marker of demarcation,

there emerged only nine Ethno linguistic Regional States from a total of over 82 language groups (Merera, 2003, Aklilu, 2003; Asebe, 2007).

The other fundamental weakness of 'ethnic federalism' in the country is its failure to consider historical realities, more importantly the new demographic dynamics. In countries like Ethiopia, where population redistribution or resettlement schemes are prevalent demographic phenomena, it is not uncommon to find indigenous (native) peoples linguistically dominated by new settlers. Taking language as a cardinal criterion for territorial arrangement is risking for the indigenous peoples under such circumstances (Merera, 2003, Aklilu, 2003; Asebe, 2007).

Furthermore, Aklilu (2003:12) stated that one of the limitations in the regionalization is the lack of consistency in implementation, and mentioned the case of *Harari* and *SNNPRS* as show cases in the inconsistency. He adds that the regionalization only followed ethno- linguistic component and it ignored social, economic and religious elements of the society. This, in turn, complicated ethnic relation in the country by producing potentially disruptive factors.

To put it precisely, the principle of the constitution gave golden opportunity for many ethnic groups to demand self -government, representation in the parliament and recognition of rights over traditional land ownership. However, the mismatches between the promises and the practical reality on the ground caused inter- ethnic conflicts and conflicts against the state. In doing so, it also brought new dynamics to the conflict situation in the country. Now let us turn our eyes to the description of the emerging trends of ethnic conflict in Ethiopia.

2.3.2.2. Emerging trends of inter- Ethnic conflicts

The major weaknesses of the ethnic federalism and its immaterialized promises have brought an emerging trends in inter- ethnic conflicts in the country. According to Asnake (2004:55ff), who conducted comprehensive survey on inter -ethnic conflicts in post- 1991 period, the emerging trends of ethnic conflicts related to the federalization of the country, are seen from three broad divisions. These are:

First, inter- ethnic competitions and conflicts in multiple identity regional states. In this regard conflicts occurred due to issue of identity and governance, example *Silte- Gurage*; and *Gamo and Wolaita* as a result of the *WOGAGODA* project. Moreover, conflicts that occurred over the control of administrative structure and the status of ethnic structure; these includes conflicts between *Shekeo – Mezenger (SNNPR)*, *Nuer- Agnuak (Gambella)*, *Berta- Gumuz (Benishagule Gumuz)* etc.

The second broad division is tensions that occurred between regional majorities and settler minorities. The formation of the federal system along ethnic/ linguistic lines and the increased self- assertiveness of ethnic groups are believed to have caused tension between regional majorities and settler community. Relations among the groups pose difficulties because of other subjective and objective factors, such as competition over natural resources, differences in socio- cultural systems and the way the political system order relation. The typical example of such conflict is the conflict between the *Amhara* and *Oromo* in Wollega.

The third and the last category, as to Asnake's classification, is conflict defining regional boundaries. This problem could be caused by the incompatibility of cultural/ ethnic and politico- administrative boundaries, the fluid nature of ethnic identity, contested politico- administrative decision on regional boundaries, age old competition of ethnic groups over such resources as water points and grazing land. The conflicts between *Boran- Gari*, *Afar- Issa* and *Guji - Gedeo* are taken to be good cases in point.

As it shall be argued in the analysis part of this research, the conflict between the *Karrayu Oromo* and *Argobba* groups in the post- 1991 period can be rightly put under the last category for it has become issue over the permanent control of territory. However, it is worth reminding that the broad categorization should not blind us from looking the fact that each conflict case has contextual particularities.

The other analysis on ethnic conflict is made by Ayele and Getachew (2004, cited in Tesfaye, 2007) who have tried to draw the conflict map by making conflict causes the epicenter of the empirical categorization. To them, these conflicts are (A) resource based,

Afar and *Issa*, (B) boundary issue, *Borana- Gari* and (C) language, *Wolaita* and *Gamo* after the WOGAGODA project.

Generally, the above scholarly works taken together are highly informative and clearly discern the multiplicity of causes for ethnic conflicts in the country. They cannot, however, necessarily explain all particular ethnic conflict cases fully, and, hence, any attempt to do so might result in either misinterpretation or under explanation of specific conflict. Moreover, we should be aware of the fact that the above categorization could be viewed simply as emerging patterns, otherwise, there might be conflict that cross- cut the broad divisions outlined above. Here, it is my strong contention that in order to avoid prescribing wrong medicine for ailment of ethnic conflict in the country, each conflict case should be understood in its own existing situation and socio- cultural milieu. Thus, has conceived the contextual study of the *Karrayu - Argobba* conflict.

So far, we have seen ethnic conflicts at the national level but not much is learned by remaining on the level of relative generality. As such, it is useful to try to concretize our particular case study through bringing the geography of literature review specifically to the study area. To that end, it is pertinent to assess the situation of ethnic conflicts in the Awash Valley area. This is what I discuss below.

2.3.2.3. Ethnic conflicts in the Awash Valley: An assessment

One of the areas in Ethiopia that has been vulnerable to rampant intra-and- inter-ethnic conflicts is the Awash Valley sub-region. Geographically, this area is located between 8⁰ and 12⁰ north latitude and 39⁰ and 45⁰ East longitudes. The Awash Basin has four distinct agro-climatic sub-regions, the upper Basin (head waters down to *Koka* dam), the Upper Valley (*Koka* dam to *Metahara*), the Middle Valley (*Metehara* to *Tendaho*), and the lower plains (*Tendaho* to Lake Abe)(Kassahun and Tegegen, 2003:21).

The Awash valley is a home for considerable number of pastoralists' and agro-pastoralists, whose interactions have been beset by chronic conflicts of different scales. The dominant pastoral groups that inhabit the area are the *Karrayu*, *Afar*, *Issa*, *Ittu*, *Arsi Oromo*, and the *Argobba*. So far numerous studies were conducted on issue of inter-

group conflicts in the stated area. A close examination of the existing literatures can tell us that there is much more similarity than differences in their identification of the causes responsible for the conflict. Thus, what seems sound is to give a brief assessment of the conflict situation in the area through synthesizing the predisposing and triggering factors.

To map out the conflict networks in the sub-region, the pastoralist *Karrayu* have conflictual relations with their neighbors, the *Afar*, *Argobba*, *Ittu*, *Arsi Oromo* (Buli, 2001; Ayalew, 2001; 2009). The other serious conflict that remains unsettled is the conflict between the two dominant pastoral groups of the *Afar* and *Issa*(Getachew, 2001).Moreover, the *Afar* had problems with the agro-pastoral groups of the *Argobba*.

Regarding the causes of the conflict, many researchers tried to explain the inter-ethnic conflicts in the area as state- induced conflict. To Ayalew (2001:2), like many other parts of the country, the underlying causes of conflict in the aforementioned area are thought to be economic, environmental and cultural.

The economic cause of the conflict can be perceived from the multiple marginalizations the pastoralists experienced mainly in the post 1960's period. Advocators of the "*marginalization thesis*" Ayalew (2001), Buli (2001), Getachew (2001), and Ali (1994) to mention but only a few, argued that the involvement of the state in the area squarely caused and exacerbated inter-ethnic conflicts.

Here, it should be underscored that the policies and perceptions the state held about Pastoralism and its development are informed, to barrow Ayalew's (2001:51) expressions with '*a lot of misconceptions, faulty generalization, and negative stereotypes*'. Accordingly, pastoral lands in the country are considered as "unoccupied", 'unowned' or 'abandoned'. This, in turn, offers policy ramification for the state to expropriate their traditional land. It is with such conception that the Ethiopian state made direct intervention in the Awash Valley area through the development of large-scale commercial farms initially managed by foreign agro-business in joint venture with the state (Ali, 1994, Ayalew, 2001, Getachew, 2001). Moreover, the establishment of the

Awash National Park (ANP) in 1966 over an area of 830 km² and the construction of *Koka* dam brought a major change in the resource use pattern in the Awash Valley (Ali, 1994). This transformation in resource- use has negatively affected pastoral production system and led to mounting conflicts between pastoralists and other resource-use regimes.

The dwindling of environmental resource and the inhibition of pastoral mobility as before due to state intervention caused many conflicts in the area. In this regard, a good case in point is the existing conflict between *Karrayu* and *Afar*. The *Afar* clan called *Debine* had been the neighbors of the *Karrayu* since time immemorial and was at constant war with the latter. The conflict is associated with the decline of the resource base for livestock which came to the scene largely as a result of the expansion of state owned commercial farms in the region (Ali, 1997; Ayalew, 2001, Getachew, 2001; Buli, 2001). The *Debine* were unable to strain and were forced to push south in the direction of the *Karrayu* grazing lands because they themselves were under strong pressures emanating from *Weima Afar* and other *Afar* clans. The *Weima* were also hard pressed by their traditional enemy the *Issa*. Other *Afar* clans were and are 'encroaching' the traditionally known *Debine* land because they themselves are becoming vulnerable to the expanding 'Melka Sadi' and 'Melka Worer' concession farms and 'Awara Melka' state farm had expropriated a substantial amount of land from *Debine Afar*. The *Debine* cannot go further east to *Alleghedi* plain in the Middle Awash Valley for fear of a great traditional adversary, i.e. the *Issa*. Thus, the *Debine Afar* preferred to push a bit south and is undertaking bloody clashes with the *Karrayu Oromo* (Ayalew, 2001:249).

The other factor for the conflicts in the Awash Valley is socio-cultural. In this regard Buli (2001) stated that, prior to the commencement of state intervention in the area the major cause of conflict between groups was cultural. Such type of conflict was dominant, *inter alia*, between the *Karrayu- Afar*, *Karrayu- Argobba* and the *Afar- Issa*. These conflicts were fought mainly for the sake of achieving social fame.

One thing that needs to be cleared at this juncture is the fact that conflict over scarce resources existed long before state intervention. But what the state has done is that it worsened the situation of scarcity, and, hence, exacerbated the frequency and intensity of conflicts in the area.

Apart from the predisposing factors, there are also triggering factors that lead to conflicts. The triggers in the area are almost the same. In his study on the *Afar-Karrayu* conflict, Asnake (2011:32-33) identified some proximate causes for the conflict. As to him these causes are cattle raiding and homicidal acts, looting and robbery, drought and famine, and the involvement of spoilers. This reality also holds true to other conflict cases in the sub-region. Here, the *Karrayu - Argobba* conflict by itself needs to be viewed from such angle too.

Chapter Three

3. Setting the General Context of the Study

Introduction

The pastoralist *Karrayu* and the *Argobba* agro-pastoralist ethnic groups are adjoining communities who count the age of their interrelations in centuries. The two groups used to have both symbiotic and conflictual relations. They used to have positive social relations and maintained economic inter dependence. However, all these do not help them to avoid periodic violent conflict that hallmarks their contemporary relationships.

Thus, to better understand the conflict between the two groups it is imperative to set its general context. The general context in this regard encompasses the myth of their historical origin, early settlement in the area and mobility, their social organizations and mode of subsistence. In addition, this chapter also set the multiple lenses that shall be used to capture the aforementioned conflict and explain it accordingly following its trajectory.

3.1. Karrayu: Geography and the People

3.1.1. Geography

As per the post -1991 administrative restructuring the *Karrayu* land named as Fentale *Woreda* is located within the administrative umbrella of Eastern Showa zone of Oromia Regional State. Astronomically, the *Woreda* is located between $30^{\circ} 30'$ to $40^{\circ} 11'$ longitude East and $8^{\circ} 42'$ to $9^{\circ} 00'$ latitude North. The administrative seat of the district is Metehara town, which is located at a distance of 200kms southeast from the country's metropolis-Addis Ababa. Regarding its relative geographical location, the Fentale district is bounded by the *Debine Afar* in the north, *Arsi Oromo* in the south, the Awash National Park and the *Ittu* of west Harerge in the south, the *Argobba* in the west, and the *Amhara* in the district of Berehet and Minjar- Shenkora in the south west.

The topography of the *Woreda* constitutes flat, undulating plains, hills and mountainous ridges. The altitude of the *Woreda* varies between 950 meter and 2007 meter above mean sea level (ams1). The highest elevation in the area is mount Fentale (FWARDO, 2007).

An altitude of greater than 1500 meter amsl is located merely around the bottom of mount Fentale. The plain areas around mount Fentale elevated between 1050 meter and 1022 meter above mean sea level.

As to metrological data registered at Awash Station (1965-1984) and Matahara Station (1985-2007) in the *Karrayu* area, the annual rainfall ranges from 276.5 mm to 898.5 mm with mean annual rain fall of 544.7 mm. The study area receives high rain fall from June to September. There are about four to eight dry consecutive months in a year that starts as of October. Moreover, the analysis of metrological data recorded at the aforementioned stations reveal at the mean monthly temperature ranges from 27.2⁰C to 38.3⁰C where as that of mean minimum monthly temperature ranges from 9.8⁰c to 24.3⁰c. The mean annual minimum and maximum temperatures are 18.2⁰C and 33.6⁰c respectively. These indicate that the temperature of the area is generally high throughout the year. Accordingly, this tells us that Fentale district is located within *Kolla* or semi- arid climatic zone of Ethiopia.

The soil of Fentale district is infertile and low in organic matter. This is mainly attributed to geological formation resulting from volcanic activities that have taken place in the area (FWARDO, 2007). The type of soil and the climatic condition of the area taken together made rain fed agriculture extremely difficult. To Ayalew (2001:12) this reality explains why the *Karrayu* community largely depends on pastoral mode of subsistence rather than on crop production.

Regarding its hydrology, Lake *Beseka* and Awash River comprise the main hydrologic elements in the *Karrayu* area. Awash River is the perennial river that crossed the area. Beseka on the other hand is one of the highly mineralized water in the country (Haji, 2009:28). This lake covers an ever expanding area of the study *Woreda*. This natural lake, along with the Awash National Park and commercial Estate Farms, alienated large tract of land form the *Karrayu* and complicated their life and relations with their neighboring groups too.

3.1.2. Karrayu: Myth of origin and settlement pattern

The *Karrayu* society is a clan of the Oromo nation, the numerous ethnic groups in Africa (Baxter, et, al 1998:7; Asmeron, 2006:116), and the largest on the Horn of Africa. Regarding their origin, *Karrayu's* oral tradition held that prior to their migration in the 16th century; their original homeland was *Meda Wollabu* (Ayalew, 2001:152; informants³). Here, it should be noted that *Meda Wollabu* is a place which based on the current state of historical knowledge is taken to be the original home land of the whole Oromo nation.

According to their oral tradition, the *Karrayu* left their original home land during the great population movement of the 16th century and gradually settled in different parts of the country. Taking their cross distribution in to account, Asmerom (2006:163), asserted that the *Karrayu* clan is the most expansive part of the Oromo nation. Today, the *Karrayu* are found at the Awash Valley (*Fenale Woreda*), *Borana*, *Bale* at *Hulul*, and the *Jille Soba* of southern Wollo (Ayalew, 2001), and they are also found as far south as the Tana river in Kenya, among the *Orma* (Asmeron, 2006). This reality soundly contradicts with the assumption of others, who culturally and territorially grouped this clan under the *Borena*. This is because such assertion seems inconsiderate of the fact that the *Karrayu* exists in what is presumed to be both *Barentuma* and *Borana* country.

Regarding the history of their settlement in the Awash Valley area, so far, no one can give the exact date. However, based on *Karrayu's* oral tradition and using their Gada chronology, Ayalew (2001) estimated that the *Karrayu* inhabited the aforementioned area since 200 years ago. To further explain the history of their settlement to this area, I have largely drawn on the master piece of Ayalew's (2001) book and ,of course, ascertained by knowledgeable *Karrayu* elder informants⁴ and is precisely presented here below.

³ Sheik Muktar Fentalle, an incumbent Gada leader, interviewed on 10 February, 2009 at Gelcha Kebele; Haji Qesero Jillo is ex- Gada leader, interviewed on 12 February, 2009 at Metehara.

⁴ Haji Qesero Jillo, interviewed on 12 February, 2009 at Metehara; Haji Roba Saqale, a renowned elder and member of the government organized 'Peace Committee', interviewed on 23 February, 2009-Metehara.

The 16th century population movement of the Oromo resulted in the re-union of sub-clans or clans, while contrarily it also resulted in bloodshed among the same branch. This reality holds true to the *Karrayu* society too. The first phase of their movement took the *Karrayu* from *Mormor* to *Mada Wollabu*. During the second movement, *Karrayu* elders held that their clan moved from *Mada Wollabu* along the chains of mountains towards the region of *Bosset* and settled at a place called *Hora-Somma*.

Nevertheless, before they moved to their present settlement area, their Abba Gada's⁵ and Abba Dula's⁶ sent *Gaddu*(spy), a reconnaissance squad to investigate the kind of people they would encounter and gather information pertaining to the region itself. Around the Middle Awash, the first investigating group met people who were called *Hawasso* (they also call themselves '*Leenca Fentale* which means lion of *Fentale*). As they did not fight without the order of the Abba Gada, the scout returned and reported about their encounters. Another small band was again sent to identify the language of the *Hawasso* but it failed to realize its language. For the third time the Abba Gada sent a huge force with a mission of fighting and looting the *Hawasso*. The band accomplished its mission and yet failed to identify the identity of the group they conquered. It was only the last mission that was successful in identifying the language of the *Hawasso*. Alemayehu et al (2006) stated that the *Hawasso* group was perhaps one of the sub-groups that detached itself and remained behind around the Middle Awash during the movement of the main *Karrayu* branch.

Since their first arrival in the Awash Valley, the *Karrayu* were able to control wider territory. Regarding this, a key informant⁷ said that the size of their settlement area is described as "the territory stretching beyond Awash found below *Horra-Somma* was nine". However, owing to the presence of keen adversaries around them, their territory waned gradually. At the present time, most of these lost territories are found within the administrative boundary of *Afar* Regional State and a significant number of *Dulecha*

⁵ Abba Gada is the leader of the ruling Gada Assembly.

⁶ Abba Dula is leader of war among the Oromo.

⁷ Fentale Gubu, a knowledgeable elder, interviewed on 1 March, 2009 at Metehara.

Karrayu live in this region. Even one of the districts in this region is known by the name *Dulecha*.

Genealogically, the *Karrayu* clan is part of the *Barentuma* confederacy. This clan consists of two main sub tribes named *Basso* and *Dulecha*⁸. The same genealogy tries to present the blood relation of every main tribe as far as a family (*Balbala*) level. This genealogical structure is based on the remoteness and closeness of blood relations among the community. Apart from blood ties, the *Karrayu* have also an organizational structure formed on the basis of socio-political objectives (Alemayehu, et al, 2006:199). Based on *Karrayu* elders Alemayehu, et al stated that there were conflicts among the *Karrayu* over issues of scarce resources. It was to deal with these intra-clan conflicts that the *Karrayu* established sub-clan organization based on social and economic objectives. Moreover, it was intended to develop the confidence of every *Karrayu* sub-clan to move into or settle in the territory of other *Karrayu* sub-clans without fear.

Regarding their pattern of settlement, the two tribes of the *Karrayu* Oromo, named *Dulecha* and *Basso* had their distinct settlement area. However, one branch can settle in the area of the other. The pattern of settlement of the two branches is based on the general Oromo tradition of seniority. Accordingly, the *Dulacha* (the elder one) took the right direction, and the *Basso* settles on the left direction (Alemayehu, et al, 2006:202, informant⁹).

3.2. Socio- political organization

It is true that while northern Ethiopia, the seat of the classical Ethiopian civilization, offers few cases of democratic governance in the past, the southern half of the country contrarily witnessed certain democratic and egalitarian forms of administration and decision making. The various ethnic groups in this part of the country have their own indigenous socio- political organizations that evolved over time. Of these institutions the

⁸ For more on the genealogy of the *Karrayu* refer Alemayehu, et al (2006) History of the Oromo to the Sixteen Century.

⁹ Sheik Muktar Fentalle, interviewed on 10 February, 2009 at Gelcha Kebele; Haji Qesero Jillo , interviewed on 12 February, 2009 at Metehara.

Gada system of the Oromo is perhaps the most famous one. Despite its gradual weakness, the *Gada* system is still serving as a symbolic representation of pan- Oromo identity and solidarity. The *Karrayu* clan as an integral part of the larger Oromo ethnic group has their own separate and autonomous *Gada* government.

The ethnographic studies undertaken so far on the *gada* system lucidly discern that the system is very complex in which its complete understanding is yet to be made. Due to this reason, there exists ambiguity in the definitions offered to it. But according to Asmerom, a social anthropologist who did a standard work on the *gada* system defined the concept as follows. "The Gada system is an institution that represents an extreme development of a type of social structure known to anthropologists as age sets" (1973:50). The same author further describes the system as "..... a system of Gada class (luba) that succeed each other every eight years (among the Oromo) in assuming political, military, judicial, legislative and ritual responsibilities. Each *gada class* ¹⁰ is a segment of generation" (Asmerom, 1973: 31). It is an age grade system where the power to administer their respective clan (community) was transferred to the fourth age grade every eight years.

The basic structure of the *gada* government is similar across clans, but what is different is the number of *gada grades*.¹¹ In this regard, the maximum number of *gada grades* is found to be eleven among the *Borana* and the minimum is five among the *Macha* of central, southern, and south western Ethiopia. Similarly the *Karrayu* of the Awash Valley has five *gada grades* (*Gada shenen*). These are namely *Robelle*, *Dirmejji*, *Melba*, *Michille*, and *Halchissa*.

As to Ayalew (2001:170) the two tribal divisions of the *Karrayu* Oromo, *Dulecha* and *Basso*, have their own autonomous *gada* rule. In the past, as Alemayehu, et al

¹¹ Gada class is "the group of people who share the same status and who perform their rites of passage together" (Asmerom, 1973:51).

¹² Gada grades are "the stages of development through which the groups (classes) pass" (Asmerom, 1973:51).

(2006:200), based on *Karrayu* elders, states that the two clans have a separate settlement and administrative zone after they formed a tribal organization on the basis of social and political objectives. Accordingly, the *Karrayu* of the *Basso* branch come to have their center named *Tarre Ledi*, and the *Dulecha* on the other hand has a center at *Tarre Lugoo*. The same source stated that formerly the *Karrayu* of the Awash Valley had also common politico- religious centers. The first such center of the stated people was at *Horra Somma* (*Tullu Boset*) which latter on was replaced by another center named *Gadaa Kalala* (*Malka Sadi*). *Malka Sadi* in the language of the Oromo means three rivers. The place got its appellation from the fact that it is located close to the intersection of three rivers of *Awash* (*Awes*), *Kessem*(*Bulga*) and *Qabana*. As per the present administrative division, this area which formerly was *Karrayu*'s settlement is now found within the regional state of *Afar*.

The other institution that should not be escaped without discussion is the spiritual institution called *Qallu*. The *Qallu* institution is highly complex and highly instructive institution that has a great interdependence with the *gada* system. While explaining the meaning of the *Qallu* and its role (inter dependence) with the *gada* system, Asmerom stated the following;

The *Qallu* are the ritual leaders of the Oromo, representing the two great societal halves of the nation, whose shrines are historically associated with the cradle of lands of the Borana and the Barentuma Oromo. Oromo pilgrims who came from far and wider honor them; to take part in the octennial ritual called *muda* ("The anointing") The *Qallu* are showered with gifts, and, in turn, they give their blessings. They are empowered to oversee election of *Gada* leaders but they and their kin are forever barred from holding such office. They may not bear arms or shed blood (1973:100-101).

The *Qallu* ritual leaders are the most senior men in the kinship. Among the *Karrayu*, like other Oromo clans, the *Qallu* played a preponderant role in indigenous conflict resolution. The *Gada* system and *Qallu* institutions together have been central to the

socio- political organization of the *Karrayu* society and were a marker of their pan-Oromo ethnic identity.

Despite their relevance to the lives of the stated community, these highly venerated indigenous institutions of the *Karrayu* were gradually but certainly weakened. As to Ayalew (2001), of course, confirmed by my key informants¹² there are two major factors that were responsible to the gradual erosion and weakness of the system from the *Karrayu*'s socio-political landscape. Both of these factors are external to the community, in the sense that they came from outside the community.

The first factor that eroded the hold of the *gada* rule is the incorporation of the *Karrayu* society into the administrative umbrella of the central state structure that had commenced since the period of Menelik II. The cumulative result of this was, to use Ayalew's statement (2001:179) '*state institutions gained prominence and supremacy over indigenous social structure*' (my emphasis).

The second factor is related with the Islamization of the *Karrayu* society. As it is known, formerly, i.e. before they espoused Islam, the *Karrayu* society had their own traditional religion, *Waqeffana*. It is centered on the belief in *Waqqa* (the sky-God), the creators of everything in this world. But later on, of course, recently with the coming of Muslim *Ittu* Oromo from western *Harrerge* Islam take its root among the *Karrayu* pastoralists. Their acceptance of Islamic religion made the *Karrayu* converts not to revere, as they did before, their long standing and cherished *gada* values and institutions. In addition, though it seems less significant, the dispersal of clans of the same tribe in different directions is believed to have its own adverse impact on the weakening of the *Gada* and *Qallu* institutions.

¹² Sheik Muktar Fentalle, interviewed on 10 February, 2009 at Gelcha Kebele; Haji Qesero Jillo, interviewed on 12 February, 2009 at Metehara.

However, in the post- 1991 period, informant¹³ disclosed that there is an ever strong feeling of going back to the source among the community. So they still celebrate their *gada* tradition. But its role has been undermined to be no more than a symbolic one. As such, the *Karrayu gada* leaders did not of course exercise their legitimate power as before but yet played a good part particularly in the resolution of both intra and inter-ethnic conflicts via the use of their traditional wisdom.

3.3. Economic activities

Traditionally, the *Karrayu* engaged in pastoral mode of production by raising camels, sheep, goats, and donkeys. To be more specific, for a long period of time in the past, livestock production has been the dominant economic activities which proffer subsistence for *Karrayu* households (Ayalew, 2001:106). However, owing to different reasons the *Karrayu's* economic activities underwent gradual but certainly conspicuous transformations.¹⁴ Nevertheless, notwithstanding the transformation pastoralism yet remains the predominant subsistence economic base for the *Karrayu* households. They have been engaged on multi species pastoral activities.

According to the results of the more recent study by FWARDO, in the year 2007, there were about 155,633 cattle, 119,078 goats, 97,329 sheep, 91,482 camels and 2089 donkeys were found in *Fentale Woreda*. To describe it using percentage, the number of cattle ranks first (35%) followed by goat (22.6%), sheep (21%), and camel (20%). The least percentage is accounted by donkeys which constituted only 0.4 % of the total livestock.

Although a recent phenomenon as compared to the overall history in the aspects of their subsistence economy, the *Karrayu* society has also commenced other augmenting and / or alternative way of life. To put differently, the *Karrayu* since more recent times have started to practice small scale irrigation based and rain –fed farming production.

¹³ Fentalle Jarra, a *Karrayu* elder from Banti Kebele. I had an interview with him on 5 March, 2009 at Metehara.

¹⁴ For more detail and excellent synthesis on the *Karrayu's* economic transformation see, *inter alia*, the master piece of Ayalew (2001) *Pastoralism under Pressure: Land Alienation and Pastoral Transformations among the Karrayu of Eastern Ethiopia, 1941 to the present*.

It is an incontrovertible reality that the Awash Valley, a home for considerable number pastoralists, has proved to be a show case for unbridled pastoral crisis emanated from state policy and intervention in the area. As both informants and handful of researchers vividly stated, the imperial regime of Ethiopia since the 1960s launched direct intervention in the Awash Valley through establishing commercial Estate Farms. This program has a purpose of producing surplus and financing other sectors of the national economy (Ali, 1997:37). Moreover, as to Ayalew (2001:67-68) the evolution of pastoral policies and development interventions in the country in general was made by the government for the sake of winning legitimacy and acceptance from the west and expectation for better life by the people. However, the pastoral policies have been informed by 'flawed assumption, and generalization about the primitive nature of pastoralism and pastoral land use and tenure arrangement' (Ayalew 2001:68). This made the policies extractive, which aimed to extract economic surplus for the national economy. This reality happens among the *Karrayu*, and, hence, brought direct adverse bearings on their economy.

The establishments of commercial farms and conservation schemes compelled the *Karrayu* to loss their prime dry season grazing land, deprived access to water resources, displaced them from their traditional lands, enhanced vulnerability to drought (Ayalew , 2001:203-213)). It also inhibited their free mobility, which is an imperative for pastoral way of life. This reality plus their progressive integration to the market economy have brought marked economic transformations among the *Karrayu*. The transformation in the economy is an adaptive response to the chronic resources scarcity, largely a socially generated one, and its attendant repercussion in weakening their pastoral means of livelihood. As such, currently the pastoralist *Karrayu* have commenced to cultivate maize, sorghum, ground nut and onion both in rain fed and small-scale irrigation agriculture using water from the Awash River (FWARDO, 2007).

Moreover, according to informant¹⁵ the *Karrayu* society also earns revenue from the sale of a fire wood and charcoal to the urban dwellers of Metehara town. Furthermore, growing number of *Karrayu* are also hired as a wage laborers at Metehara Estate Farm and sugar factory and Nura Era Plantations.

3.4. An overview of the *Argobba* society

3.4.1. History of origins

Like the origins of many ethnic groups in Ethiopia, tracing the origin of the *Argobba* people is one of a very controversial and debatable historical theme. A sober and close examination of the data generated from the available secondary sources and the oral information gathered from knowledgeable *Argobba* elders¹⁶ clearly testify the aforementioned assertion. Accordingly, different people and writers offer divergent, often conflictual explanations, about *Argobba* early history of origin. Generally, the persisting discordant explanations on the *Argobba* history of origin can be rightly boiled down to three theses. So here below attempt shall be made to present and critically question, albeit briefly, all the three hypothesis.

The first hypothesis about the origin of the *Argobba* people argued that the *Argobba* group has external origin. According to this oral tradition, the *Argobba* are an immigrant people who came from the Arabian land. This assumption is, of course, deeply established and rooted among the *Argobba* people themselves. The *Argobba* people traced their origin from Arabia and considered themselves as descendants of the Arabs who migrated to the hinterlands of Ethiopia (Braukemper, 1977:27; Abebe, 1992:80; Tesfaye, 2000:197; informants¹⁷).

Though it is popular oral tradition, this explanation about *Argobba* origin is highly questionable and cannot pass the critical test of historical enquiries. Its convincing limitations can be vividly conceived from three cardinal queries. These are from which

¹⁵ Gebi Hawas interviewed on 9 March, 2009 at Metehara.

¹⁶ Sheik Hussien Seid, a religious leader, and Mohammed Nur, a knowledgeable elder interviewed on 10 January and 7 January, 2012 at Arerti.

¹⁷ Ibid

Arabian clan they descended; secondly the route they had taken up on their migration; and the third one is linguistic evidence on the root word of *Argobba* itself.

On the whole, the answers given by the *Argobba* for the above questions are found to be different. Regarding its clan origin, some say that they are from the Benial-Hamaya Quraish Arab clan while others claim that they descended from followers of Prophet Mohammed, who came to Ethiopia in the early days of Islam. There is also a difference over the route via which they came to Ethiopia. Some argued that they came through Massawa while others say that they came through the port of Zeila (Braukemper, 1977:22; Abebe, 1992:80-81; Tesfaye, 2000:196:197).

Moreover, the linguistic evidence given to justify and accrue credence for the above explanation is neither exempted from contradiction. According to interviewed *Argobba* elders¹⁸ and written sources, the etymological origin of the word '*Argobba*' is divergent. The first view, which is a widely held tradition of the people, maintain that the term *Argobba* is derived from the amalgam of two discrete words 'Arab and '*gebba*' (which literally means Arab entered'). Others say that the term is derived from '*har*' and '*Gobba*' which means 'silk and mountain'. This perhaps used to refer to the economic activity of the *Argobba* in silk trade. Still others held that etymologically the term emanated from the combination of the two words '*rahmed*' and '*gebba*' (which means 'prosperity entered') (informant: Nur Ali Seid¹⁹; Stitz, 1973: 190-192; Braukemper, 1977:22; Abebe, 1992:80; Tesfaye, 2000: 1996-1997).

At this juncture, it seems pertinent to point out that the above contradictory explanations provided by the people themselves and the limited substantial evidences that we have at our disposal made the hypothesis hardly true and convincing. Moreover, probably owing to the potential and/or actual implications of having foreign origin to their contemporary political quest of the people, many still questioned this thesis and said that they are an

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ A perceptive elder, who possess a good deal of knowledge on the history of the *Argobba*. I interviewed him on 13 February 2011 at Metebela-capital of Berehet Woreda

indigenous people who are closely related to and involved in the historical development carried out in Ethiopia at large.

The second hypothesis, which of course secured a weighted and growing credibility about the historical origin of the *Argobba* people, vehemently argued that they are among the indigenous people of Ethiopia who embraced Islam very early. Historians who advocated this thesis, namely Trimingham (1965), Tadesse (1972), and Sergew (1972) argued that the *Argobba* are the indigenous Islamized people who accept Islam as a result of Ethiopia's early contact with the Arab world. According to Tadesse (1972:41) and Sergew (1972:279), the *Argobba* are one among the many semetic speaking people who moved south wards during the Axumite era and gradually settled in different parts of the country.

The last and the third hypothesis argued that the *Argobba* people are an assimilated people of the native people and the Arab immigrants. Scholars like Abebe (1992:83) and Ahmed (2006:17) tried to substantiate their argument in asserting the *Argobba* as a mixed people by referring the Arab immigrants in Ethiopia at different times and the close inter-relation they made with the indigenous people.

Here, it should be noted that the present day social make up of Ethiopia is largely the result of the fission and fusion of the various native people in the country. There was the cultural assimilation and intermarriages between immigrant Arabs and the indigenous people. However, it is yet quite difficult and has no solid ground to arrive at a conclusion that the distinct *Argobba* people as a whole are assimilated simply by looking the limited assimilation of the Arabs among the leading families of the *Argobba*.

3.4.2. Early settlements and mobility

Here, before I delve into the discussion of *Argobba* early settlement and movement across the horizon of time, I found four points to be made clear from the outset. The first point, of course, a core one is that though there exist contending and counter points about the historical origin of the *Argobba* group, this research is done based on the second

hypothesis which considers the *Argobba* as an indigenous Islamized people of the country. The other point is that tracing the original settlement of a given people is a highly an uphill task for scholars. This taxing reality did not exempt the *Argobba* people too. As such, since the early settlement of the *Argobba* is obscure, this study merely attempts to cover the period from when the *Argobba* are refereed as people in written Ethiopian literature. The third issue is that most of the sources used in this thesis associated *Argobba*, *Yifat* and *Wolasma* to each other and the existence of the *Wolasma* title among the *Argobba* people up to this time, and the researcher of this study also regards these three entities as interrelated to each other.

The final critical point is a methodological imperative related to the relevance *per se* of this sub-topic to the theme of this particular thesis. As it shall be disclosed in the analysis part (chapter four), both the *Argobba* and *Karrayu* groups have proffered historical reasons to justify their respective cause in the conflict. Of course, the purpose of this study is not to justify the conflict. Its intent is rather to render as much as possible a critical and dispassionate explanation to it. But to do so, the history of their prior settlement especially in the present areas which are the bone of contentions between the study groups must be explicated on its own right. This is because it gives us the general context about the groups' relations (both symbiotic and adversarial) in historical terms and also helps us to delineate the contours of the conflict.

According to written sources southeastern *Shoa* in general and *Gedem Goze* in particular is considered as the first homeland of the *Argobba*. The *Argobba* people lived in the eastern escarpment of the Great Rift Valley system particularly in south eastern *Shoa* for at least 800 years (Braukemper, 1977:39-40; Abebe, 1992:84-85). Based on the current state of knowledge, it is safe to conclude that southeast *Shoa* is the original home land of the *Argobba*. It was from there that the *Argobba* moved to other parts of their current and previous settlement areas particularly to the north and south along the escarpment slopes from this area.

Like the transhumant *Karrayu* who are considered to be the most expansive clan among the *Barentuma*, and even among the Oromo, the *Argobba* people are one of the sparsely settled ethnic groups in Ethiopia. On the basis of the post-1991 state re-structuring and its administrative divisions, the *Argobba* people are found spreading in four regional states; namely *Amhara*, *Afar*, *Oromia*, and *Harari* regions (Tesfaye, 2000:195-196).

There are multiple factors that account for the movement of the *Argobba* group to various parts of the country. As to source, search for new land, religious evangelization, war and territorial expansion, and economic pressure determined the settlement and mobility of the *Argobba* people (Aklilu, 2000:175-182). In the late 13th and early 14th centuries, capitalizing on the weakening of the Christian Kingdom, the *Argobba* people were able to expand their settlement by raiding and incorporating the territories of their neighbors, including territories held by the Christian Kingdom (Mered, 1973; 622-623; Braukemper, 1977:27; Abebe, 1992:110; Uhlig, 2003:333).

It is believed that it was during this period that the *Argobba* settled in a vast area by expanding in the north to northern *Shoa*, southern *Wollo*, in the east to the *Afar* lowlands, in the west to the Christian territories of the highland environments, and in the south to northern *Fatagar* and *Dawaro* and to the present day *Arsi* zone. These areas taken together are now dominated by the Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups. The *Argobba*, however, are believed to have once dominated these regions, perhaps in the early medieval period (Stiz, 1973:190; Aklilu, 2000:175; Uhlig, 2003:333).

Argobba predominance in the area did not, however, last for a long period of time. This was because of the rise of strong contending force to its dominance -Christian Highland Kingdom and the relation they held with them. On the whole, the territorial boundary of the *Argobba* peoples settlement waned and waxed depending on the relative power balance they maintained with their contending neighbors (Taddesa, 1972:129-147; Braukemper, 1977:24-26; Waldron, 1984:51). Moreover, the loss of the state of *Yifat's* trading position in the region also partly contributed to the reduction of *Argobba* territorial holdings (Mered, 1973:622-623; Braukemper, 1977:26; Abebe, 1992:100).

Other fundamental factors that determined the mobility and shaped the settlement of the *Argobba* people had occurred in the 16th century, the most eventful period in Ethiopian history. This happened mainly due to the Muslim-Christian war and the subsequent major population movements of the Oromo from their original homeland *Meda Wollabu*. According to scholarly views, these major events changed the demographic map of Ethiopia. In this regard, the *Argobba*, who lived at the cross road between the Christian highland and the lowlands dominated by the muslim Sultanates, their boundary and settlement pattern were highly effected to the new developments of the 16th century (Waldron, 1984:51; Abebe, 1992:120; Uhlig, 2003:133).

To make it more clear, the war of Ahmed *Gragn* which devastated the powerful Christian kingdom gave golden opportunity for the *Argobba* to expand their territories to the Christian domain in two ways; first, as being a member of the invading forces, they were able to obtain their own share from the victories and second, as they settled immediately next to the Christian kingdom territories with some experience of settlements in the previous centuries exploited the advantage to resettlement and establish news settlements in the invaded and vacant areas abandoned by '*colonist settlers*' of the Christian Kingdom(Abebe,1992:104).

However, the geographical map and settlement of the *Argobba* was later affected due to the counter attacks of the Christian forces to revert what happened during the invasion of Ahmed *Gragn* and the conquest and expansion of the Oromo people who brought a far reaching adverse effects on *Argobba's* settlement (Braukemper, 1977:27; Waldron, 1984; 51; Abebe, 1992: 120).

In its counter attack, the Christian Kingdom re- occupied and established resettlement in its previous holdings either as a military '*colonist settlement*' or as a civilian people settlements. By this time, the *Argobba* lost what they had acquired during the wars of Ahmed *Gragn* (Stiz, 1973:191-192; Shack, 1974:143; Braukemper, 1977:27; Abebe, 1992:111). This development highly reduced the territorial holdings of the *Argobba* people.

The ferocious attack on the *Argobba's* territory that threatens the very existence of the people came from the expansionist forces of the Oromo, who began to penetrate first to the occupied territories of the *Argobba* in *Arsi*, *Chercher* and *Harar* and later to the hinter land of the *Argobba* in southeastern *Shoa*. As to sources, the Oromo expanded to the heart of the *Argobba* lands from the south particularly from *Harar* and *Chercher* area starting from the mid 16th century (Shack, 1974: 143; Stiz, 1975:191; Abebe, 1992: 108,111). By the end of the 16th century, the Oromos almost conquered a large portion of the *Argobba* homelands both in the south (*Harar* and *Arsi*) and in the north (*Wollo* and *Shoa*) (Waldron, 1984:51;Abebe, 1992).

The *Argobba* people were able to survive from the serious danger of complete invasion posed by the Oromo expansion by using two basic strategies. The first and most important strategy they used was the shift of their settlement to inaccessible mountain terrains and to the hill tops that have a strategic military importance to defend themselves from any adversaries. This strategy made the use of the Oromo cavalry squarely difficult and inconvenient to raid the mountainous terrains (Braukemper 1977: Waldron, 1984; Abebe, 1992: 111-112). Here, it should be noted that most of the present *Argobba* villages in central Ethiopia (including my study area) are found in these mountainous terrains and the house construction and location of the villages suggest that they are certainly constructed for defensive purpose. The other strategy is the fact that they forged military alliance with Christian Highland Kingdom, and, hence, have received military aid. By doing so, they rescued themselves from being completely swallowed by the Oromo and even able to push the scattered Oromo settlers who occupied some parts of mountainous and bush areas (Stiz, 1975:78; Abebe, 1992:122).

The military assistance from the Christian Highland Kingdom, however, posed another major threat on the *Argobba* as it was followed by political expansion and new settlement of the Amhara in the conquered *Argobba* land because most of their land was regarded by the Christian Kingdom as “*spoils of war, in which the Amhara governor could disposed of it at will*” (Stiz, 1975:78; Abebe, 1992:122; emphasis added).

It was, however, during the reign of emperor Menelik II that the current *Argobba* settlements took their final shape. During this period, the *Wolasma* rulers of the *Argobba* ceased to have any political power as it was dominated by the *Shoan* governors. Thus, the subsequent expansion of the Amhara settlement highly reduced the territories of the *Argobba* people and finally confined them in less fertile, hilly and environmentally less favorable areas in which they still occupy and live there (Stitz, 1974: 19; Abebe, 1992: 210-212). Even though there were other factors that compelled the *Argobba* to move into new places even in the 20th century, such as famine and trade, it was at the end of the 19th century that the *Argobba* territories had taken its final shape. In this regard, for instance, we can find a good number of *Argobba* traders in the town of *Metehara*- the capital of *Fental woreda*.

3.5. The Argobba: Language and religion

It is beyond doubt that language is one of the central markers of ethnic identity. In post-1991 federal Ethiopia's political re-engineering, the state put the premium on language as a major perimeter for a certain group to qualify as a distinct ethnic identity and hence, have constitutional right to self- government.

The *Argobba* people speak a language called *Argobbigna*, which belongs to the south Ethiopia group of Semitic languages and has close linguistic affinities with Amharic but it is distinct (Shack, 1974:143; Tesfaye, 2000:197; Ahmed, 2007:123-128). The language has yet no alphabet and there is no written literature in *Argobbigna*.

Given its multi- ethnic composition, the history of modern Ethiopian state has largely been characterized by ethnic domination, marginalization and assimilation (Merera, 2003; Yishak, 2008). Results from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussion²⁰ disclosed that the *Argobba* ascribed themselves as one of the marginalized ethnic groups in Ethiopia whose asymmetric relation with the power holders and their acculturation to nearby ethnic groups brought an adverse repercussion through weakening the use of their language as a mother tongue.

²⁰ The FGD with the Argobba was undertaken at Arerti, on February, 17, 2012.

It is the aggregate results of these *assimilation* and *integration*²¹ which brought linguistic exchange and let the *Argobba* languages being submerged by and giving way to *Amharic*, *Oromiffa* and *Afar* languages (Tesfaye, 2000). It is plainly perceivable that during the last centuries there has been the continuous decrease in the number of *Argobba* speakers. It is this historical reality that render justification for Ullendorff, who nearly before four decades, stated that “*Argobba* is -rather was spoken to the north east of Addis Ababa. It is disappearing rapidly in favour of *Amharic*, and only a few hundred elderly people are still able to speak it”. This assertive statement was, of course, challenged by Stitz (1973:189) who argued that Ullendorff’s claim perhaps indicates future developments, otherwise there were areas where *Argobba* is the first language, where children and women use *Argobba* at home even, when, of course, the men and also sometimes women speak either *Amharic* or *Oromigna* as second language.

Both informants²² and written sources unanimously concur that despite the assimilation and integration of the *Argobba*, their language did not disappear altogether. Rather, it is currently spoken in the rural *kebeles* of Amhara Regional State, in Oromia special zone - *Shonke* at *Gobera kebele*, in northern Shoa zone at the districts of *Weqet*, *Meriye*, *Ansertu*, *Woreba* rural *kebeles*; in the district of *Ankober* at the surrounding of *Aliyu Amba* and *Sebradin* peasant associations. In addition, within *Berehet woreda* of same zone, *Argobbigna* is being spoken in the environs of *Metebela* town and at the rural *kebeles* of *Miqagn* and *Mahfud*. Moreover, the language is spoken in *Tarma ber* district, and in the regional state of *Afar* within *Gachine* special *woreda* of the *Argobba* (Amhed, 2007: 126). Nowadays the *Argobba* are making a consorted effort to revive their language.

It is beyond doubt that while drawing the balances sheet of EPRDF’s political policy, one can put its contribution to the promotion of ethnic identity to its credit side. The growing

²²As analytical concepts, integration and assimilation refer to different processes. Assimilation means vertical relationship between minorities and Majorities which the latter incorporates the former. Integration on the other hand is supposed to take place in horizontal relationship when groups at equal level tend to integrate in to the culture, values, and ways of living of the other and vice versa (Asebe, 2007:15).

²² Sheik Hussien Seid, and Mohammed Nur, interviewed on 10 January and 7 January, 2011 at Arerti-capital of Minjar- Shenkora Woreda.

ethnification of politics since then has positively correlated with the development of ethnic consciousness. It is within this wider socio-political contexts of contemporary Ethiopia that the (re)-construction of *Argobba* ethnic identity should be understood.

Groups' distinctiveness strongly depends on self-identification and ascription by others in social interaction. One of the objective criteria which both the in -groups and outsiders use to label other as separate ethnic identity is language. In this regard, the *Argobba* people, who have started but only late to (re)-construct their respective pan- *Argobba* ethnic identity, are trying to resuscitate their language. Though it is too late to judge the success of their linguistic nationalism, their effort, however, has been met with three problems born out of the nature of their scattered geographical settlement, their continuing relations with other linguistic groups and its result, and the third one is the post- 1991 political structure of the larger state.

To explain the last point more, the *Argobba* people, as stated above, are widely distributed and lived in four different regional states, each adopting its own working language and language of education. Furthermore, in all the regions, the *Argoabb* are a minority group whose relations with the majority lead them to abandon the use of their language in favor of *Amharic* and *Oromigna*. More importantly, the major factor that hinders the development of their language is the fact that the different regions are found to be reluctant or less willing to let the promotion of *Argobba* language. But notwithstanding the aforementioned predicaments the *Argobba* people, along with others stakeholders, are striving to revive their language. As part of their move, they started to prepare a comprehensive dictionary and planned to teach their children at school. However, its end result is to be seen in any future time.

Regarding their religion, the *Argobba* people are predominantly Islam. They espoused Islam early in the history of the country and played a paramount role in the expansion of Islam to different parts of Ethiopia. According to Braukemper (1977), the *Argobba* embraced Islam in the early 12th century.

On religious counts, the *Argobba* claimed themselves to be God- fearing. They adopted the laws of the Qu'ran(moslems Holybook) to their local tradition and the *Qadi* and elders administer the community. Children of both sexes learn the Qu'ran from early age. Boys who wish to continue their Qu'ranic studies go to *Ulamma* schools. If they are far from their parents, they sustain themselves by begging much like the '*kollo temaris* (itinerant) Christian students (Aklilu, 2000:181; informant; Umar Abdalla²³).

The *Argobba* asserts that they are the first ethnic group to accept Islam. They say that Islam entered Ethiopia via their ancestors. For them, the history of *Argobba* and the history of the coming of Islam to Ethiopia are one and the same (Aklilu, 2000:181; informant; Umar Abdalla). Unlike their language, the *Argobba* did not abandon their religion till to date. It is their religion and religious leaders that play a paramount role in managing intra-and- inter group conflicts. Moreover, their similarity in religion provided them solid cultural row material for the group to develop their sense of ethnic solidarity.

3.6. Social Structure

The social structure of the *Argobba* society reveals that their social division and organization occur along the line of age boundaries going from infancy, childhood, youth, adulthood and old age. Each age group has socially assigned duties and responsibilities. In addition, role engendering is visible in their social structure. As such, the role of the female is to give birth to children and nurture them, to take care of domestic chore (preparation of food, fetching water, spinning cotton, basketry, weaving) and they also help the male in farming. The male, on the other hand, participate in public meetings, cultivation, and to weave cloth. However, nowadays *Argobba* women are not confined to home, they rather begun to participate in social and political affairs of the community.

The other point that should be mentioned is that the *Argobba* culture is highly defensive and refuses marriage from outside. But this does not mean that the *Argobba* did not intermingle with other ethnic groups. Regarding their kinship, the *Argobba* established

²³ Interviewed on 12 February 2011 at his homestead -Awra Godana

both on the paternal and maternal lines that is the reflective of the characteristics of semetic people (Tesfaye, 2000:198). For the *Argobba* society, kinship is a cardinal criterion for the selection and establishment of residence.

The *Argobba* people have their own traditional administrative and judicial system. In this regard, the *Wolasama*, *Qadi* and *Demina* are worth mentioning. The term *Wolasama* refers to a person having pure, unmixed *Argobba* blood, and who possess land and by virtue of his genealogy is a member of the ruling class. A *Wolasma* is from the *Doba* lineage and he holds land and administers the community. Owing to *Wolasma's* strong contact with the then feudal rulers of Ethiopia, land and administrative authority was given to it and this, in turn, made *Wolasama* a superior class as compared to other *Argobba* society. However, this system was disappeared from the socio-political landscape of the *Argobba* as a result of 1974 popular revolution and its radical land proclamation.

Qadi, on the other hand, is a religious leader, who officiates wedding and formalizes marriages according to the rules ordained by the Holy Quran. In addition, the *Qadi* plays a paramount role in administering justice. *Demina* is a traditional conflict resolution mechanisms which the society use to deal with both intra-and inter-group conflict. They adopted this tradition from their Oromo neighbors.

3.7. Economy of the Argobba

The *Argobba* people of *Minjar- Shenkora* and *Berehet* districts are largely defined as agro –pastoralists. Though agriculture is central to their subsistence economy, they also raise livestock. The *Argobba* are well versed in ox-plough agriculture and use terraces as they settle in the escarpment of the rift valley area. The dominant crops that the *Argobba* produce in this area are *teff*, *wheat*, *sorghum*, and *maize*. Moreover, they also raise livestock such as cattle, sheep, and goats. This made them highly competitive with their *Karrayu* counterparts over issues of grazing land and water points.

In addition, the *Argobba* people in the two *Woredas* have also engaged on trading activities. The Muslim *Argobba* has been highly involved in trade since time immemorial. In short, they possess pretty experiences of trading activities. During my field study, I observed that these traders are found less in *Arerti*- the capital of Minjar-Shenkora *Woreda* and relatively more number are found at *Metebela* the administrative capital of *Berehet* district. Furthermore, informant²⁴ disclosed that *Argobba* traders are also found at the towns of Metehara. Here, the *Argobba* traders owned , among others, shops of different sizes and grinding mills and render their service both to the urban dwellers and the pastoralist *Karrayu* too.

3.8. Multiple lenses²⁵ to capture the conflict

One of the areas in Ethiopia where there exists pervasive and violent inter- group conflict is the Awash valley. There is no shortage of scholarly literatures that lucidly discern the conflicts in this sub- region are products of multiple causes and contexts. Thus, in order to have a clear picture of the conflict, we need to use multiple lenses having different zoom sizes to capture the historic and contemporary aspects of *Karrayu – Argobba* conflict. To that end, we need to set both the micro and macro (i.e. local and national) level historical contexts, and then analyzes the conflict following the trajectories set to view it.

Moreover, for the same end, the analysis should be informed by the “*political economy and cultural ecology of war*”, an approach that emphasizes and examines how political, economic, social, and cultural factors that cause and sustain conflict between the societies. We need to incorporate in our analyses the interplay of historical and contemporary processes, the intersection of politics, economy and culture, the connections between local, regional and national system. And the role the actors play in the conflict and how material forces and popular discourses, institutional conditions and

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Besides the SCA toolkit of conflict analysis, the multiple lenses are selectively formulated by the researcher to have clear conceptual and empirical points of reference for the analysis of *Karrayu- Argobba* conflict.

symbolic constructs structure and reproduce conflict. By doing that, we could uncover not only the causes of the conflict but also the changing nature of pastoral and/ or agro-pastoral conflict using Karrayu-Argobba conflict as a show case.

In order to view the *Karrayu -Argobba* conflict from its genesis and see its flow across time, we should make the 1960s a watershed period. Formerly, the pastoralist culture of war ethos played a central role for the conflict between the two groups. But this does not mean that other economic factors did not involve in the conflict. It did really. However, socio -cultural factors have prominence. Before this time, the state was not a central actor, with its vested interest. This came only after the launching of massive development intervention in the Awash Valley area.

To better understand as to how state involvement in pastoral land affected the relation between the two groups and render solid context to the conflict we need to see the impacts of popular international discourse. It is well known that since its birth, the modernization theory, has become a powerful paradigm that has been used to guide development policies in the developing countries -so called third world. This paradigm assumed that developing countries were hallmarked by two fold economies- modern capitalist sector and backward long-established sector that the latter was survival from the past that would become separated as they get into contact with the modern world (Greenberg and Park, 1994:6). It is this grand aim of modernizing the economy that motivated the Ethiopian government to launch its development intervention in the Awash Valley. This, in turn, complicated inter-group relations and determined conflict dynamics in the area.

Moreover, nowadays seeing pastoral conflicts as a mere products of culture and competition over scarce resources (grazing land and water points) seems too reductionist. This is because over time the conflict between pastoral and agro- pastoral communities recorded transformation in nature, scale and consequences. In Ethiopia, this has been particularly the case following radical state restructuring of post- federal period. The

federal policy, as discussed in chapter two, has brought its unintended results of pronouncing inter-ethnic conflicts in the country.

To delineate the impacts of post-1991 political developments on the *Argobba-Karrayu* conflict, it is necessary to outline some of its practical implications. The federal constitution officially bestowed democratic rights for every ethnic group to administer themselves. However, in reality there are many groups that have been denied this right. The *Argobba* people are one among them. According to *Argobba* informant²⁶, the *Argobba* people have already made their political quest to administer themselves through establishing special *Woreda*, within Amhara regional state of north *Shoa* zone. However, so far their political plea did not bear fruits. Upon the recognition of their rights in the future, the *Argobba* anticipated that the areas which are yet a bone of contentions with the *Karrayu* will fall with their own administrative boundary.

Furthermore, post-1991 political development has brought ethnification of politics and the consolidation of ethnic consciousness in the country (Merera, 2003). This, in turn, aggravated boarder disputes between regional states, which are a big test to the viability of the federation. This as to Yishak (2008), has something to do with the pre-existing way of life and use of resources. In the pastoral communities, boundaries are always fluid. The pastoral communities often cross boundaries in search of water and grazing land in different time of the year. Creating hard and fast boundaries would aggravate the ethnic tension. Similarly, not to have official map that demarcate areas of conflict is no less problematic both to the state and to the conflicting adjoining communities like the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* groups.

The other lens we should make use of is the resolution mechanisms used to manage the conflict. In Ethiopia, there are two broad categories of conflict resolutions, which are still functional (Alula and Getachew, 2008). The indigenous conflicts resolution is time-tested and effective in resolving conflicts. Assefa (2005) argues that the nation building process, state's adoption of the formal conflict resolution mechanism, the spread of

²⁶ Abdalla Hassen, interviewed on 21 February 2012 at Metebela.

formal education, the advent of urbanization and modernity, the increased social mobility of people and various social developments marginalized indigenous conflict resolutions, and their authorities and legitimacy was challenged by these new social forces. Such large scale historical, political, economic, social and cultural factors have impacted on the indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms. This reality holds true to the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* communities. The *Karrayu*, have traditional conflict resolution mechanisms called *Arrara* institution and similarly the *Argobba* have '*Shimiglina* (institution of the elders). Both groups used it to solve inter- and intra- group conflicts. In post- 1991 period the state prefer to use what Asnake (2004::63) called *legal* and *politico- administrative* institutions to manage the conflict. This makes traditional conflict resolution systems inadequate to solve the contemporary *Karrayu- Argobba* conflict. So this context can help us to see the role of the state in the management of the stated conflict and it also gives us wider clue to unearth the factors for the inadequacies of the traditional ones in addressing their contemporary conflict.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. The Predisposing and Proximate Factors in the Karrayu-Argobba Conflict

Introduction

This chapter is the central part of the thesis written principally based on the primary data gleaned during the fieldwork. It tries to address the research questions pertaining conflict causes. The chapter is classified into three main sections. The first section lays the foundation through framing the history and nature of Karrayu and Argobba relationships, and sees the gradual deterioration of their amicable relations. This, in a way, opens the door to the analysis of their conflict. The second and the third sections explain the structural and proximate causes of the conflict respectively.

4.1. The Karrayu and Argobba: History of Relationships

The pastoral *Karrayu* and the agro-pastoralist *Argobba* groups are two neighboring communities whose historical relations have been marked by both conflict and mutual coexistence. Before their hostility reached its unprecedented scale, the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* used to have amicable relations, manifested in their socio- economic cohesions. As *Karrayu* informants²⁷ expressed it, unlike their conflict with the Afar, *Karrayu*'s serious conflict with the *Argobba* is relatively a more recent phenomenon. While explaining their historic friendly relations and peaceful co-existence and economic interdependence with the *Argobba*, a *Karrayu* elder²⁸ reveals that:

Formerly the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* were like relatives (*firra*). We used to have *Jaala* relations. During the time of dry season, a significant number of our livestock's were made to graze with the *Argobba*. The *Argobba* also did the same, especially in the summer time of their cultivation; they bring their stocks except the draught animals to us to graze until the end of the summer period. Moreover, mainly at the time of *Remadan* (Muslim fasting time) we also ate *sadaqa* together.

²⁷ Haji Qesero Jillo, interviewed on 12 February, 2009; Umar Wachu Rare, a knowledgeable elder at Qobo, I had interviewed him on 7 March, 2009.

²⁸ Haji Qesero Jillo, interviewed on 12 February, 2009 at Metehara.

The above case clearly discerns that the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* groups used to have good cordial relationships in the past. Pushing the issue far more Ayalew (2001) stated that in pre- Dergue²⁹ period the ‘*Dulecha* section of the *Karrayu* clan had closer ties with the *Argobba* than they did with their own *Basso* brothers’. For this, their contiguous territory (geographical proximity) along with other factors played its own role. The *Argobba* is now believed to have settled in the traditional land and settlement areas of the *Dulecha*.

In economic terms, the grazing alliances and livestock entrustment helped both groups to use resources commonly. This arrangement helped particularly wealthy *Karrayu* through enabling them to escape the vagaries of drought periods. Moreover, cattle entrustment has mutual benefits to the two groups in focus. Underlying this fact, a key *Argobba* informant³⁰ discloses his view in the following manner:

... During the time of our good relations, we, the *Argobba* took bulls and oxen from the *Karrayu*. We trained (*makinat*) them to plough and used them for cultivation. This especially benefited the ‘poor’ *Argobba* who did not possess a couple of oxen. For them, rather than entering *mekenajo*³¹ arrangement, it is better to take oxen from the *Karrayu* and paid some amount of grain in return as per their consent.

Such economic interdependence was a regular phenomenon as far as the historical relationships of the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* societies are concerned. Moreover, their cordial relation could also be seen from the fact that the now much contested sites of the *Arole* Plain and the grazing lands along the banks of *Kesem* (*Bulga*) river were used commonly but with a manageable conflict. In those days, whenever conflict happened over the use of scarce resources, they used to settle their hostility using their traditional conflict resolution institutions.

²⁹ The ‘Dergue’ represents a ‘committee’ organized first by the Imperial regime (Haile Sellassie I) from the lower ranks to contain/suppress the ongoing popular revolt against the regime since 1960s.

³⁰ Tahiriye Sheik Abdul, a community elder, interviewed on 15 February, 2012 at Arerti.

³¹ *Mekenajo* refers to the arrangement made by farmers who usually own one ox to farm their land alternatively.

Furthermore, as to my informants³², before three decades or so, the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* groups used to have a common market at a locality called *Kollu*. Here, not only the aforementioned two groups but also other like the *Ittu Oromo*, the *Afar* and the *Minjar Amhara* also involved in the market exchange. However, according to *Karrayu* informant³³ this ceased to be the case just after the serious conflict the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* fought around 1975. The *Karrayu* called this large scale combat *lola Booda* (the conflict of *Booda*). But this does not mean that the two groups totally stopped their market exchange since the stated time. In my field work, I have observed that the *Argobba* who came from the two adjacent districts of *Minjar- Shenkora* and *Berehet* attend markets at the town of *Metehara- Addis Ketema* market.

The event that served as a watershed period, as it ushered a new era of hostility between the two groups, had occurred in the immediate years of the Ethiopian revolution. The event totally altered *Karrayu's* perception of the *Argobba* and let the seed of enemy image formation grown fully. An incumbent Gada leader of the *Karrayu* sheik Muktar Fentalle, alias, Roba Fentalle explains the issue as follows:

Just in the aftermath of Birra korkoro³⁴ (severe drought occurred in 1973/74), the *Argobba* launched large scale war and had inflicted a heavy damage on us. At *lola Booda* (the *Karrayu's* appellation to that conflict) the *Argobba* people prepared themselves and declared largescale raids against us. They did not fire their *chebo*³⁵ over the mountains as before which was a signal of conflict. It was a surprise attack, an ambush. They killed our women and even cut- off their breast (*harmaa*), burned our houses and looted our livestock. It was since then we become a 'real enemies'.

³² Umar Abdalla, interviewed on 12 February 2011 at his homestead -Awra Godana; Sheik Muktar Fentalle, interviewed on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metehara.

³³ Sheik Muktar Fentalle, interviewed on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metehara.

³⁴ During the 1973/74 draught, the *Karrayu* had experienced a severe water shortage. Reportedly, water was distributed to the inhabitants period during this period from water tankers by the government and non-governmental agencies. As a result, this time came to be known as Birra Korkoro, years of water tanker (Ayalew, 2001).

³⁵ Chebo is a combustible object made from thin dry woods. The *Argobba* usually fire it as a signal of conflict.

This event complemented by other serious conflicts that occurred particularly during the Dergue era has worsened the *Karrayu-Argobba* mutual co-existence. The *Karrayu*'s image of the *Argobba* has been further negatively skewed as the latter is believed to expropriate the formers traditional land. The formation and development of enemy image has deteriorated their mutual symbiosis and has socially distanced them a part. This has been further convoluted by the politicization of their ethnic differences, largely a post-1991 phenomenon and the diametrically opposite views they held concerning the contemporary underlying cause of the conflict-land possession.

4.2. The Karrayu - Argobba conflict: Causal analysis

The intractable conflict between the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* has evolved across times since the time of its genesis to its contemporary condition. It is a multi-dimensional conflict. Hence, it has no mono casual determinism that explains the whole intricacies of the conflict. Rather, the causes, structural and proximate, of the conflict found to be multifarious. As the structural analysis shall discern, the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* conflict is historically embedded and is the outcome of the interplay of economic, socio- cultural, political and security related factors. In addition, the triggering factors render life for the sustenance of this conflict. The proximate factors created conducive environment to the outbreak of violent conflict or its further escalation. Thus, this section is devoted to the analysis and explanations of the structural causes and triggering factors of the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* conflict in some detail.

4.2.1. Structural causes of the conflict

4.2.1.1. Economic factors

It is beyond doubt that one of the factors that plays a pivotal role in the conflict among many groups in the country is economic. In this regard the *Karrayu-Argobba* conflict is not exceptional in any sense of the term. Thus, the economic factors have proved to be central throughout the history of the aforementioned conflict. Here, for the sake of convenience it is discussed under two rubrics-inappropriate development policy and resource competition.

4.2.1.1.1. Partial centre development policy

Based on its appropriateness, development interventions may generate or exacerbate conflict or they may build the conditions for more harmonious communities on a sustainable basis. In this regard, the much ill-conceived development policies pursued by the successive Ethiopian regimes have brought drastic multifold repercussions on the local communities, particularly the pastoralists. Its net effects has been that it generates and exacerbates inter-group conflicts in the area ,like the *Karrayu* and *Argobba*, as it raises stakes of economic competition and created situations of 'winners' and 'losers'. To better understand the real impacts of the inappropriate development policies carried out in the Awash Valley on our conflict case; let us see the contentions surrounding it.

Like their counterparts across the globe, pastoralists in the Awash Valley have encountered multiple marginalizations. Their mode of production is considered as primitive and anti-environmental and thus needs to be replaced by sedentary agriculture. The perceptions and policies the state held about pastoralists and its development is informed with what Ayalew (2001:51) aptly worded as '*misconceptions, faulty generalization, and negative stereotypes*'. Accordingly, pastoral lands in the country are considered as "unoccupied," 'unowned' or 'abandoned'. It was in light of this that the imperial regime of Ethiopia in its 1955 revised constitution determined that pastoral territory, referred to as *Zelan* land, was made state property (Yacob, 2000). This has offered policy ramification for the successive Ethiopian regimes to expropriate pastoral lands in the area.

State-backed development through large-scale irrigation has been the central focus in the pastoralist inhabited areas of the Awash River basin since the late 1950s. The programme of commercialization of agriculture launched by the state has a purpose of getting surplus to the national economy (Ali, 1997:37). It also meant for getting legitimacy to the imperial regime (Ayalew, 2001).

The development policy is, however, partial and inappropriate. This is because development intervention and conservation schemes of the Awash National Park

alienated considerable portion of the grazing land from the local communities. This, in turn, created and worsened the degree of scarcity of environmental resources, and, hence, exacerbates inter-groups conflicts, like the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* case. In commenting the inappropriate nature of the economic development policy of the successive Ethiopia regimes, Nicol, et al (2000), claims that the maintenance of power and authority by the state was equated with the appropriation of resources for the centre. And conversely this is done with denial of access to the peripheral communities. This has been what really happening to the pastoral and agro-pastoral communities' in the Awash Valley area.

To carry out its development interventions, the imperial regime established the Awash Valley Authority (AVA) in 1962. AVA was an autonomous public authority with the responsibility to coordinate and administer the development of natural resources in the Valley (Flinten, and Imeru, 2002: 272). Though the AVA was mandated to involve local communities in development initiatives, it did not do so. Apart from the plantation agriculture, the establishment of Awash National Park in the area previously used by *Afar* and *Karrayu* pastoralists as dry and wet season grazing land reduced the resource-base of the stated communities.

The net effect of such development and conservation schemes is that it worsened the conditions of scarcity of resources and exacerbated intra-and inter-group conflicts and violent confrontations with the coercive state itself (Getachew, 2001:60).

While explaining the adverse repercussions of the state policy on their livelihood conditions a key *Karrayu* informant³⁶ has expressed his indignation in a nostalgic sentiment using metaphor as:

"Jireegni Karrayu durii fi umriin ijollummaa tokkodha"

Literally it means 'The living condition of the *Karrayu* people in the distant past was the same as the age of childhood'.

³⁶ Sheik Muktar Fentalle, interviewed on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metchara.

The informant used his metaphorical expression to explain the ever growing impoverishment of the *Karrayu* people, and the consequent deterioration of their contemporary living conditions. According to him, it is quite comparable with the pretty childhood age which cannot come again, once it passed. In this regard, the *Karrayu* are nostalgic about the 'land of plenty' which they forcefully lost to the state.

For the pastoralist *Karrayu* society, the introduction and expansion of Metehara Sugar factory and Nura Era plantation blocked their access to several water points along the banks of the Awash River. It also exposed them to recurrent droughts and famines, which are a triggering factor for the inter-group conflict in the area. What is worse is that the state has not offered any meaningful compensation to the pastoral *Karrayu*. Even though the *Argobba* people did not lose land due to this development policy, the supply-induced scarcity generated by the state on the *Karrayu* forced the two groups to compete for the remaining resource in the area.

Generally, the inappropriate development policy launched by the state has alienated land from the pastoral *Karrayu* and other groups and created a socially generated scarcity of environmental resources, and this ultimately exacerbated inter-group conflicts in the Awash Valley area.

4.2.1.1.2. Competition over scarce resources

Ardent competition and struggle about issues pertaining to access and /or control over cardinal resources(grazing land and water points) is the *differential specifica* of conflicts in the Awash Valley areas. The age-old animosity between the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* could be mainly explained as resource-based conflict. To better realize 'resources scarcity' as a main but not sole conflict contributor, we need to see it from the vantage point of the degree of scarcity, the extent to which the supply is shared by the two groups in focus and the lack of easy access to alternative sources.

The mounting degree of resources scarcity viewed both in its relative and absolute terms and the concomitant environmental degradation have been common phenomena in the

study area. According to data gleaned from informants,³⁷ there are many factors that served as a womb for the scarcity of resources in the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* lands. For the sake of convenience, the identified factors can be classified as natural and social, in which the latter proved pivotal as compared to the former. The natural factor is related with the very erratic precipitation patterns the area received caused subsequent droughts in the area. Moreover, the ever-expanding of the blackish water of Lake Beseka expropriated grazing lands of the *Karrayu* and has reduced their alternative resource bases. Regarding the trend of Lake Beseka’s expansion, estimates made by studies at different times indicate the following incremental trends.

Table 1: Estimates of Lake Beseka’s areal coverage over time

Year	Areal coverage (in km ²)
1964	3
1972	11
1990	29.5
1998	40
2007	42

Source: the tabular presentation is made by the researcher based on the works of Halcrow (1978), MoWR (1998), and OIDA (2007)

The socially generated scarcity of environmental resources, on the other hand, have emanated from both internal and external factors. The internal factor is related with the steady increase in the number of population among the two groups. The culture of the two groups is found to be pro-natal. The muslin *Argobba* and *Karrayu* societies view children as assets not as liability in any sense of the term and as supernatural gift. In light of this, a key *Argobba* informant³⁸ expressed his perception in form of query “who am I to determine the number of children I should have while children are gifts from Allah”. Such cultural attitudes, complemented by their traditions of polygamy and shortage of family planning services delivered to the two communities made considerable impact in

³⁷ Umar Abdalla ,interviewed on 12 February 2011 at his homestead -Awra Godana; Sheik Muktar Fentalle, interviewed on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metchara.

³⁸ Abdalla Hassen, interviewed on 21 February 2011in Metebela.

the increase of their population size, which, in turn, has a direct implication to the scarcity of environmental resources that the two groups depend for earning their livelihoods.

The other factor for the increase in the human population in the *Karrayu* land is the result of immigration. The following case obtained from a key *Karrayu* informant³⁹ explains the situation very well. His observation reads as follows:

In the distant past, we, the *Karrayu* had vast land used by the *Basso* and *Dulecha* clans of the *Karrayu*. We possessed abundant resources. But since the last three or four decades other immigrants such as *Somali*, *Argobba* and *Ittu* settled in our land. Among others, the inflow of the *Ittu* was very high. The rate of the *Ittu* incremental on our land was just like *ibida bonaa* (wildfire), which covers wide area in a short period of time.

To make the issue of demography more concrete, it is just enough to see the results of two consequent census reports of CSA. According to the 1994 Population and Housing Census, there were 48, 114 rural populations in Fentale *Woreda* and this figure reached 61, 708 in 2007. Thus, within a few years more than a decade, there are 13,594 additional populations in rural *Karrayu* areas. This, along with other factors, conspicuously worsened the degree of scarcity and created a fertile ground for inter- group conflict.

The external factor for the scarcity of resources in the area is the outcome of ill-conceived development policy launched in the Awash Valley by the successive Ethiopian regimes. This, as stated above, confined the mobility of the *Karrayu* pastoralists and absorbed their alternative sources of grazing land and water points along the banks of the Awash Valley. Understandably, this dwindling of resource base made inter-group competition for other limited resource a must, and this, in turn, has brought the neighboring ethnic groups to periodic conflict.

³⁹ Umar Wachu Rare, a knowledgeable elder at Qobo, I had interviewed him on 7 March, 2009.

Moreover, the supply induced scarcity of resources and the unfulfilled demand for grazing land and water points have fueled the disputes between the *Karrayu* and *Argobba*. The natural resource base that is available to the two pastoralists and agro-pastoralist groups is gradually shrinking from time to time. This gloomy reality is the outcomes of multiple factors, high population, diminishing and erratic annual rainfall, rangeland degradation and land alienation by the state. The ultimate result of all these is the conflict not only between *Karrayu* and *Argobba* but also among other neighboring groups.

To be more specific, informants⁴⁰ have stated that the *Argobba* and the *Karrayu* groups made ardent competition over the use and control of resources in the areas of *Arole* plains and along the banks of *Kesem (Bulga)* river. Historically, the vast rangelands found in the two sites were used commonly by the two groups with manageable degree of conflict. This happened notwithstanding strong claim of land ownership made by the *Karrayu*.

Generally, the competition over scarce resources caused the conflict between the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* groups. But in times of conflict over the uses of scarce resource, 'the rule of the game changes' and it takes ethnic dimensions. In their contemporary conflict, scarcity of environmental resources provided the sufficient objective cause for their ethnicity to be the basis of their mass mobilization in the conflict.

4.2.1.2. Socio-cultural factors

4.2.1.2.1. Revered ideology of war

The other fundamental subjective factor that has been playing a preponderant role in the conflict between the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* societies has enmeshed with the socio-cultural fabrics of the two groups. It is almost a common knowledge that pastoralists in the Awash Valley area have deep-rooted culture of violence that framed their reverence to warrior ethos. This reality is, of course, supported by scholars from different disciplines, who lent themselves to the study of pastoralists and agro- pastoralists conflicts. In this

⁴⁰ Fentalle Gubu , a *Karrayu* elder, interviewed on March 1,2009 at Haro Qersa; Nur Ali Seid, a perceptive elder, who possess a good deal of knowledge on the history of the *Argobba*. I interviewed him on 13 February 2011 at Metebbla-capital of Berehet Woreda.

regard, it is social anthropologists more than anyone else that offered the most refined accounts of pastoral violence by emphasizing their ritual and symbolic dimensions of feuding and raiding between antagonistic tribal groups (Abbink, 1998). According to this perspective, violence is an integral part of the herders life-world, acting both as a means of conflict regulation and shaping individual and collective subjectivities. In short, it is the normalization of agro-(pastoral) conflict.

As informants⁴¹ from both groups disclose, the Argobba and the Karrayu have a common culture that give due appreciation and social rewards to heroes. There has been a conflict between the two groups caused by their cultural values. Such combats were proved to be a testing ground for 'a biological male' to really become 'a social man, in the eyes of his respective community.

Regarding its presence, Buli (2001:77) stated that before the central government had embarked upon its development and conservation schemes in the Awash Valley, conflicts among the various ethnic groups were instigated by culture of war. However, as informants⁴² from both groups have stated that, the war over cultural value demands 'great preparation and resources' it was conducted very rarely. For instance, across the horizon of the last century the *Karrayu* fought twelve war of this type with the *Afar* and fewer with the *Argobba*.

As far as the nature of this conflict is concerned, it is an agreed upon conflict. This means that the protagonist groups reach a mutual consensus about the date, time and place of combat. As such, there is no room for the actual combat to erupt incidentally. To do that, the groups that want to take the initiative send messenger/s to the other group. The culture of the two groups renders a privilege for the massagers being immuned from any form of maltreatment. Rather, he receives a warm reception and due hospitality in the home of his 'enemy'. In such type of conflict, my informant⁴³ indicated that both groups

⁴¹ Haji Qesero Jillo, interviewed on 12 February, 2009 at Metehara; Tahiriye Sheik Abdul, interviewed on 15 February 2011 at Arerti.

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

fought gallantly with much energy, courage and determination so as to escape from any forms of embarrassment. This made the combat more intense in its very nature.

The warrior ethos and respect for masculinity, a cultural cause for the conflict between the two groups, seems more pronounced among the *Karrayu* society. They have an exaggerated social place for the variant heroes. Regarding this an informant⁴⁴ reiterates their warrior ethos and the place their society accords to brave heroes in the following manner.

In our tradition (*aadaa*) we do not have a place for cowardice. A young *Karrayu* should prove to be a good fighter that protects his people from dangers. At the time of marriage, the youths are expected to bring war booties and cut men's genitals as evidence of being a *raragga*.⁴⁵ Heroes are praised by male and females alike. They have symbolic differences in the eyes of the community members of the *Karrayu*.

The above case vividly indicates the fact that the social rewards heroes enjoy among the *Karrayu* society has a magnetic power of alluring the motives of every *Karrayu* male to kill his adversaries. This, in turn, has added a momentum to the conflict and let its vicious circle move along its trajectory.

For the sake of consolidating the above idea of *Karrayu*'s culture of violence and the symbolic differences of the *raragga*, I found Frejacques's (2003:213) statement worth quoting. In light of this, she writes:

One or two generation ago, men used to wear *arbora* bracelets (made of ivory), as a sign of being good fighters. Nowadays the bracelets are called *bircha* (made of metal) and these together with *looti* earrings, can only be worn after having killed a man [only from enemy group].... When the owner of decoration dies the clans claim them and then hands them over to another descending member who kill an enemy.

⁴⁴ Umar Wachu Rare, interviewed on 7 March, 2009 at Qobo Kebele.

⁴⁵ *Raraga* is the appellation given to a *Karrayu* man who killed his enemy.

Among the *Karrayu* sons do not inherit these decorations automatically. They are rather expected to kill their enemy as their clan heroes. This cultural value pushed, particularly the youths violent behavior in their relations with neighboring groups who are identified as enemies.

Moreover, the *Argobba*'s stereotyped image of *Karrayu*'s culture has its own bearing in the conflict between the two groups. An *Argobba* elder⁴⁶, who once lost his son, sadly expressed his perceptions as:

It is common that the *Karrayu* kill *Argobba* or *Afar*. We do the same on them but ours is different. Once, my elder son was killed by *Karrayu* while he was keeping cattle. They killed and emasculated his genital, and left his dead body over the plain. We found him dead, but for us it was tantamount as a double death.... Thus, for me the *Karrayu* are notorious *khafir* (infidel) who knows no mercy.

This stereotyped looking of the *Karrayu* had a great impact on their hostility and on enemy image formation. And the vendettas which the *Argobba* take to such actions are very serious and its results usually let the conflict escalates.

However, one thing that needs to be raised here is the divergent interpretation that Frejacques (2003) renders to what others like the *Argobba* ascribed to the *Karrayu* of being "notorious and fearsome warriors". She argues that such '*bad reputation*' is important for the *Karrayu* because their population density is lower than the agrarian neighbours and potential enemies. Thus, according to Frejacques, this '*ruthless and delinquent behavior*' (my emphasis) is a strategy for coping the lack of institutional safeguards. And this, in a way, gives protection through reputation. Here, I contend that her argument is a little bit unconvincing. This is because among any other groups in the Awash Valley, it is the *Karrayu* who have fought against many foes. These includes the *Afar*, *Ittu Oromo*, *Arsi Oromo*, *Argobba* and also with the *Minjar Amhara*. Thus, to me this '*bad reputation*' has not shielded the *Karrayu* society from attacks and vengeance by their neighboring adversarial groups.

⁴⁶ Umar Abdalla, interviewed on 12 February 2011 at his homestead -Awra Godana.

The other factors that are intertwined with the *Argobba* and *Karrayu* groups' socio-cultural fabric and aggravated conflicts are the tradition of weapon and cattle raiding and rustling practices rectified by their culture. But this shall be discussed in some length at its more appropriate places (section 4.2.2.2, and section 4.2.4).

4.2.1.2.2. Convergence on conception of solid boundary

The divergent views that the pastoralist *Karrayu* and the agro-pastoral *Argobba* have about solid boundary also played its own part in their conflict. The *Argobba* society is predominantly settled agriculturalist, whereas the *Karrayu* livelihood relies mainly on their pastoral mode of production. Owing to different factors, the *Karrayu* in this area have now practiced multiple resource nomadism'. That is, they did not totally abandoned mobility but they rather combined it with cultivation, the sale of labor and livestock herding. So, there has been spatial mobility of the *Karrayu* based on season. Their territorial attachment to a certain place of grazing and water points is time-bounded. But this does not mean that they do not have a sense of ownership over their land. However, the concept of territoriality marked by fixed boundary is an alien concept to the pastoralist life style of the *Karrayu*. This is not the case for the *Argobba* who have permanent settlement. They are very much critical over issues of land and boundary. This reality can be discerned from the fact that boundary disputes over small plot of land leads to intra- or-inter- family killings. This is because they have special psychological attachment over their land. This perception is perhaps molded by the land tenure, the *rist* system. In addition, there is also a cultural impact of the Amhara whose social psychology on land is well captured by their much telling saying "በሚስትና በርስት ቀልድ የለም" (there is no joke over issues of *rist* land and wife). The historic land tenure system made the *Argobba* not to be alien to the concept of solid boundary. So this difference in their concept of fixed boundary, largely the result of their life styles, has latter on caused the conflict between two groups.

In an attempt to show the keen linkage between their social conception of solid boundary and their contemporary conflict with the *Argobba*, the incumbent Gada leader of the *Karrayu*⁴⁷ explains the issue as follows:

Formerly our transhumance covered vast spaces. The *Karrayu* herders did not stick to a single area. This gave the chance for the *Argobba* to settle on our traditional land. The *Argobba*, who came from the mountainous area of *Cooba*, gradually settled on *onna* (temporarily abandoned place) *Karrayu*. Here, they started cultivation, and to expand their boundary but only at the expense of our traditional land until their spatial settlement took its contemporary form. Adding an insult to our injury, the *Argobba* pejoratively called as *goddantu*, with no sense of land owner ship.

The above case clearly reveals the fact that their growing convergence in their concept of territoriality marked by fixed boundary is a cause of conflict between the two groups as it raised question of ownership. This is further complicated by the ethnicization of territoriality and boundary that motivated the *Karrayu* to raise historical justification which is against the *Argobba's* present state of 'effective occupation'. For this, the *Karrayu* openly blamed the present government of Ethiopian for taking no action to stop *Argobba's* territorial encroachment and offering a tacit type of support for their settlement.

One pertinent question that needs to be addressed under this rubric is that what other factors, besides the ethnicization of boundary, have contributed for the *Karrayu* to change their conception of solid boundary as opposed to the dotted ones? It is believed that the land tenure policies of the successive Ethiopian regimes undermined the communal land tenure tradition of pastoralists in Ethiopia (Abdullahi 2007: cited in Hagmann and Alemmaya, 2008). The same thing has happened on the transhumant *Karrayu* society. In addition, their 'forced sedenterization' caused largely by their loss of land for the state farms and Awash National Park, and the shortage of land and its declining carrying capacity is one reason for the *Karrayu* to be more conscious of fixed boundary. This, along with the post 1991 administrative restructuring and instrumentalization of ethnic

⁴⁷ Sheik Muktar Fentalle, interviewed on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metehara.

identity, partly explain their contemporary claim and action in their conflict against the *Argobba*.

Generally, even if the degree of its impact on *Karrayu* and *Argobba* conflict may not be comparable with the other structural causes, the convergence on their social concept of solid boundary has its own bearing in the aforementioned conflict.

4.2.1.3. Political variables in the conflict

The other structural cause attributable to the *Karrayu* - *Argobba* conflict is embedded with the macro (state level) political realm. The impacts of the political variables which this study identified on the conflict have been direct, and immediate. And its bearings can also be seen on other factors that are beyond the political realm. Here under, a brief analysis and discussions shall be made on these political factors that accounted for the stated conflict. For the sake of thematic presentations, the analysis is made under the three rubrics of exclusionary political environment, governance problematique, and the politicization of ethnic differences.

4.2.1.3.1. Exclusionary political environment

Since its establishment and evolution, the modern state of Ethiopia is criticized for having exclusionary political environment. In this regard, the Muslim *Argobba* and pastoral *Karrayu* constituted among the politically marginalized groups. Since they have been drawn to the orbit of the central government, their marginalization continuous unabated. This is particularly the case for the *Karrayu*, who are denied of their rights of making decision on matters pertaining to their own affairs. This can be seen from the fact that prior to the development and conservation interventions, the imperial government expropriated 12,000 hectares of land from the *Karrayu* and offered it to *Ras Mesfin*, and *Ras Bezabih Selishi* (Buli, 2001:53). In addition, state-backed development schemes that alienated significant portion of *Karrayu* land and caused socially generated scarcity were undertaken without their consent (Ayalew, 2001; Flinton and Imiru, 2002). This has exacerbated inter-group conflicts in the area, and *Karrayu* - *Argobba* conflict is one among them.

Moreover, in contemporary period of post-Federal Ethiopia the radical restructuring made by the incumbent government of EPRDF⁴⁸ and its administrative divisions also created much serious problems for the two groups. Regarding this, a *Karrayu* elderly informant⁴⁹ argues that:

Our government (*mottuma Keynaa*) did not consider our past history. It is a dry fact that the land where the *Argobba* now settled was our land. History tells this to anyone. But the government not oblivious of the matter favored the *Argobba* and gave the land to them, as they already occupied our land when the incumbent government came to power. Nevertheless, it is foolish to say that people settled in a certain areas are always owners of the land.

This case reveals that the *Karrayu* still felt a sense of alienation by the state and their claim to land with the *Argobba* for permanent control of it is the result of the political factor.

Furthermore, the pastoral land tenure system issued by the government also has implication for the conflict that happened in this area in general. The federal constitution of Ethiopia officially determines that Ethiopian pastoralists have the rights to free land for grazing and cultivation as well as the rights not to be displaced from their own land (FDRE, 1995.Art.40). Nevertheless, so far no federal or regional laws have been promulgated to enforce this constitutional principle effectively. Their mobility for grazing land and water is deterred by administrative boundaries. The *Karrayu* elder⁵⁰ for instance called the administrative boundary they share with the *Afar* and *Argobba* *dhangaa loola* (conflict boundary).

⁴⁸ Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (EPRDF) is the ruling party in the country. It came to power by overthrowing the Dergue government in 1991.

⁴⁹ Haji Qesero Jillo is ex- Gada leader, interviewed on 12 February, 2009 at Metehara.

⁵⁰ Haji Roba Saqale, interviewed on 23 February, 2009-Metehara.

4.2.1.3.2. Governance problematiques

Besides, their marginalization participants of the focus group discussions⁵¹ stated that the nature of their *Woreda* administrations is marked by its lack of good governance. They further stated that the officials assigned to run the administrative machinery are ineffective, lack commitment, and thus failed to discharge their responsibilities. Though the mandate to address the underlying cause of the conflict is beyond their reach, their commitment to handle over conflict has neither successful nor that much encouraging.

What is more discouraging in the eyes of my *Karrayu* informant⁵² is that the government paid militia has been accused of being involved in counterproductive activities that worsened the conflict between the two groups. There are allegations and counter-allegations between the two groups that the militia units, whose gun is meant to keep peace in the area are believed to be lined up in the actual combat along their 'own side'. The *Karrayu* stated that in the 2006 conflict, which they called *lola Bakula* as a show case. They argued that the *Minjar - Shenkora* and *Berehet Woreda* administration offered ammunition to the *Argobba*. And the *Woreda* police and militia units side with them and fought against the *Karrayu*. But they criticized their *Fentale Woreda* administration not only for not doing the same but also to what they regards that it deterred the *Karrayu* even not to defend themselves. Here, whatever the degree of the credibility of such allegations, it can be said that there are groups within the state administration that played a destructive role against their stated official mission and thus, have been adding a momentum to the intensity of the *Karrayu – Argobba* conflicts.

As part of lack of good governance *Argobba* and *Karrayu* informants⁵³ further noted that these officials, who are responsible to keep peace, are criticized for their affiliation to the ruling party. They are more concerned to the government's political expediency than addressing the conflict cases. In this regard, there is a clear tendency among officials in

⁵¹ The FGDs with the *Argobba* and the *Karrayu* were undertaken on 17 February, 2012 (Arerti) and on March 8, 2009 at Metehara respectively.

⁵² Umar Wachu Rare, a knowledgeable elder at Qobo, I had interviewed him on 7 March, 2009.

⁵³ Umar Abdalla, interviewed on 12 February 2011 at his homestead -Awra Godana; Sheik Muktar Fentalle, interviewed on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metehara.

under estimating and misunderstanding the conflict. One of the informant⁵⁴, for instance, has reduced the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* conflict to a very simple matter of theft and considered ‘robbers’ as the only responsible group in the conflict. In addition, there are also officials who may rightly be labeled as “ethnic entrepreneurs” that highly politicized the *Karrayu* - *Argobba* conflict. This, as it proves, has exacerbated the conflict and become a road block to the peace making processes attempted to date.

Finally, this lack of good governance has also been observed in the peacemaking processes. The top-down, state-centered, peacemaking approach has sidelined their customary conflict resolution institutions. The elders have been marginalized and thus compelled to play largely ceremonial roles in conflict management. This, in turn, has adverse repercussions in the *Karrayu* - *Argobba* conflict.

4.2.1.3.3. Exploitation of ethnic differences

As I have discussed in the theoretical framework, the politicization of ethnicity by political elites justifies mass mobilization in conflict. Under different circumstances, ethnicity can be constructive as well as destructive and silent or active. This study has discovered that the exploitation of ethnic dichotomies by the respective elites of the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* has offered ethnicity its destructive and active face in the post-1991 relationships of the two communities.

Ethnic identity as marker of group identification exists long between the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* societies. Despite their social relations and economic interdependence, the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* clearly know the boundary of their identity differences. Even in pre-federal Ethiopia, in times of their conflict over the use of scarce resources, the ‘rule of the game change’ and took inter-group dimensions. However, this has become more potent and visible in post-1991 Ethiopia. This happened along with the politicization and formalization of ethnicity at the national politics. But still the question of *Karrayu* - *Argobba* ethnic differences *per se* perpetuated the conflict between them seems

⁵⁴ Ato Adinew Haile, Head of Administration and Security office of Berehet Woreda. I interviewed him on 12 January, 2010 at Metebela.

challengeable. In this regard, scholars like Julius O. Ihobvnbere openly argued that ethnic identity by itself is not a problem to human survival. In deepening his assertion Ihobvnbere write that:

In Africa ethnic identity by itself has never posed a problem to human survival. . . . But it is only the activation of such identity in the struggle to expand political spaces, displace others, appropriate resources, monopolize power, or engage in extra-legal agendas that has given ethnicity and ethnic politics negative connotation (2001:69).

It is plausible to argue that despite their ethnic dichotomies, the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* people as discerned in section 4.1, maintained cordial inter-group cohesion. But, the wider political development of federal Ethiopia has created a fertile ground for elites to mobilize their respective groups against others to meet their political and economic ends. Currently, for the *Karrayu*, their conflict with the *Argobba* has been a matter of claiming their historical territory which they lost due to the latter's encroachment and its integration within the administrative tentacle of Fentale *Woreda*. Such claim are said to have been activated by political elites either openly or in clandestine. In this case, the role played by OLF⁵⁵, ONC⁵⁶ and other ethnic entrepreneurs even from OPDO⁵⁷ is a good case in point.

Similarly, for the *Argobba* their vested interest in the conflict has been to maintain the territory which they 'effectively occupied' and have legal recognition of self governance via establishing special *Woreda*. To that end, an informant⁵⁸ argued that, *Argobba* political elites, members of Argobba Peoples Democratic Party (APDP) and others politicize their rural society, raised their political consciousness to realize their end. Such role of the elites have made the *Argobba* mass in the area more firm and less flexible on

⁵⁵ The Oromo Liberation Front(OLF) is an armed organization born in 1974 with the major aim struggle of self-determination for the Oromo People and the establishment of People's Democratic Republic of Oromia. Though the front was accused of instigating conflict in the area, Karrayu informant disclosed that the front played a role in the resolution of the historic Karrayu-Arsi conflict.

⁵⁶ Oromo National Congress (ONC) is one of the opposition parties in Ethiopia that struggle to ensure the democratic, political and economic rights of the Oromo people within federal Ethiopia.

⁵⁷ Oromo People Democratic Organization (OPDO) was organized in 1990, and it is one of the founding members of the incumbent government-EPRDF.

⁵⁸ Ato Bejerond Abera, Head of Administration and Security office of Minjar-Shenkora *Woreda*. I interviewed him on 20 February, 2012 at Arerti.

their stance, which appeared uncompromised, in their conflict with the *Karrayu* society. These elites exploited *Argobba's* stereotype image of the *Karrayu* which they described the later group' as *goddantu* (people who move from place to place) ,and hence have no legal right to question ownership of land.

The net effects of the exploitation of ethnic differences by political elites are that both groups now have a clear tendency of remembering their bad relations, pejorative stereotypes and undermined their historic inter-group cohesion. This, in turn, enhanced the development of enemy image and hence adversely affected their relationships. Moreover, it also brought ethnic solidarity among different clans. Pertaining to this, result from the focus group discussion with *Argobba* elders uncovered their views that they claimed currently (in times of large-scale conflict) the *Argobba* have fought not only with the *Karrayu* as long before but also with the *Ittu* and *Arsi* Oromo, who helped the *Karrayu*. They further noted that, even government recruited militia units and police forces in Fentale *Woreda* have believed to fight against the *Argobba* just supporting their ethnic group-the Oromo.

The politicization and exploitation of ethnic differences by local elites hallmarks their contemporary relationships. Underscoring this, *Karrayu* informant⁵⁹ perceived and explained the situation as:

... Even in times of incidental killings, the question is not how the individual was killed? But rather who killed who? The issue is usually explained or interpreted in ethnic terms. Who killed? refers mainly to the ethnic group not as such to the single culprit. The culprit is simply taken as the representative of the whole ethnic groups, even if the homicides were committed without the prior consent or knowledge of the community at large. This made inter-group vengeance common phenomenon and the group is also reluctant to handover the culprit or unwilling to cooperate with the legal body in their task of identifying the perpetrators.

Generally, exploitation of ethnic differences and its politicization by local elites to realize their political and economic goals has remained onestructural factor that exacerbates the conflict between the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* groups.

⁵⁹ Gebi Hawas interviewed on 9 March, 2009 at Metehara.

4.2.1.4. Security- centered factors

4.2.1.4.1. Proliferations of small arms and light weapons

The result of this study solidly ascertained that one of the cardinal security related factor in the conflict between the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* is the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. To better conceive the degree of its impact in the conflict, it deems necessary to analyze in light of the culture of weapon dearly valued by the two groups, the demand for it, its supply and circulation in the area and the weak state control system. But prior to delving to this task, let me first define what small arms and light weapons constitute. According to the definition of the United Nations, small arms are handled fire arms such as revolvers, rifles, sub- machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns designed for use by one person (UN, Secretary Genaral, 1997). Light weapons, a closely related category, are designed for use by several persons serves as a crew.

According to, the results from the FGD⁶⁰ the ever mounting demand for small arms in the Awash Valley area has caused and exacerbated conflicts and made inter- group conflicts more lethal. It has also increased the duration of violence. The demand for small arms and light weapons are multifold and it ranges from socio-cultural to security and economic imperatives of the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* communities. While narrating the value of arms in their society, a knowledgeable *Karrayu* elder⁶¹ has stated the following, and it reads as:

Possession of arms is a highly valued among the *Karrayu*, particularly among the youth and adolescents. Weapons are seen as part of our identity As we are encircled by many adversaries, having arms is considered as a sole means of security to the communities and individuals. Moreover, the scarcity of resources compelled us to move to some distant places in search of pasture and water, and this imperative of mobility is unthinkable without the possession of guns.

The above empirical case vividly discerns the need but not the whole gamut to the demands of small arms among the *Karrayu*. Besides the need for safeguarding personal and community security, there is also other socially generated demand for small arms by

⁶⁰ The FGD the *Karrayu* was undertaken on March 8, 2009 at Metehara.

⁶¹ Haji Roba Saqale, interviewed on 23 February, 2009-Metehara.

them. The transhumant *Karrayu* entertains a 'culture of weapon'. Thus, possession of better arms is believed to be an indication of wealth, a symbol of status and, of course, a means of acquiring that social status. As my informant⁶² openly disclosed, the keen competition to always possess 'better weapon' is not merely limited to the out-groups. But there is rather also conspicuous competition within *Karrayu* families and individuals for having automatic and semi-automatic weapons.

The same can be said to the agro -pastoral *Argobba* communities, who revered the tradition of weapon too. As stated in chapter three, the *Argobba* informants⁶³ asserted that it was their incorporation to the expanding forces of Menelik II and the hostile nature of their historical relations with neighboring groups that confined their settlement to the escarpment of the Rift Valley. The pattern of their settlement is designed for defense purpose. Their conflict with other groups has forced the *Argobba* society to bear arms, as they do, as a necessary issue of security.

The other factor for the presence of high level demand for small arms among the study groups is the age- old traditions of cattle raiding, and rustling. This cattle raiding as a cultural phenomenon gives green light to violence. To effectively execute livestock raiding arming oneself or the group is not a mere choice rather it is a necessity. The practice of cattle raiding still continues unabated, but it has been undertaken under changing socio-economic conditions. The economic change is linked with the commercialization of raiding. Formerly, raided livestock were kept in the hands of each community. There was a high degree of probability for taking back the lost livestock through counter- raiding. This ensured that the wealth of both the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* groups remained with their reach. However, the new system that emerged in more recent times, made raided animals to be sold off to traders even without the knowledge of their respective communities. This reality has made gun a means of wealth creation, particularly for the youths of *Argobba* and *Karrayu*. And the logic is that the better a group is armed, the more animals they are able to raid, and the more money they make.

⁶² Sheik Muktar Fentalle, interviewed on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metehara.

⁶³ Sheik Hussien Seid, and Mohammed Nur, interviewed on 10 January and 7 January, 2011 at Arerti.

This situation has been serving as a magnetic force to the youths and adolescents of the two groups under review.

In addition, economically the pastoralist *Karrayu* have been encountering a growing impoverishment which emanates from the interplay of different factors, and the lack of any alternative means of livelihood has a driving power to engage in looting and organized crime of robbery by the youths. Similarly, the carrying capacity of the *Argobba* land has been declining due to natural and social factors; the erratic rainfall pattern, increase in population size, land degradation and fragmentation have hurdled the growth in agricultural production. This has compelled the two groups to compete over scarce resource, causing conflict which, in turn, has encouraged the arm race and the resultant small arms trafficking.

Furthermore, as informants⁶⁴ from both groups explain, the social transformations that have direct bearing on cattle raiding and on the growing demand for small arms. According to these informants, inter-generation conflicts now evident in both communities tacitly entitled the youths to undertake whimsical raids. Formerly, community elders rendered their blessings, decided the appropriate time for raiding. They also advised their youths to execute their mission taking their experience. Nevertheless, due to the gradual weakening of their social institutions, there occurred conflict between the youths and elders. As a result, the former age groups have already commenced to make whimsical raids against one another. This, in turn, adds a momentum to the drive of the youths to possess arms, and hence complicated the conflict between the two groups.

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons and its use by 'undisciplined' groups is identified as a major source of insecurity. In the Horn of Africa, the supply of small arms exacerbates conflicts. Regarding their availability in some parts of East Africa, especially among the pastoral, and agro- pastoral communities, Kibuka (2000) expressed "*It is easier to obtain a gun than say a handkerchief*" (emphasis mine). This exposure of small

⁶⁴Umar Abdalla, interviewed on 12 February 2011 at his homestead -Awra Godana; Sheik Muktar Fentalle, interviewed on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metehara.

arms to illicit possession and use are owing to the absence of restraint in the supply of arms, the lack of universal laws and standards for control, due to failure to address effectively the adverse social, political, and economic conditions that lead to violence and generated demand for small arms.

The above reality holds true to the situations of arms supply in the study *Woredas*. Formerly, the pastoralist Somali clan called the *Hawiya* played a central role in the supply and circulations of small arms in the Awash Valley area. But nowadays, the *Argobba* people themselves are believed to play active role in the circulation of small arms which are accessed by the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* societies.

According to my informants⁶⁵ there is weak controlling system on the part of the state over the circulation of small arms by illicit traffickers. Even the legal registration method used so far in both districts of Fentale and Minjar -Shenkora does not achieve its intended results. For this, they identified two factors as responsible to the situation. These are, first the people in each *Woreda* are reluctant to legally register weapon they have at hand. This is because they fear that the government in the future will confiscate their guns. Second, those who are mandated to undertake the registration have not made any strict door-to-door investigation of the availability of guns at each household. This complicates the situation and exacerbates the conflict between the two communities under scrutiny.

4.2.1.4.2. Issue of boundary and land ownership

Though it is relatively a recent phenomenon, the problems of contested border between the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* has now become a cardinal variable explaining their contemporary conflict. As stated above, there were historical animosities between the two groups in the area. But their conflict was largely over the temporal use of grazing resources and water points. Here, it should be noted that pastoralists settled in marginal environment where scarcity of natural resources is a norm than exception. This made mobility an economic imperative, which again rendered the boundaries between pastoralists and/or agro- pastoralists in the Awash Valley area become porous. Though

⁶⁵ Ibid.

issue of territorial ownership is always there, inter-group crossing of one another's borders among pastoralists is common but mostly was not made for permanent control. But the agro-pastoralist Argobba did it long before federal Ethiopia. This, however, has changed particularly as a result of the post-1991 ethnic based territorial administrative decentralization.

Before we view it in light of the contemporary administrative decentralization, let us first see it from the formal land rights of pastoralists. According to Helland (2006:6), "formal land rights in the pastoral areas seem to be a matter of loosely defined group right that are granted to named ethnic groups". This principle, according to which political recognition depends on a group's ability to control and claim a distinct area of land, encourages conflict over spatially concentrated natural resources. Owing to the post 1991 administrative restructuring, resource-based conflicts have become increasingly twined with a quest for territorial control for political purpose. This is the case of contemporary Karrayu and Argobba conflict. And it is an indication of the changing nature of pastoral and agro-pastoral conflicts in the areas.

Again before we proceed any further it is pertinent to address the changing nature of *Karrayu* and *Argobba* conflict from over temporary resource uses to territorial annexation and control. Ordinarily, the term 'control' entails the exercise of authority or having a dominant influence over a thing or a person (Morris, 1982: 290). It is such influence that enabled the controlling body to direct or regulate issues pertaining to the thing controlled. Driving from the above is the fact that 'resource control' means the exercise of authority and influence over the resource of a given area. It follows that to control a resource permanently, one need not necessarily own resource or has a historical justification to its ownership.

According to Karrayu elder,⁶⁶ the contemporary border conflicts between the Karrayu and Argobba is the result of the failure of the incumbent- EPRDF government to fully consider and address historical realities. For the *Karrayu*, the *Argobba* are nothing but

⁶⁶ Fentalle Gubu , a Karrayu elder, interviewed on March 1,2009 at Haro Qersa.

'late comers' to the area, while the Karrayu are 'first comers'. This, along with the politicization of ethnic identities, put its preponderant role in the evolution of Karrayu and Argobba conflict from competing claims to the use of rangeland and water to what Ayalew (2001:251) aptly described as "a desire for territorial expansion and annexation". Of course, such conflict dynamic is not exceptional to the two groups. Rather, there are similar cases of boundary disputes in the Awash Valley area involving, for instance, the Karrayu and Afar, and the Afar and Issa.

As part of a move to secure legitimacy from the state, the same Karrayu elders sadly stated that the Argobba have been changing the names of places found within the boundary of the contested territory. As stated by Ayalew (2001:252), and, of course, ascertained by informants⁶⁷ too 'traditional lands of the Karrayu such as Beru Bodda (Sabober plain) Eddo Guddo, Karra Suta, and Korqe have been christened by the Argobba's as Shelim Gara, Netch sar, Suta ber and Awra Godana respectively. For all what happened on them, the Karrayu informants pointed their finger and blamed the government policy and action, and criticized the passive nature of their own regional state and Woreda administration in seeking enduring solutions to their grievances.

Leaving the justification or exoneration about the issues of boundary /ownership of land to the concerned body, the future conflicts scenario would remain a hot potato. This could be seen from the fact that till now there is no official map that clearly delineates the boundary between the two groups. According to informant⁶⁸ the problem may be more pronounced when the Argobba get their anticipated self- government. Regarding this, young educated Argobba informant⁶⁹ expressed his views as:

We, the Argobba people, living in the two adjacent districts of Minjar -Shenkora and Berehet are denied of our constitutional rights of administering ourselves. We want to establish self-government like our brothers living in Afar, who established a special woreda called *Gachine*. This is absolutely unconstitutional Alas".

⁶⁷ Sheik Muktar Fentalle, interviewed on 10 February, 2009 at Gelcha Kebele; Haji Qesero Jillo, interviewed on 12 February, 2009 at Metehara.

⁶⁸ Ato Bejerond Abera, I interviewed him on 20 February, 2012 at Arerti.

⁶⁹ Ismail Hassen, a preparatory student at Arerti, interviewed on 21 February, 2012.

The view of the above case is shared by *Argobba* focus group discussion participants too. The *Argobba* possess not only the will to administer themselves but they have also already made their political quest to the concerned body to establish special *Woreda* within North Shoa Zone of the Amhara Regional State. However, to date their deep rooted political quest does not come to its fruition. But for them, it is only a matter of time but upon the recognition of their rights the *Argobba* have a keen anticipation that the territories which are yet a bone of contentions with the *Karrayu* will fall with their own administrative boundary. But for sure this would be a problem to the two groups, and as well as the Amhara and Oromia Regional States.

Generally, conflict over boundary and land ownership inhibited the two groups particularly the *Karrayu* to move freely as before to rangelands found there. Both groups feared possible attacks and this, in turn, has created a kind of 'no man's land'. As a result of this, some parts of the grazing land remain unused.

4.3. Proximate causes of the conflict

Besides the structural causes, there are triggers that manifest the conflict between the two groups. Generally, the proximate causes are those factors that are contributing to a climate conducive to the eruption of violent conflict or its further escalation. Here below, a brief analysis and discussion shall be made on the identified triggering factors in the *Karrayu - Argobba* conflict.

4.3.1. Cattle raiding and rustling

The practice of cattle raiding and rustling, which the formal legal system considered as theft or robbery, has a different cultural meaning among the pastoral and agro-pastoral groups of the Awash Valley area. For these groups, cattle raiding are an age-old tradition, morally ratified and backed by social institutions. Since livestock significantly contributes to the pastoral production, herd size affects pastoral human welfare and therefore livestock wealth accumulation is a desirable goal, particularly among the pastoralist *Karrayu* society.

The maximization of herd size among these communities as revealed by *Karrayu* focus group discussion participants⁷⁰ has both economic and socio-cultural ramifications. Herd size reflects social value and is also a source of prestige. Among the *Karrayu*, there is a special ceremony undertaken by rich pastoralists called *Garicha Kuma*.⁷¹ The *Karrayu* have conducted cattle raiding against their neighbours *Argobba* but mainly against the pastoral Afar for both social and economic needs. In economic terms, they make raids in the aftermath of draught period to replace stocks which they lost due to the calamities of recurrent draughts and famines. In addition, they also make counter-raids as a vendetta against their adversary-the *Argobba* just to retrieve the stocks previously looted from them. *Karrayu* youths also made raids for the sake of raising dowry in times of marriage. Besides, in socio-cultural term cattle raiding is a testing ground mainly for the youths to prove their actual masculinity. The one who executed successful raids on their identified enemies is named *manjolla*, a respected hero in the eyes of his group. Regarding the special place the *Karrayu* society gives to raided livestock, Ayalew (2009:35) explained that stolen herds are a symbol of courage and bravery. They are made different via special decoration from the rest of the household livestock.

In a similar vein, the *Argobba* informant⁷² have confirmed that though they did not possess a special social institutions to cattle raids they stated that the *Argobba* have made raids and counter-raids against the *Karrayu*. In times of large scale raid, the *Argobba* sell the stolen livestock to the neighboring *Afar* pastoralists, who are the strongest enemy of the *Karrayu*.

The practice of cattle raiding still remains unabated. But officials⁷³ claim that the "Joint Peace Committee"⁷⁴ is believed to reduce large scale raids, which each groups carried out

⁷⁰ The FGDs with the *Argobba* and the *Karrayu* were undertaken on 17 February, 2012(Arerti) and on March 8, 2009 at Metehara respectively.

⁷¹ *Garicha Kuma* is a ceremony that only pastoralists known to be 'richest' can undergo. The one eligible for the ceremony must own 100 or more heifers which have given birth to calves for the first time in one mating season(February and March)(Ayalew,2001:327).

⁷² Umar Abdalla ,interviewed on 12 February 2011 at his homestead -Awra Godana.

⁷³ ⁷⁴ The Joint Peace Committee (JPC) is a government owned organ that works to keep the peace and security of the area. For more discussion on its role see chapter six.

one another. The recent large-scale raids happened before six years, in 2006 when the *Argobba* looted more than “one thousand camels” from the *Karrayu* groups. Nevertheless, small scale-raids conducted by few individuals remain to be a regular phenomenon between the two groups. The failure of the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* groups in divulging the perpetrators and forcing them to return the looted property has derived the victim to made counter raids. And this as, it happens, adversely affected their conflictual relationships.

Furthermore, the growing commercialization of cattle raiding has openly motivated *Argobba* and *Karrayu* youths to involve in frequent raids and clashes. Interviewed officials from peace and security offices of the two districts stated that, among others, herders, community elders and even *kebele* administrators played their roles in cattle raiding. These officials have expressed their indignation in that in communities where “nothing is done under hand” exposing and handing over perpetrators are not as such difficult. But the above groups are usually reluctant and do not cooperate with the Joint Peace Committee. This as to the officials has hindered their office to make timely intervention and deliver justice immediately.

Generally, the age-old tradition of cattle raiding and counter-raiding conducted for its socio-economic values is one of the commonest triggers in the conflict between the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* societies.

4.3.2. Drought and famine

It is beyond doubt that the Awash Valley area inhabited by the pastoralists, agro-pastoralist and cultivators has been hit hard by recurrent droughts and famines. Drought and famine result from the amalgam of natural and social factors. In the study area, the existing argument is that there is strong positive correlation between the ‘expansion of commercial farm and conservation schemes and the recurrence of drought and famines (Ali,1994;Ayalew 2001:200). Coming to our particular case, owing to Nura Era plantation, Metehara sugar estate factory, Awash National park and the ever expansion of lake Beseka, the *Karrayu* lost considerable part of their grazing and water sources. This

highly increased their vulnerability to drought which, in turn, affected their relations not only with the *Argobba* but also with other hostile neighboring groups, mainly the *Afar*. Underlining their state induced vulnerability to drought, a *Karrayu* informant⁷⁵ has uttered a statement in light of the *Karrayu*'s loss of access to the Awash River. The elder stated the issue using his vernacular, *Oromiffaa* and I found it worthy to be reproduced here as:

"Lagni 'Hawaas' hundee lubbu keenyafi. Bonni fedhe yoo dhufee, isa qaban turre. Hara garuu hundee lubbuu keenyaa kan dhabne"

Awash River was a base for our life. We did not worry about any drought occurrence having it. Nowadays, we lost this blood line for our life'

Prior to state intervention in the area, the *Karrayu* used to settle along the banks of Awash River especially during the dry season. The area hence called *onna boba* (dry period settlement area). Here, they had access to the pasture and watering points of the Awash River. However, today this has become quite impossible. This forced the *Karrayu* to compete with their 'enemy', the *Argobba*, in other areas, like the banks of Kesem (Bulga) River.

The overall role of drought and famine as a basic variable of conflict triggers could be seen from the fact that it exacerbates the seriousness of the underlying cause. This is to mean that scarcity of resources reached its peak in times of drought, and it brought the *Karrayu* and *Argobba* contending groups at loggerheads over the remaining meager resources. In addition, drought has also inflicted considerable loss of herds. This normally compelled the two groups in post drought period to undertake cattle raiding for the sake of restocking their herds. This, in turn, causes inter-group conflicts between the *Karrayu* and *Argobba*.

The *Karrayu* make different classifications of *lola* (conflicts) based on their nature. Of them, the most common type of conflict they fought mainly in the time of high scarcity is

⁷⁵ Haji Roba Saqale., interviewed on 23 February, 2009-Metehara.

called *lola selfa*. According to informant⁷⁶, at the time of chronic scarcity, the Karrayu send 'selfa' (armed scout groups) selected from the owners of the livestock. The 'selfa' move before the herds and herders to expand their buffer zone for grazing and thus also check out the situations of their adversaries, in this case the Argobba. The Argobba herders do not let the 'selfa' to trespass their claimed territory. As a result, conflict break out and it is this conflict that the Karrayu called *lola selfa* (the conflict of *selfa*)

Even though drought has a direct bearing on the Karrayu and Argobba conflict, its correlation with the frequency and intensity of conflict is not as we may assume. Normally, we may consider that in times of chronic scarcity of resources, it would automatically lead to frequent and intense violent conflict. However, a close examination of the issue reveals that the years of severe droughts, for example, among the Karrayu, did not match with the major conflicts they fought against the Argobba. As identified by Ayalew (2001:210-211) over the last decades the Karrayu were hardly hit by four severe draughts. It occurred in the years 1973-1974; 1980 to 1981; 1984 to 1986, and 1989 /1990. But the major conflict which the Karrayu believed to have fought against the Argobba happened outside the time of the above drought years. These are *lola Boda* (1975), *lola Qobo* (1976), *lola Fultino*, and even the most recent conflict of 2006 (*loola bakule*) were not years of drought and famine among the two groups.

Viewed from such vantage point, it seems tenable to argue that drought has an inverse relations with the Karrayu and Argobba conflict, (conflict measured particularly in terms of its intensity). This can be further strengthened by Frejacques (2003) idea of that the "Karrayu in dry season fought for survival and took revenge at the wet season". This clearly indicates that major conflicts which demands preparation, mobilizes resources and involve relatively large number of people are unthinkable in times of severe drought and famine. But for small-scale conflicts, drought is one of the usual triggering factors.

⁷⁶ Sheik Muktar Fentalle, interviewed on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metchara.

4.3.3. Inter- group homicides

The other almost regular phenomenon that triggered the conflict between the Karrayu and Argobba has been the incidental or deliberate killing of one another. What further exacerbate the issue are their warrior ethos and their culture that offered a green light to slayer. This culture embedded moral values of the two communities sustained conflict with its 'do it right effect' as far as homicides are concerned.

As this study reveals, the Karrayu youth for instance have a social motivation and rewards for killing their enemy from their neighboring groups. As such, they have never failed to kill when ever opportunity appeals itself. And the one who killed his enemy, like the Argobba is called *raragaa*. He is considered as a symbol of honor for his family, relatives and even the clan as a whole. This act of homicide ignites the motor of vendetta by the relatives of the assassinated and made the conflict continue alive. Concerning the scale of Argobba's vengeance and its effect in the escalation of conflict, a key Karrayu informant⁷⁷ said the following:

It is common that we, the Karrayu, kill our enemy be it Afar or Argobba. Our adversaries do the same against us. But the problem with the Argobba is that whenever a Karrayu killed one Argobba, they usually tried to reciprocate it by killing ten and even more Karrayu. The Argobba are not like the Afar, they even killed our women to upset us. Mostly when they killed, a Karrayu they said the assassin is a certain unknown *shifla* (bandit).

Nevertheless, what the "Joint Peace Committee" has identified as a success story of their mission is the visible reduction in the rates of homicides. This is, of course, supported by informants from both sides too.

4.3.4. Spoilers

Spoilers wearing 'Argobba Masks'

The major spoilers in this inter -group conflict between the Karrayu and Argobba, as both groups have identified but with divergent perceptions, are the Minjar Amhara . Here, it should be noted that the Karrayu were also in conflict with Minjar Amhara especially at times of high scarcity over the grazing lands of the Kesem River. Concerning the active

⁷⁷ Haji Qesero Jillo is ex- Gada leader, interviewed on 12 February, 2009 at Metehara.

and destructive role played by this Minjar Amhara who appears to wear Argobba mask, a knowledgeable Argobba elderly informant⁷⁸ stated that:

. . . Besides us, the Argobba, there are many instances in which armed Minjar Amhara coming from the deep land of Minjar -Shenkora *Woreda* conducted cattle raids. They also shot Karrayu herders to death and snatched their gun. However, owing to our deteriorated relations, the Karrayu wrongly believe that every harm that came on the direction of our boundary is considered to be committed by the Argobba. As such, they launched their vendetta on us.

The above case clearly reveals that the Minjar Amhara have served as spoilers and key triggering actors in the Karrayu - Argobba conflict. But what the informant in a way described as the failure of the Karrayu to make distinction between the Minjar Amhara and Argobba is questionable. This is because it is quite unconvincing to claim that the Minjar Amhara perpetrators involved in their criminal act usually without the knowledge of the Argobba. This is further consolidated by Ato Adinew⁷⁹, Head of administration and security office of Berehet *Woreda*, who openly stated that “there is sort of unity between what he called ‘Argobba and Amhara robbers’. This highly worsened our relations with Fentale *Woreda* in general and the relations between Argobba and Karrayu in particular.

The Karrayu on their part, are very well cognizant of the existence of the Minjar Amhara in the conflict scenario. Nevertheless, the ‘allegations that Argobba put against the Karrayu on the claimed ground of the latter’s inability to differentiate between the Argobba and the Amhara has proved to be unfounded. The Karrayu society is neither oblivious nor have any doubt on the involvement of the Amhara. They rather have a divergent perception to the issue. Karrayu perception is well captured by the argument forwarded by their incumbent Gada leader, Robba Fentalle⁸⁰. He has articulated his argument elaborately and his view shall be put but only in its abridged form in the excerpt below :

⁷⁸ Nuri Ali Seid interviewed on 13 February, 2012 at Metebela town.

⁷⁹ Ato Adinew Haile, I interviewed him on 12 January, 2010 at Metebela.

⁸⁰ Sheik Muktar Fentalle, interviewed on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metehara.

... We, the Karrayu, know all our enemies (*dinni*) very well. We are neither deaf nor blind. We possess eyes (*ijja*) and ears (*gurra*); so we see and hear what happens on us and even beyond that. The Minjar Amhara from both the rural (*badiya*) and town (*magaala*) of the neighboring *Woreda* come to our territory and loot our cattle, camels, goats and everything they found. They also killed our men, even the aged ones. . . . They came from deep and travel across the Argobba's settlement area. It is the Argobba who provided them with shelter, food and give the necessary advices to accomplish their mission. In addition, they also made cattle raids jointly and share what they looted together.

Here, it seems plausible to assert that there is a definite solidarity between the Argobba and Minjar Amhara robbers and the latter more often than not used the former territory as a launching pad to make attacks against the Karrayu. The Minjar Amhara robbers earn economic benefit from their raids. And the Argobba people point at their finger on the Minjar Amhara, but the Karrayu contend that this is simply for the sake of shifting the responsibility of being culprits. Be this as it may, the Minjar Amhara who appears to wear Argobba masks still remain to be spoilers in the conflict between the two groups. Their drive for illegal economic gain has given a kiss of life to the sustenance of Karrayu and Argobba conflict and let the conflict flows along the course of its vicious circle.

The Revered fortunetellers

The other group that played a role of spoilers in the Karrayu versus Argobba conflict and should not be escaped without mentioning is witchcrafts that secured their reverence mainly from the community superstition. Most, if not all, of the Argobba informants have found quite reluctant to divulge the role of witch doctors in the conflict. This is because they believed that the Argobba people are the true adherents of Islam and witchcraft is against the tenets of Islamic teachings. This is, however, rebuffed by other informants, who stated that there are individuals who served as fortunetellers. Moreover, it is not uncommon to some Argobba youths to visit known witch doctors for the sake of getting medicine which they believed will turn bullet to water. This individuals fear nothing to involve in looting and robbery.

Similarly, among the Karrayu there are much revered fortunetellers which the Karrayu in their parlance called *gileen*. According to informant⁸¹ the *gileen*, using their techniques of ‘*dhakka naqqaa*’, told for their kin the appropriate time for undertaking cattle raids. Formerly, it was very common for the Karrayu youth who aspired to be *manjolla* or *raragga* to visit the house of the *gileen* and get their respective services. As remuneration to the service they rendered, the *gileen* earn some parts of the booties as per their verbal agreements. Violating their prior agreement is unthinkable for the youths as they fully believe that curse by the *gileen* would bring bad consequences in the future life of not only the youths but also their family too.

Due to their revered acceptance in the eyes their community, the *gileen* convinces their men to make raids against their Argobba adversary. This way they have served as spoilers in the conflict. Nevertheless, since more recent times, the roles of these fortune tellers have been eroded from the social fabric of the Karrayu society. This, according to informant⁸² is principally attributed to the impacts of Islam. However, despite the fact that the Karrayu society espoused Islam, they still practiced it in its syncretic forms. As such, the role of *gileen* could be said has diminished but they still have a role in conflict instigation and in a ways continue being spoiler in the conflict between the two groups.

⁸¹ Umar Wachu Rare, a knowledgeable elder at Qobo, I had interviewed him on 7 March, 2009.

⁸² Haji Qesero Jillo is ex- Gada leader, interviewed on 12 February, 2009 at Metehara.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. Actors and Dynamics of the Conflict

This chapter delves itself to the discussion of two major themes, actors and dynamics of the Karrayu-Argobba conflict. The chapter is divided in two main sections. The first section is meant for the identification of actors with their vested interests in the conflict. The second section considers the dynamics of the conflict via presenting its trends of escalation, de-escalation and re-escalation across the horizon of time.

5.1. Actors-oriented analysis

The conflict between the Karrayu and Argobba involves many actors having their own interest. But the problem in actors-oriented analysis is not the identification of actors *per se* rather their classification as 'primary actors' or 'shadow' (secondary) actors' by looking their visibility in the conflict⁸³. In the intractable Karrayu - Argobba conflict, the two groups remains centrally visible throughout the history of their conflict. In addition, the Karrayu - Argobba conflict platform also involves others each having its own interest in the conflict.

5.1.1. Actors beyond the two Ethnic groups

5.1.1.1. Foreign concessionary company

As stated above, since the late 1950s/ large-scale irrigation has been the central focus of development in the Awash Valley. Modernization efforts of the imperial regime in Ethiopia in the context of expanding large scale commercial farming were partly owned by concessionary companies. In our case the HVA (Handels Vereeniging Amsterdam) started to produce sugar in the Upper Awash Valley. This company, as asserted by Bahru (2002:206:207), was attracted by loose investment policy of the country that actually made them more profitable than ever before. Its vested interest in gaining exorbitant profit from this commercial farm displaced the Karrayu from their land, and thus complicated the situation of scarcity of environmental resources. This, in turn, caused

⁸³ In this regard, Shedrack Gaya Best (2004: 64-65) stated that identification of primary and secondary actors in a conflict is an uphill task. This is particularly the case, as with time, primary actor can be a shadow actor and the vice versa. Even actors may cease to be actor, and hence leave from the conflict scene of a given conflict across the horizon of time.

and/or exacerbated inter-group conflicts in the area, like the Karrayu - Argobba conflict. But later, as it happened, this foreign concessionary company left from the conflict scene after it was nationalized by the Dergue regime.

5.1.1.2. The Ethiopian Government

The adverse roles the successive Ethiopian regimes played in this conflict between the two groups can be seen from its design of inappropriate development policies. The establishment of Nura Era Plantation, Metehara Sugar Estate factory, and the Awash National Park alienated a good part of Karrayu land. This not only generates but also exacerbated inter- group conflict the Karrayu have with their neighboring adversaries, like the Argobba, and it also led to the hostility between the Karrayu and the state. Karrayu elder⁸⁴ perceived that the boundary they share with these development and conservation schemes is classified as *dhanga loola* (conflict boundary).

Besides its resource grab, as shall be seen below in chapter six, informant⁸⁵ expressed that the failure of the successive Ethiopian regimes to resolve or transform the Karrayu and Argobba conflict through any meaningful means made the central state to continue as actor in the conflict.

5.1.1.3. Political parties

The two political parties which Fentale *Woreda* identified as agents in the exacerbation of Karrayu's conflict not only with the Argobba but also with the Afar were Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Oromo National Congress (ONC). The OLF as a move to 'destabilize the country' have engaged in 'destructive' actions that complicate Karrayu's relation with its hostile neighbors of the Argobba. According to informant⁸⁶, the OLF cadres made close contacts with the Karrayu society and made them politically assertive. The party was believed to present issue to the Karrayu not as it appears but with tone of

⁸⁴ Sheik Muktar Fentalle, and Haji Qesero Jillo interviewed on 11 February, and 12 February 2009 at Metehara.

⁸⁵ Sheik Hussien Seid, a religious leader, and Mohammed Nur, a knowledgably elder interviewed on 10 January and 7 January, 2011 at Arerti.

⁸⁶ Abay Tsegaye, Head of Administration and Security Office of Fentale *Woreda*. I interviewed him on 12 February, 2012.

supplication. They created looser mentality on the part of the Karrayu and instigates them to claim their historic land now occupied by the Argobba. This, of course, worsened the Karrayu and Argobba conflict over issue of land ownership.

Similarly, the ONC especially in the 2005 national election campaign is supposed to play the same role. As a Karrayu elder⁸⁷ narrates his recent memory and has stated that the ONC openly stated that the government deliberately cut-off Karrayu land and offered it to the Argobba. And this has, in a way, consolidated Karrayu's already existing enemy images against the Argobba.

The role of the two political parties is not confined to the increase of Karrayu - Argobba conflict but they also tried their best to defame OPDO and made it less dependable in the eyes of the Karrayu. This was manifested, for instance, during the 2006 conflict (*lola Bakule*). At this conflict, informant⁸⁸, states that the Karrayu complaints 'swarmed' (to use his own expression) the compound of Fentale district administration. They sadly pointed out that the *Woreda* administration was responsible for exposing them to such danger. The Karrayu then even asked the administration to supply them with ammunition. The Karrayu believe that, the Argobba were then supported by their district administration.

5.1.1.4. Ethnic entrepreneurs

Results of the Focus Group Discussions⁸⁹ uncovered that there are individuals in the three districts that worked to the politicization of the Karrayu and Argobba conflict. Among the Argobba people, there are local elites who are dissatisfied by the government's reluctance to render them the status of special *Woreda*, are allegedly instigated their people to conflict against the Karrayu. The political calculation of this Argobba ethnic entrepreneurs have centered on the belief that the outbreak of frequent conflict would pressurize and speed up the government to respond to their quest. The

⁸⁷ Fentalle Gubu , a Karrayu elder, interviewed on March 1,2009 at Haro Qersa.

⁸⁸ Abay Tsegaye, I interviewed him on 12 February, 2012.

⁸⁹ The FGDs with the Argobba and the Karrayu were undertaken on 17 February, 2012(Arerti) and on March 8, 2009 at Metehara respectively.

Karrayu argued that these ethnic entrepreneurs have played a preponderant role in the 2006 Argobba's raid of the Karrayu. The same allegation exists against those political elites on Fentale *Woreda*, who are believed to activate the conflict.

Taking *Iola Bakule* as a show case, the two groups held mutual allegations and counter allegations that during this time the militias and even the police forces who are supposed to keep peace in the area were believed to side with their groups and take part in the conflict. This act of prioritizing one's own ethnic affiliation to the sacred mission of peace keeping between the two groups worsened the conflict situation. Here, I should make it clear that none of my Argobba or Karrayu informants accepted that they secured the support of the militia or police forces. But the case holds true when it comes only to the other side. So what really exists is a kind of inter-group incrimination.

5.1.1.5. Federal army forces

The other group which this study identified as actors is the special federal army forces which the state used to suppress violent conflict. In this regard, the more recent Karrayu - Argobba conflict of the 2006 was a major one that continued for about a week. As it happened beyond the control of the regional governments, the federal army made direct intervention and suppressed the conflict with the use of sheer military force. As informant⁹⁰ revealed the importance of the area (as it is crossed by the main road to the port of Djibouti), make any risks of conflict a threat to safe transportation. Thus, there have been normal tendency of the federal armies to quickly intervene and suppress conflict. But their intervention, both Argobba and Karrayu informants⁹¹, maintain that created sense of enmity with the local communities. The Karrayu states that in the 2006 conflict, it was not the Argobba that harmed them, rather the government armies who beat and killed us. The Karrayu perceived that the government is inconsiderate of their 'just cause' in the conflict. So the bad scars their intervention left on the two groups definitely hampers both the conflict and the peace making process. This, of course, is the results of making peace through violent means.

⁹⁰ Abay Tsegaye, I interviewed him on 12 February, 2012.

⁹¹ Umar Abdalla, interviewed on 12 February 2011 at his homestead -Awra Godana; Sheik Muktar Fentalle, interviewed on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metehara.

5.1.1.6. Illicit arms traffickers

The other actors that played a subsidiary role in the Karrayu and Argobba conflict are those individuals and /or groups who have been involved in the supply and circulation of small arms to the two protagonist groups. Formerly the Somali clan called the Hawiya played a decisive role in the circulation firearms in the area. And now-a-days, as identified by Ayalew (2009), the group that have been playing a paramount role in the circulation of small arms and ammunitions are the Argobba group themselves. But apart from this as informant⁹² stated, there are also individual contrabandists that provide the guns, particularly bullets to the Karrayu and Argobba groups. Their motive in the conflict is economic benefits. This could be discerned by the fact that the Argobba arms smugglers sale their gun to the Karrayu but not oblivious of the fact that it can be used against their own kin groups. The sole motive of these illicit arms traders is none other than economic gain. Thus, these illicit traders, in short affect the conflict in many ways than one.

In light of this a Karrayu informant⁹³, states that Argobba merchants dwelling in the town of Metehara are believed to take part in the supply of arms to their group. These 'rich merchants' are believed to have both the money and relatively easy access to buy fire arms and bullets and thus provide it to their Argobba kin groups. They are also accused of being involved in cattle raids in proxy and benefited much out of it. During my field work, I heard that it was on this ground of allegation that an Argobba trader named Nuriye Tahir was shot to death at his business house.

5.1.2. Karrayu and Argobba Groups

It is beyond doubt that in this intractable social conflict, the two ethnic groups that played a central and primary actors role are the transhumant Karrayu and the agro-pastoralist Argobba. Initially, the conflict was between the Argobba and Dulecha section of the Karrayu. But later on with the encroachment of the Argobba on Dullecha's land and the latter's eviction to the Basso territory, the conflict has become between Argobba and the

⁹² Ato Bejerond Abera, I interviewed him on 20 February, 2012 at Arerti.

⁹³ Gebi Hawas interviewed on 9 March, 2009 at Metehara.

Karrayu as a whole. Formerly, the interest of these ethnic groups in the conflict was the use of resources, in the Arole Plain and the banks of Kesem (Bulga) River, which they used commonly but not without conflict. But now-a-days the Karrayu and Argobba groups have held a diametrically opposite interests over the ownership of land and territorially occupations. These groups have been moving their own way to realize their defined interest in the conflict. This made them core actors in the conflict and, of course, primary ones.

5.1.2.1. The youths: As core actors

The other primary local actors that played a central role in this conflict are the youths from both groups of the Argobba and Karrayu. The social responsibilities these age groups shoulder among their respective community gave them an opportunity to involve in violent confrontations. Among the Karrayu, the pastoral youths are responsible for herding their livestock, and they move to different places, *goddana* in their parlance. Their transhumance includes the areas which they identified as conflict boundary. This led them in conflict with their Argobba adversaries. Their engagement in violent conflict is particularly common in the dry season. However, they also fight each other at times when there is 'no scarcity' as such.

As a Karrayu informant⁹⁴ stated, the pastoral youths fought spontaneous conflict against their Argobba counterparts both in the areas of Arole and Kesem River. The type of conflict (*lola*) which the Karrayu called *Matta Bute* has been a common phenomenon among the youths. *Matta Bute* as one type of conflict is marked by the following characteristics. It is a spontaneous, accidental conflict that occurs between the herders from the two sides. It occurs at a time when herds of the two groups meet at a certain point. This time the youth herders from either side take provocative initiatives like verbal aggressions and scold. This, in turn, lead to the outbreak of clashes, but the conflict usually lasts after a short while as no preparation is made to it. Moreover, *Matta Bute* does not have spillover effect but at times where there occurred homicide or serious

⁹⁴ Sheik Muktar Fentalle, an incumbent Gada leader, interviewed on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metehara.

injury it leads to revenge and hence plant the seed for the escalation of the conflict. *Matta bute* could happen at any time of the year and does not necessarily entail the shortage of pasture or water, which is a common case under *lola selfa* (the conflict of *selfa*).

Argobba informant⁹⁵ also confirmed the existence of this most frequent and very small-scale conflict. To express its mundane nature, the Argobba called this type of conflict as '*yeregnoch til*' (conflict of the herders). Mostly this type of conflict is perceived as simple and even the neighboring village may not be aware of it even after it gets terminated.

In addition, this active role of the youths in the conflict can also be discerned from the fact that individuals groups within this age bracket involve in cattle raiding and rustling. The Karrayu people have social institutions for undertaking cattle raiding and rustling which are called *Orissa* and *Gaddu* respectively. While explaining their features Ayalew (2009:28-29) wrote the following:

Gaddu is an institution in which five to eight armed youths launch cattle rustling on neighboring groups they consider to be their enemies. It is a planned and organized attack usually undertaken during the rainy season (*genna*). *Orissa* on the other hand is more heavily organized raid with the objective of plundering livestock belonging to an enemy group. It involves up to two hundred people.

Generally, both the small-scale and large-scale raids and counter-raids the two groups make against each other caused their conflict, and let it be enduring as it proves. But what further complicated the issue are the weakening of the power of customary authorities and the commercialization and politicization of livestock raiding. Due to this, the youths have been engaging in such act even without the knowledge of their communities as before. While explaining the violent behavior of their youth, elderly Argobba informant⁹⁶ expresses his views in the following ways:

⁹⁵Umar Abdalla ,interviewed on 12 February 2011 at his homestead -Awra Godana; Sheik Muktar Fentalle, interviewed on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metehara.

⁹⁶Nuri Ali Seid interviewed on 13 February, 2012 at Metebela town.

. . . Our youth are highly provocative and always want to be *gegna* (hero). They undermined their Karrayu counterparts on the ground of lack of courage which they cannot parallel with us. The youth are prone to take immediate revenge, without the approval of their family or community. They commit incidental killings against the Karrayu, either as revenge or simply to dispossess his gun. The youths also loot cattle from the Karrayu in the face of the dry sun, which the Karrayu usually fear to launch without wearing the darkness of the night.

This case discerns the overall violence in which the youths take part. And in times of large-scale conflict, it is the youths along with the adults who took the frontline of the combat. This made them an active agent in the conflict scenario.

It should be reminded that any attempt to address the Karrayu and Argobba conflict through the mere participation of renowned community elders can hardly bear its fruits. This is because customary authorities do not enjoy their past glory. There also exists inter-generational conflict. Thus, reaching the youths through elders has become more and more difficult. As such, the concerned body should use considerable energy to bring changes in the violent and destructive behavior of the youths from the two ethnic groups. Otherwise, excluding the youths, who play a pivotal role in the conflict, from the peace making processes and awareness raising meetings, would carry the risk of missing its intended target.

5.2.2.2. The roles of women

It has been common that in many studies of conflict, wars have been taken historically symbolized as the touch stone of “manliness”. The concept of war as the proving ground of manliness has centered on the notion of combat. Combat is understood to be the ultimate test of masculinity, and thus crucial to the ideological structure of patriarchy. However, against this assumption, this study has found that both Argobba and Karrayu women have direct and indirect roles in the conflict.

Results of the focus group discussions⁹⁷ held at Metehara and Arerti towns disclosed that the role of women during cases of violent conflict is not as primary combatants lined at the fore front. They rather are believed to play subsidiary or secondary role through providing logistics to their respective men. They provided them water, and food in times of prolonged combat; they also take care of those individuals injured during the conflict and take back the slained to a relative buffer zone. Moreover, when there is no open conflict the women at home prepare food for their men who go and stay for some days for the sake of cattle raiding and rusting.

Furthermore, Karrayu and Argobba women also play considerable role in the dissemination of information regarding the eruption of violent conflict. This highly helps each group in order not to lose numerical advantage in favor of their enemy. They did this through shouting loudly which served as a ringing bell to the neighboring villages.

In addition the direct involvement or presence of women in the place of combat adds a momentum to the war morale of their respective men. Regarding this, a Karrayu informant⁹⁸ expressed this matter metaphorically as follows:

The presence of women (*dubarii*) with us during conflict, make the conflict deadly. They are just like *ibida* (fire) as they inject courage to the man. To escape from embarrassment, we are not daring to run back from the combat nor do we give hand (*harka kennu*) to our enemy.

This case is a clear indication of the fact that women praise and lionize their heroes through their war songs. By contrast, they uttered pejorative and derogatory words to those men who are reluctant to fight gallantly and run away from the combat. This ultimately denigrates the ‘masculinity of these groups. An Argobba informant⁹⁹ captures the whole issue by saying ሽሙጣቸውን አንችልም (we cannot shoulder their sarcastic

⁹⁷ The FGDs with the Argobba and the Karrayu were undertaken on 17 February, 2012 (Arerti) and on March 8, 2009 at Metehara respectively.

⁹⁸ Sheik Muktar Fentalle, interviewed on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metehara.

⁹⁹ Abdella Hassen, interviewed on February 21, 2012 at Metebela.

speech) after the end of the conflict. Among the Karrayu and Argobba women have due place for being a wife of a hero.

The Karrayu and Argobba women have been victims of the conflict that occurred between the two groups. However, throughout the history of their relationship and conflict, informants¹⁰⁰ disclosed that killing a woman by a man has been seen as 'a sacred cow' by these communities. This is to mean that it is culturally a taboo to kill a woman. The pastoralist Karrayu and the agro- pastoral Argobba are patriarchal societies who accorded due place to masculinity. Apart from accidental killings no one kills a woman deliberately. A Karrayu informant¹⁰¹ narrated the reason for this 'rule of the game' sanctioned by their culture in the following way:

. . . In times of either open combat or otherwise, it is quite a taboo to a Karrayu man to kill women from any other adversary groups. In our culture, women are considered as *burqaa* (natural spring water). So killing them is tantamount to committing a grave crime of 'genocide' through stopping the perpetuation of generations to the victim groups. In addition, we did not kill women because they are just like their *harama* (breasts), a lowered one; thus cannot cause any actual harm. They are rather harmless.

In a similar vein, this cultural taboo of killing women is out rightly supported by the Argobba informants too. However, there is accusation over the break of this rule. The Karrayu sadly stated that unlike the Afar, who respect and adhere to this cultural sanction, the Argobba are accused of killing Karrayu women. As discussed above, the event that opened a new chapter for Karrayu and Argobba's history is *lola Boda*. At this conflict, the Karrayu stated that the Argobba killed their women and even cut-off their breast. However, this 'allegations' is squarely nullified and rebuffed by the Argobba who stated that killing women is the action of the cowardice.

¹⁰⁰ Sheik Muktar Fentalle, interviewed on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metehara.

¹⁰¹ Umar Abdalla, interviewed on 12 February 2011 at his homestead -Awra Godana; Sheik Muktar Fentalle, interviewed on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metehara.

Researches reveal that pastoral women in the Awash Valley have played their own role in the peace making process. They served as ambassador of peace. In order to resolve inter-ethnic conflicts and create inter-group cohesion the 'exchange of woman' has been used, for instance, between the Karrayu and Afar, Afar and Issa, Karrayu and Ittu, etc. However, this study has found that this common tradition of inter-group marriage or exchange of women is nearly non-existent between the Karrayu and Argobba. For the Argobba, this is perhaps because of their defensive culture of marriage. On the part of the Karrayu, lack of marriage alliance with the '*Sidama*', a group in which the Amharic speaking Argobba are also included sometimes, Frejacques pointed out some reasons. According to her 'lack of knowledge concerning animal herds, food preparations, child care and ritual life are the main reasons put forward against incorporating '*Sidama*' woman into Karrayu society. Karrayu men and women perceive the differences experienced in these four domains of socio-cultural life as being so consequential that common life is believed to be impossible (Frejacques, 2003:251).

5.2. Dynamics of the conflict

Conflicts are multi-dimensional and hence, are not static social phenomenon. Thus, any satisfactory conflict analysis should essentially address the dynamics aspects of the conflict which alter both the structure and interplay relationships over time (Mitchell, 1981:133). Conflict dynamics can be described as the resulting interactions between the conflict profile, the actors and causes. In this case, understanding conflict dynamics helps to identify windows of opportunity, in particular through the use of scenario building, which aims to assess different possible developments and think through appropriate responses. In a given conflict, its dynamics can be found encircling the conflict context, causes and actors. It hence lies between what Galtung (1996:76) termed '*conflict formation and conflict transformation*'. In light of this, the dynamics of the Karrayu – Argobba conflict is explained mainly based on the structural and actor-oriented analysis made above. To make the analysis more concrete, empirical cases shall be used here under.

5.2.1. Long term trends: Changes and continuities

The genesis of Karrayu –Argobba conflict is rooted in historical past and hence it underwent transformations in its nature, causes, scope, and intensity. In its formation, the Karrayu-Argobba conflict was believed to be the outcome of the culture embedded warrior ethos and their socially manifested aggressive patriarchy. But over time mainly after state intervention in the area made in the name of development and natural conservation, which generated resource scarcity, the conflict between the two groups was principally defined as resource-based conflict. That is conflict over the temporal use of grazing lands and water points for their livestock's. But the root cause of the conflict has changed in the post-Dergue era. The restructuring of administrative boundary and its decentralization by the federal government, which uses the territorial approach to its ethnic-based federalism, has transformed the vested interests of the two groups in their conflict. It changed it from the temporal use of environmental resources to the permanent quest of territorial occupation and boundary delimitation.

A close look at the long term trends of the Karrayu-Argobba conflict could discern the other changes or new trends that the conflict exhibited in the area of actors. During the imperial period, HVA, a foreign concessionary company, was one shadow actor in the conflict. But this continued only up until its nationalization by the Dergue government, which made it the property of the state. Moreover, the formalization of ethnicity by the federal government and its multi-party politics has brought political parties to the scene of the conflict. Besides this, ethnic entrepreneurs from both groups have been playing their adverse roles via the politicization and exploitation of ethnic differences which they have used for mobilizing the masses to realize their respective socio-economic and political ends.

Pertaining to the institutions, both community-based and the formal state apparatus, used to mitigate or manage the conflict, formerly their customary conflict resolution institutions of the two communities were effective in managing their intermittent conflict. But this was altered by the state during the Dergue era that deliberately marginalized their traditional institutions. And now-a-days the incumbent government as

informants¹⁰² ascertained has seemed to give some support to the revival of such customary institutions. To that end, the state owned peace-making platforms have involved community elders and religious leaders as its members. Nevertheless, the weakening of the traditional institutions, the lack of authority and capacity by elders to make decisions pertaining to the predisposing factor, and the state 'monopolization' of the peace making process have made the customary institutions inadequate to address the conflict. This, in turn has opened the way for the escalation of the conflict in present period.

The other transformation the Karrayu-Argobba conflict has exhibited as part of its dynamics in its historical evolution which marks its present trend is the tendency of reductionism observed in the two communities. This is to say that every conflict case and type is explained in ethnic terms. As stated by Karrayu informant¹⁰³ the two types of conflict (*lola*) which they fought against the Argobba, namely *Mata Bute* and *lola selfa* were regular phenomenon but they usually terminated with no much spillover effects. The same informant further captures this issue by taking another variant of conflict (*lola*) which they called it by a distinct conflict name-*lola Murrasa*. The informant has explained his views in that:

... The Karrayu have fought many *Murrasa*'s with the Argobba since time in the past. In *lola Murrasa*, the number of combatants involved is less than thirty. It can be conducted without the knowledge of the whole Karrayu villages (*gandootta Karrayu*). One village (*gandaa*) may conduct it. While undertaking such conflict we send spy (*dhootu*) to check the potential strength of our adversary. We do this mainly in order not to lose numerical advantage in favor of our protagonists. This conflict terminates after some hours and does not have much spillover effects on the neighboring villages.

This is not, however, the case in contemporary period when inter-village communications have been enhanced mainly due to their access to the services of mobile technology. This has made contemporary conflicts largely mass-based. Conflicts that might occur at the vicinity of the banks of Kesem River between few Karrayu and Argobba herders is heard

¹⁰² Sheik Muktar Fentalle, on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metehara.

¹⁰³ Abdella Hassen, interviewed on February 21, 2012 at Metebila.

by other Karrayu who are settled say in *Nura Era*, *Gelcha*, or *Ledi Fete* with almost a meteoric speed. This enables other villages to take part in the conflict, and it lets the conflict escalates very soon.

The progressive polarization of ethnic identity and its being a base for mass mobilization can also be discerned from the rural- urban linkages. As stated by Argobba informant¹⁰⁴, formerly the conflict between the Karrayu and Argobba was largely a rural phenomenon. Despite their conflict and deterioration of inter-group cohesion, the Argobba merchants living at the town of Metehara were not targets of vengeance by the Karrayu. But the growing solidification of their ethnic dichotomy that widened and consolidated the 'they' and 'us' boundary seems to have injected new dimension to it. As a show case, the same informant has pinpointed the situation that occurred in the aftermath of the large scale conflict of 2006. Then the Karrayu killed a rich Argobba merchant at his business house for the mere reason that he possesses Argobba ethnic marks. The Karrayu did this to avenge the Argobba.

Therefore, the politicization of ethnicity cut the rural-urban dichotomy, and, hence, widened the scope of the conflict by adding new actors in the conflict. Shedding light to this assertion, results of the Focus Group Discussion with the Argobba elders held at Arerti have revealed that initially the Argobba had fought with the Dulecha section of the Karrayu. But later on with the displacement of the Dulacha and their subsequent settlement on the Basso land, the conflict became between the Argobba against the whole Karrayu groups. And now-a-days with the solidification of ethnic identity, other Oromo clans are believed to render their support to the Karrayu, these are namely the Ittu and the Arsi Oromo.

The other new trend closely tied with the changing nature of the Karrayu-Argobba conflict is the adverse role played by the youths from both groups. Just throughout the history of their conflicts the youths have remained to be central actors who take the

¹⁰⁴ Umar Abdalla, interviewed on 12 February 2011 at his homestead -Awra Godana; Sheik Muktar Fentalle, on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metehara.

frontline in times of actual combat. But unlike to the historic past, informants¹⁰⁵, have disclosed that due to the weakening of their social institutions and the attendant inter-generational conflict, ease of access to the supply of fire arms, and the commercialization of the age-old tradition of cattle raiding have motivated the youths to involve in more violent conflicts. This has brought new changes in the conflict and escalates its intensity.

Besides the long term trends, the other pertinent issue that should not be escaped without mentioning while addressing conflict dynamics is the short-term triggers which lead to the outbreak or escalation of the conflict under review. In this regard, there is continuity in the triggering factors from the formation of the Karrayu and Argobba conflict till to date. Thus, cattle raiding, homicidal crimes, looting and robbery, and the negative roles of spoilers in the conflict still remain to be factors that have manifested the conflict between the two groups. The change in this regard as argued by interviewed officials¹⁰⁶, in the two districts of Fentale and Minjar-Shenkora, is the reduction of large-scale cattle raiding and counter-raiding. Moreover, the short term-triggers, unlike in the past, are not used by the two conflicting groups to meet their short term or immediate interests. But they are rather used as a means to realize their defined grand goal of territorial occupation and boundary delimitation.

5.2.2. Intensity of the conflict: Escalation and de-escalation

Since its initiation, the conflict between the Karrayu and the Argobba underscored marked changes in its degree of intensity. Despite its temporary de-escalation after a period of its entrapment, the average trend of the stated conflict has been showing a clear escalation in its intensity. In the past, the conflict between the aforementioned groups was managed by the local communities through the use of their time-tested wisdom of customary conflict resolution/management institutions. But this has changed over time and along with other factors plays its own role in the escalation of conflicts.

¹⁰⁵ Abay Tsegaye, I interviewed him on 12 February, 2012; Ato Bejerond Abera, Head of Administration and Security office of Minjar-Shenkora Woreda. I interviewed him on 20 February, 2012 at Arerti.

¹⁰⁶ Umar Abdalla, interviewed on 12 February 2011 at his homestead -Awra Godana; Sheik Muktar Fentalle, on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metehara.

Conflict escalation is noted for its rising levels of hostility driven by the severity of the tactics that the conflicting parties have made use of. According to my informants¹⁰⁷, there are multiple factors that account for the increase in the frequency and intensity of the Karrayu-Argobba conflict. Just to begin it the progressively growing polarization of relationships between the two groups under review has played a pivotal role in intensifying their conflict. Historically, the Karrayu and the Argobba communities used to have amicable relations. Their peaceful co-existence was manifested with their social bondage established through *jaala* relations, their economic interdependence, and through their economic exchange conducted at the common market they used to attend. But since the time of the Dergue era, their hostility entered a new stage and it fractured inter-group cohesion. What has developed from this is the development of keen enemy image, stereotype, and the consequent lack of mutual trusts. This, in turn, convoluted their conflicts and has been adding a momentum on the intensification of the conflict in focus.

Moreover, across the horizon of time the Karrayu-Argobba conflict has extended its scope via involving new additional actors having their own vested interest in the conflict. This reality, as it proves, has complicated the conflict situations and hurdle the peace-making endeavors made so far. Another fundamental factor, which the same informants, have identified as responsible for the exacerbation of the stated conflict is the worsening of resource scarcity. The serious scarcity of environmental resources is caused by the amalgam of both natural and social factors. The socially generated scarcity resulting from state interventions in the area, and its effect of enhancing the vulnerability of the groups to recurrent draughts and famines has generated and worsened the conflict between the stated groups. It is not a mere coincidence that the conflict among the Karrayu and the Argobba reached an unprecedented scale after the involvement of the state in the realm of forceful resource grabbing.

¹⁰⁷ Abay Tsegaye, I interviewed him on 12 February, 2012-Metehara; Ato Bejerond Abera, I interviewed him on 20 February, 2012 at Arerti.

Furthermore, the change in the underlying cause of the conflict compelled both groups to re-define their goal in the conflict. As a result, their present contentions over issues of land ownerships and boundary problem make the Karrayu and Argobba societies to have a diametrically discordant stance in the conflict. This appears not easily compromised or negotiated. What gives extra weight to the problem is the fact that to date the state failed to address the root causes of the conflict. More worsening is the destructive role which local state agents who are selected to keep peace in the area are found being actors of violence.

Still more, the relative ease of access to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, the commercialization of cattle raiding and the failure to enforce decisions of series of peace agreements pushed each groups to resort to the use of military might as a dependable solution to their problem. This has definitely exacerbated both the frequency and lethality of the conflict, and thus, it partially explains its contemporary trend of escalation.

Generally, it should be noted that the progressive escalation of the Karrayu-Argobba conflict does not proceed in linear over time. There have been stages where the conflict de-escalates, albeit temporarily, after a period of its escalation. For instance, since the most recent large scale conflict of 2006, there seems the conflict decreases after its force full suppression. This relative de-escalation happens while the stalemate continues unchecked. For this informants¹⁰⁸ pointed out that the declines in large scale cattle raids and in the rates of homicides, and also the decreasing tendency in the frequency of occurrences of violent conflict as responsible factors. But the present de-escalation is not complemented by enduring peace efforts. This made the post-2006 decrease in the intensity of conflict a short-time reality with a high degree of probability to re-escalate when conditions of conflict appeals itself to the two groups.

¹⁰⁸ Umar Abdalla ,interviewed on 12 February 2011 at his homestead -Awra Godana; Sheik Muktar Fentalle, on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metehara.

CHAPTER SIX

6. Micro and Macro level Responses to the Karrayu-Argobba conflict

In this chapter a due attention is given to the analysis of the micro and macro level approaches which have been used to address the aforementioned conflict. By doing so, the chapter, pinpoints the factors for the weakening of their customary conflict resolution /management institutions and its contemporary inadequacies to redress the conflict. It also made a critical assessment of the role of the Joint Peace Committee in addressing the conflict in focus.

6.1. Micro level responses

From the discussion made so far, it has become clear that the Karrayu and Argobba since the time of their contact maintained both amicable and conflictual relationship. Until more recent time in the entire history of their relations, where their animosity reached a point of unprecedented scale, both groups have used their customary conflict management/resolution institutions to redress injustices or injuries inflicted by any perpetrators.

As stated in chapter three, the agro-pastoral Argobba are patriarchal society who possesses traditional mechanisms of conflict resolutions. The Argobba 'institutions of the elders' have been administered by religious leaders of the community, the Qadi, Sheiks and by other respected community elders. Likewise, the pastoral Karrayu also have a time-tested institution of conflict resolution mechanisms called, the *Arrarra* institution. In this institution, revered community elders, Gada leaders both active and retired, and spiritual leaders fill the platforms of the institution. These groups are called *jarsota Arrarra* (literary means elders of reconciliation). Here, it should also be noted that *Arrarra* is not only the name of the institution, it is rather beyond that, and encompasses the actual process of reconciliation and peacemaking ceremonies undertaken by the community.

The intent of this sub-section is not to probe deep into the investigation of the nature of their conflict management system *per se*. Rather, it is targeted at excavating the role the

indigenous systems played in addressing their conflict and why it gradually but certainly lost its historic potency in peace-making process, and, thus, ultimately become inadequate for managing their contemporary conflict. To do that, a good starting point should be to say few pertinent words about the roles of elders and traditional conflict resolution system in African perspective.

It is beyond doubt that elders and chiefs in Africa play decisive roles in customary conflict management system. They are highly respected in the eyes of their societies. Their judicial decisions are legitimated by their 'knowledge of the traditional way of life, circumspections, and adherence to the truth' (Pkalya et al, 2004). In this regard, the same authors have identified a few other reasons to the respect elders and chiefs enjoy in many African societies. I found their argument worthy to be reproduced here under and it reads as:

The elders have three sources of authority that make them effective in maintaining peaceful relationships and community ways of life. They control access to resources and material rights; they have access to networks that go beyond the clan boundaries either identity or generations; and posses supernatural powers reinforced by superstitions and witchcraft.

The above reality holds true for both the Argobba and Karrayu groups. As data gleaned from focus group discussions¹⁰⁹ have disclosed that before the coming of the Dergue through the popular revolution of 1974, the imperial regime 'accorded wider latitudes of freedom' to the two groups to deal with their conflicts according to their traditions. The two groups used to settle their problems customarily and often report the issue to their immediate state administrators just as an afterthought.

While expressing the effectiveness of their customary conflict resolution which is deeply embedded in their social norms and rituals an Argobba elder¹¹⁰ reveals that:

¹⁰⁹ The FGDs with the Argobba and the Karrayu were undertaken on 17 February, 11 2009 (Arerti) and on March 8, 2009 at Metehara respectively

¹¹⁰ Tahiriye Sheik Abdul, a community elder in interviewed on 15 February 2011 at Arerti

. . . It is undeniable that the Argobba made cattle raids against the Karrayu in many instances. Especially in times of cattle raids, the Karrayu have sent their elders with their own initiation and make our elders know the whole issue. Later on they sit together and reach an agreement to return the cattle to the owners without much difficulty But this is not case now.

The informant is nostalgic about his past as he still has sound reasons to prefer the customary conflict resolution to the formal legal system for solving their conflict and grievances they have one another. Moreover, his statement of "*this is not the case now*" vividly indicates the contemporary erosion of their institutions and its weak enforcement capacity. In addition, the commercialization of cattle raiding and rustling made retrieval of lost livestock through peaceful means as before proves difficult if not totally unthinkable.

Moreover, in the past, the two groups also used their customary conflict resolution institutions to address cases of homicides. Regarding this, the Karrayu have a popular tradition called *Guma*. The *Guma* is a blood money paid to the assassinated kin as compensation. Unlike the procedure in the formal court system, here identifying the culprit is not difficult. Elders from the two groups agree on the amount of blood money to be paid and then reconciliation is concluded with ritual ceremonies destined to give a symbolic end to it. This normally closes the windows of opportunity for vendetta from being taken by the victim group. However, now-a-days as informants ¹¹¹ have stated, more often than not, the dialogue over issue of homicides is made through the language of the gun. This, in turn, sustain the cycle of conflict between the stated groups.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of their traditional approaches in managing conflict in historic past can also be seen from the way they used resources commonly. As this chapter in its causal analysis made it clear that the conflict between the Karrayu and Argobba in pre-federal period was principally resource-based. These groups were fighting over the grazing land and water of the Arole Plain and the banks of Kesem River, the latter site involve other competing groups, the Afar, Ittu and Minjar-Amhara.

¹¹¹ Umar Abdalla ,interviewed on 12 February 2011 at his homestead -Awra Godana; Sheik Muktar Fentalle, on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metehara.

However, despite their conflict in these areas, the Karrayu and Argobba used the customary means of conflict redressing and used the resources commonly with manageable conflicts. However, this is not the reality at the present time when grazing land remains unutilized for fear of potential attacks.

The roles of Karrayu and Argobba elders in managing their inter-group conflict on their own terms gradually lost its traditional momentum and proved inadequate to deal with their contemporary conflict. This has become a reality particularly in post-revolution period. This is because the Dergue government re-organized pastoral Karrayu and agro-pastoral Argobba under peasant associations (PAs) administered by government elected local representatives. The net effects of this on the Karrayu, as remarked by Ayalew (2001:95), was that the role of "*jarsotta Arrarra* was appropriated and given to state representatives". This, in turn, conspicuously marginalized their *Arrarra* institution. In this regard, what happened to the Argobba was not any different or not exceptional in any sense of the term.

The marginalization of the traditional institutions and the futile attempt made by the Dergue government to resolve the Karrayu versus Argobba conflict can better be described as the nationalization of the peace making process. As an ex-Gada leader of the Karrayu¹¹² explained his experience, that the state during the Dergue era made the peace making process neither all inclusive nor community based. The whole approaches did not go in line with their tradition (*adda*) as it offered the authority to state representatives who did not draw the legitimacy of their authority from the cultural fabric of the Karrayu society but from the state. This non-community based approach made the role of the state in addressing the conflict between Karrayu and Argobba an ambitious task that ultimately proved futile.

The above reality can be ascertained by the fact that as compared to the imperial regime, it was during the period of the Dergue that the Karrayu and Argobba entered a serious

¹¹² Haji Qesero Jillo is ex- Gada leader, interviewed on 12 February, 2009 at Metehara.

stage of conflict. The Karrayu and Argobba elders¹¹³ vividly remember, *inter alia*, three major conflicts they fought against the Argobba during the Dergue era. This, altogether, ushered a new era in the hostile relationship between the two groups. These conflicts were *lola Boda* (1975), *lola Qobo* (1976), *lola Fultino*. This reality is also supported by Ayalew, who openly stated that “during the military regime, far more lives are said to have been lost as a consequence of hostility between the Karrayu and Argobba than between the Karrayu and any one of the other groups” (2001:89).

Besides the adverse roles of the state, there are also other factors that account for the feebleness of the customary authorities. Results from focus group discussions¹¹⁴ uncovered that these factors are the direct offspring of the changes the Karrayu and Argobba conflict underwent in its nature. Before we proceed to the discussion of the factors, it should be noted that even during the period of its glory, there were some serious issues that proved beyond the control of elders and often dealt with mutual vengeance. This is to mean that the seriousness of the harm inflicted on any sides determines the success of their customary conflict resolution institutions. Similarly, the transformations that the conflict between the two groups underscores across the horizon of time have exerted an adverse impact on their traditional conflict redressing institutions.

The first, and of course the prominent factor, is the changes in the underlying causes of the conflict. Viewed from such vantage point, the root cause of the Karrayu - Argobba conflict moved from being cultural values to resource- based and now over ownership of land, which is now inextricably linked with the wider political development of the state. And it involves, implicitly the interests of other groups other than the two communities. As such, it has become squarely difficult to deal with their problem of territorial claim /boundary issue/ using the two communities’ traditional wisdom of conflict redressing.

¹¹³ Haji Qesero Jillo ,on 12 February, 2009 at Metehara; Sheik Hussien Seid, a religious leader, interviewed on 10 January, 2012.

¹¹⁴ The FGDs with the Argobba and the Karrayu were undertaken on 17 February, 2012(Arerti) and on March 8, 2009 at Metehara respectively.

Secondly, the commercialization and further politicization of cattle raiding and rustling has also brought negative effect and squarely precipitated the erosion of the power and legitimacy of customary authorities. Traditionally, cattle raids were made to fulfill social purpose and, of course, it has also economic significances. But now-a-days cattle raiding have got a high degree of commercialization, in which raided animals are sold off automatically in the market. So there is less opportunity to retrieve lost animals. This in turn made the traditional conflict resolutions inadequate to address even the once "easy" matter.

The third factor is related with the increase in the intensity of the conflict between the two groups. In more distant past, that is before the two groups had appropriated firearms, they had fought with traditional weapons like spears and knives. This made their conflict less lethal. This, however, is radically changed with time. Now both groups are armed with automatic and semi-automatic machineguns, and when violent conflict broke out it proved to be deadly and more lethal. This obviously derived the two groups, as it happens, 'rather than to sit under a big tree and solve their problem as before' to communicate with the language of the gun. This factor definitely has feeble the effectiveness of their traditional institutions.

The other factor that informant¹¹⁵ have pointed out is related with the communities' perception of the contemporary elders-state relations. They argued that the government's peacemaking platform is not inclusive. It only selectively incorporates what they called '*its own people*' from the two communities. This social perception bears, as it has proved, the danger of alienation of those elders who are members of the "Joint Peace Committee". And this has belittled their acceptance among their respective communities, and weakened their customary authorities. Cognizant of this reality, the government should strive to widen the scope of the peace platforms, and made it inclusive and community- based though this demands additional resources from the state treasure.

¹¹⁵ Gebi Hawas interviewed on 9 March, 2009 at Metehara.

Generally, the customary conflict management institutions of the Karrayu and Argobba societies have been losing its historical effectiveness. And it has already become inadequate to deal with the root cause of their contemporary conflict. For this deliberate marginalization by the state and the changes in the nature of their conflict are identified as responsible factors. But looking the current situations of their conflict, it can be argued that the state or any other stakeholder cannot establish durable peace unless they factor local approaches in their conflict management strategies. To that end, they can effectively tap the traditional conflict resolution/management wisdom of the Karrayu and Argobba for consolidating peaceful relations and co-existence to each other.

6.2. Macro level Responses to the conflict

Besides the indigenous approaches the two communities have used to deal with their conflict, the central state also played its own role as a response to the Karrayu and Argobba conflict. Macro level response is used here to refer to the state-centered top-down approaches the successive regimes used to settle the stated conflict. For the sake of convenience, let us see the responses of the state via explaining the pre-and-post- federal realities.

6.2.1. The Responses of the state: pre-federal reality

The national governments interpreted the inter-group conflicts in the Awash Valley as being objectively resource-based. Other subjective factors were not given due considerations. As such, the state in an endeavor to deal with the root cause of the conflict took different measures to alleviate the degree of scarcity of resources. The first major approach used was to settle displaced pastoralists' who lost their 'land of plenty' due to the irrigation scheme and the Awash National Park (Gamaldin, 1987; Ayalew, 2001). This, as it proved later, happened to be a failure, top-down approach which did not take the socio-economic life of the pastoralists in to account.

In addition, the imperial government had also tried to compensate the Karrayu for the land they forcedly lost to the state with the establishment of the Awash National Park. The Arole Plain, which then owned by a land lord named *Dejazmach* Woldegebriel

Abasetan was decreed to be given to the Karrayu with usufruct rights (Ayalew 2001:252). The size of land which the imperial regime decreed to be a compensation grant was about sixty-three *gasha*. But the decree was not made effective owing to the coming of the Dergue and its radical land reform of 1975, which nationalized all rural land.

It is these sites of the Arole Plain, which still remains to be a bone of contentions between the Karrayu and Argobba. Moreover, the imperial government also constructed a pond called Harro Ledi Robba (Ledi Robba pond) in the Arole Plain area. But due to its location at the flash point of the Karrayu and Argobba conflict, it largely remained unused (Ayalew 2001:114-115).

As to informant¹¹⁶, what happened under the Dergue government was not only the expropriation of their land but also the alienation of their indigenous peacemaking approaches. Thus, the responses of the state in pre-federal period did not bear any meaningful fruits, and hence, did not bring its intended effects. Rather it complicated the situations of inter -group conflicts in the Awash valley in general and the Karrayu Argobba conflict in particular. The federal government of Ethiopia thus inherited the Karrayu - Argobba conflict with all its complexities.

6.2.2. The State-centered approach in post-1991 period

Commercialization of peace making

Ethnic federalism in Ethiopia is presented as an instrument that could provide better conflict management mechanisms that would lessen tensions and conflict. The trackrecord of Ethiopia, Asnake (2004:64) argues, in the management of ethnic conflict after its adoption of federalism is not encouraging. In its legal management of conflict, the federal constitution has provisions about the principles, procedures and institutions for the management of disputes and conflicts over issues of national self-determination, identity and boundary conflicts between the regions.

¹¹⁶Umar Wachu Rare, a knowledgeable elder at Qobo, I had interviewed him on 7 March, 2009.

As explained above, the conflict between the Karrayu and Argobba communities in post-1991 period has been conspicuously articulated as issue of territorial ownership and border disputes. To settle such disputes through the legal framework, the present constitution of Ethiopia (Article 48) stipulates the principles and procedures of resolving border disputes between regional states. But as this study investigates so far, the federal government made no official statements and comprehends the Karrayu - Argobba conflict in regional term, involving the respective regional states of Oromia and Amhara.

The common approach the federal government has been using as a response to manage the Karrayu - Argobba conflict has been through organizing peace and democratic conferences, which are used as forum to peace building. According to informants¹¹⁷ there is also structured offices of “Security and Peace Committee” organized up to the level of *Woreda*. Moreover, unlike the Dergue era, the federal government does not sideline the traditional conflict management institutions of the communities. In this regard an informant¹¹⁸, who is Head of Administration and Security Office at Arerti, argues that the government with limitations tried to ensure the local ownership of peace processes. He stated his arguments as:

Our government respects the rights of ethnic groups who historically were marginalized. It provides the support and opportunity for local community elders to resolve their conflict as per their age-old traditions and time-tested wisdom. Though there are shortcomings in the realm of implementation, the government tried to ensure the local ownership of the peace processes.

Taking the informant’s affiliation to the ruling party into consideration, such assertion may not be a surprise. But there are others whose views appear as diametrically opposite to the view of “local ownership of the peace process”. This, of course, can also be challenged by scholarly observation that characterized the government attempt of managing ethnic conflict is hit hard by the hegemonic and centralizing tendencies by the political centre (Asnake 2004: 68).

¹¹⁷ Abay Tsegaye, I interviewed him on 12 February, 2012-Metehara; Ato Bejerond Abera, I interviewed him on 20 February, 2012 at Arerti

¹¹⁸ Ato Bejerond Abera, interview with him on 20 February, 2012 at Arerti.

The participation of selected Argobba and Karrayu community elders, spiritual leaders and Gada leaders in the series of peace conferences has brought its unintended effect of 'commercialization of the peace making'. This is because these community elders who have participated in peace conferences and conflict resolution have been paid per diems and also secure other personal benefits. The general perception among the Karrayu and Argobba (non -members of the Joint Peace Committee) is that these elders are more close to the state administration than to their respective communities. Corroborating this, a young Karrayu informant¹¹⁹ expressed his indignation in that "Now our elders are not like the formers. They are more concerned to their per diem than our cause in the conflict".

This is used to explain that their leaders who are selected by the government and also included under the 'Security and Peace Committee' are believed to be more affiliated with the state and have become politicians. Thus, they give priority to their many temporal and personal benefits than being the authentic spokesmen of the Karrayu community. Such perception is further considered by a Karrayu elder, who is not yet included in the government owned Committee, and who as a result feels some sort of exclusion from handling their own affairs. This definitely has been downgrading the legitimacy of the customary authorities and saddled the enforcement of decisions.

In general, what have been done by the government as a response to the Karrayu and Argobba conflict has not been as such successful. Although the existence of conflict between the two groups is almost a public knowledge, the government has not taken any meaningful and appropriate measures to address it. Rather, its approaches so far have the following downsides. Primarily, the federal government has not taken any meaningful preventive measures. Rather, it took reactive measures only after outbreak of violent conflict. This came for instance, in 2006 conflict in the form of conflict suppression through the application of sheer force by the federal army forces. This, however, cannot be a wise panacea to the problem as it really happens. This is because the ambition to

¹¹⁹ Beshir Abulo, a young Karrau whom I made communication on February 11, 2009.

build peace through coercion may be successful but only for short period of time. It cannot otherwise have any enduring impact in dealing with the conflict.

The other weakness of the federal government is that so far, perhaps thinking for its own political expediency, has distanced itself from addressing the underlying cause of the conflict territory or boundary issue. In this regard, Ayele's (2005:47) argument shades light to our case. He stated that in times of 'land conflicts' state officials and elders paid by the district administrators insist on the principle that "land belongs to the government".

In addition, its commercialization of the peace making might only tame 'advantageous elders' who are perceived by their respective communities as opportunistic and thus only postpone the conflict between the two groups for some other convenient time.

6.2.2.1. The Joint Peace Committee: Role assessment

As part of the politico-administrative strategy of inter-group conflict management, the government established a separate body of security and peace committee' that went to the level of the lowest administrative unit of district. The peace committee has its own militia sectors to keep peace in the area.

The Joint Security and Peace Committee is accorded to take both proactive and reactive measures. As a preventive task, it has tried to create community wide awareness on the negativities of violence. It sends its militia units to suppress conflict in times of occurrence. This helps to prevent the spillover effects of the conflict through containing its further escalation. With the aim of smoothing its operation and to give its mission mass-based face, the Joint Peace Committee also enlisted community elders from both the Karrayu and Argobba groups as active members of it.

According to an informant *Ato Adinew*¹²⁰, Head of Administration and Security Office at Berehet *Woreda*, the 'Peace Committee' has achieved some degree of success in the

¹²⁰ Head of Administration and Security office at Berehet Woreda, January 12, 2010 Metebela.

management of conflict. The area identified as a 'success story' to the 'committee' has been its reduction of the frequency of conflict and believed to control large-scale cattle raiding. In addition, though the informant did not support it with any tangible statistics, he stated that rates of homicides have also declined in more recent times. Thus, since the large scale conflict of 2006 though the stalemate situation continues between the two groups their conflict indicates some trend of de-escalation. The de-escalation, however, is not the result of the resolution of the root cause of the conflict as this does not yet come to its realization. It is rather the outcome of some control made with limitation on the triggering factors of the conflict.

Despite its claimed de-escalation, the Karrayu - Argobba conflict yet continues unabated. Thus, much is expected from the federal government, the Joint Peace Committee organized at district level and other stakeholders. But based on the data collected from informants¹²¹ this study has identified that there are multifarious factors that made the efforts of the regions in resolving and/or transforming the conflict ineffective. The identified factors are the following:

- Members of the Joint Peace Committee are criticized for lack of commitment and transparency in executing their duties.
- The fact that these members of the peace committee have been found to be empathic to their own groups tacitly reluctant to handover culprits from their respective group and made them receive the appropriate legal punishment. This, in turn, made the whole endeavors of the peace making process more convoluted.
- They lack both the capacity and willingness to enforce mutual agreements reached in the peace conferences. This problem of decision enforcement has mostly opened the way to each antagonistic group to search its own solutions carried out with vengeance and counter vengeance. This has not only exerted its

¹²¹ Umar Abdalla, interviewed on 12 February 2011 at his homestead -Awra Godana; Sheik Muktar Fentalle, an incumbent Gada leader, interviewed on 11 February, 2009 at Addis Ketema-Metehara.

adverse repercussions in their conflict but it has also been downgrading the communities' image towards the state-owned 'Joint Peace Committee'.

- Local security forces do not possess all the necessary resources (weapons, transportation services) to suppress violent conflict right at a time of its outbreak. The local communities the Karrayu and Argobba are almost equally armed as the militia units destined to contain conflict and make peace in the area. In times of conflict militia units fear possible attack thus they at best made a somehow delayed intervention and at worst they 'wait and see' until the conflict terminates on its own right. A good case in point is the 2006 conflict (*lola Bakula*) which proved beyond the control of the two regions and was only terminated after the involvement of the federal armies that suppressed it.
- In addition, the 'Committee' neither has the capacity nor the official mandate to deal with the underlying cause of the conflict, issue of land and boundary delimitation. Here, it should be stated that whatever success these groups might achieve in dealing with mainly the proximate factors of the conflict. The Karrayu and Argobba conflict will remain a time bomb that might erupt at any conducive time unless the predisposing factor is dealt once and for all by the concerned body having the legal mandate to do that.

CHAPTER SEVEN

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1. Conclusions

By now, it is self-evident that this study has delved itself to analytically comprehend the general context to the formation of Karrayu-Argobba conflict, its causes and the dynamics it exhibited across the depth of time in the past. The study has also embarked to explore the cardinal socio-economic and political development that occurred at state level but have left its conspicuous mark in patterning the relationships of the two communities. In addition, it has also entangled with the task of uncovering the roles of state centered and indigenous approaches used to redress the conflict and hence identified the actual drawbacks of the responses in their management of the conflict. Based on its rigorous empirical explanations, the study renders the following interpretive conclusions.

Notwithstanding their ethnic identity cleavages, the pastoral Karrayu and the agro-pastoral Argobba have since time in the distant past, maintained both amicable co-existence and conflictual relationships. Until their hostility and conflict reach an unprecedented scale during the Dergue era, the Karrayu and Argobba cordiality was reflected in their social bondage and symbiotic economic interdependence. But this harmony was superseded by a sense of enmity which has been expressed in their mounting intermittent conflict.

Pertaining to its causes, the Karrayu-Argobba conflict was conceived in the wombs of multifarious objective and subjective factors. Thus, there is no mono causal explanation to it, which Mitchell (1981) called it the tyranny of a single cause. The paradigm which conceived pastoral and agro-pastoral conflicts as a normal phenomenon of their life can underexplain our conflict case. Thus, it is quite pertinent to capture the changing nature of their conflict via looking the wider lenses of the broader processes that have been going at the national level. Thus, in light of its structural causal analysis, *Karrayu - Argobba* conflict is caused by the communities' high veneration to warrior ethos, scarcity of environmental resources, partial centre development policy, and the exclusionary

political environment that marginalized both groups from being the master of their destiny.

The successive regimes of Ethiopia have affected the relations of the two groups in focus. The inappropriate economic development policies pursued by the state through large scale commercial farms and its '*eco-totalitarian approach*' to the environment induced a socially generated scarcity in the area. As such, the establishment and expansion of Nura Era Plantation and Metehara Sugar Estate along with the Awash National Park grabbed considerable part of Karrayu wet and dry season grazing lands and water points. This has already caused supply induced scarcity and exposed them to recurrent droughts and famines. The erratic nature of precipitation, the unchecked expansion of Lake Beseka, the steady increase in population size have caused degradation of rangeland, and shortage and fragmentation of farmland and hence worsened the state induced scarcity. Thus, scarcity of resources as well captured by Hildyard (1999:11), "who gets to eat and who does not" principally proves to be the underlying cause of Karrayu-Argobba conflict.

Politically the exclusionary nature of the modern state apparatus that marginalizes both groups from decision making, lack of good governance and the exploitation of ethnic differences by ethnic entrepreneurs have a direct adverse repercussions in the stated conflict. The political development in the post -1991 periods and its formalization of ethnicity renders a new dimension to the Karrayu - Argobba conflict. Their resource-based conflict has since then gets politicized and their quest in the conflict is not the temporal uses of resources as such but it is rather articulated in terms of land possession (ownership) and /or boundary delimitation. While the Karrayu claims to re- integrate their 'historical land they lost due to Argobba's encroachment', the *Argobba*, on the other hand, intended to establish Special *Woreda* and get official recognition to their occupation of the land which yet is a bone of contention between the two groups.

Moreover, the political environment of federal Ethiopia has rendered an opportunity for local elites and political parties from both groups to galvanize their respective groups. The already existing identity difference is being opportunistically exploited by local elites

who targeted at the realization of their defined socio-economic and political ends. This study uncovered that the existence of 'ethnic difference justifies conflict as advocated by primordialist cannot explain the *Karrayu-Argobba* conflict case. It is the activation of these ethnic differences that perpetuates hatred and exacerbated the conflict between the two groups. In times of conflict say over scarce grazing resources and/or cattle raiding, the 'rules of the game changes' and take a group dimension.

Still more in the structural causes of the *Karrayu-Argobba* conflict, issues related to security complicated the hostile relationships of the two groups. In this regard, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the study area and the failure of the state to address the root cause of the conflict compelled the two groups to resort to the use of gun as a panacea to meet their grievances aggravated the conflict situation. The due regard the two groups accord to their 'culture of weapons', the weak policing and controlling system on small arms by the state have been further complicating the grim conflict reality prevailing here since long ago. Their access and appropriation of small arms have made their conflict more intense and lethal. The act of disarmament and legal registration undertaken at the *Woreda* levels do not bring the anticipated changes.

Apart from the underlying structural causes, there are key triggering factors that turn the latent protracted *Karrayu - Argobba* conflict to manifest it intermittently. The triggering factors give life to their conflict and have let it flows following its path of vicious circles. The main proximate causes in the conflict are cattle raiding and rustling, homicides, recurrent droughts and famines, and the adverse role played by spoilers such as fortunetellers and the *Minjar Amhara*.

Since its genesis, the number of actors in the *Karrayu-Argobba* conflict increased in number. Each actor in the conflict has its own interest/s. Foreign investment company, HVA, had left the conflict scene after its nationalization by the Dergue government. The central state of Ethiopia with its vested interest of national economic development and also for its political expediency and efficacy complicated the conflict. The federal army forces that suppressed the conflict by the use of sheer military power are also the actors in

this conflict, whose role in the conflict has been very temporal. In addition, political parties and ethnic entrepreneurs have also played a destructive role in the Karrayu - Argobba conflict. Illicit arm traffickers that supply fire arms in the study area are also other shadow actors in the conflict. Initially the *Hawiya*, clan of the Somali pastoralists smuggled the small arms to the area but later other contrabandists involved in this business. And now the Argobba themselves are believed to play an active role in the circulation of arms to this conflict prone areas of Ethiopia. But still the primary actors in the conflict are the Karrayu and Argobba ethnic groups. Among the ethnic groups, the youths particularly have played a central role in the conflict. Similarly, Argobba and Karrayu women have both direct and indirect roles in their conflict, which squarely exceeds the mere task of ululation and praising their respective men. The role women in the conflict are an integral part of the subjective factor. However, the peace platforms do not enlist as such these sections of the societies. This, in turn, affects but only negatively the peace making endeavors.

Concerning its dynamics, the Karrayu - Argobba conflict has undergone some marked transformations in its underlying causes, scope, and intensity across the horizon of time. Some of the major changes the conflict exhibits are the increase in the number of actors having their own interests and positions; the transformation of the predisposing factor from being the temporal use of resources to permanent territorial occupation. The politicization of their relationships and the tendency of reducing everything in ethnic term are also recent phenomena that feature the dynamic aspects of their conflict. Moreover, the gradual weakening of their customary conflict resolution institutions which have lost its past glory and have become inadequate to address contemporary conflicts between the two groups is another change in the realm of conflict dynamics. Last but not least, unlike in the past, the two groups have now used immediate triggers to realize their ultimate grand goal in the conflict but not to meet their immediate interests. And in reference to the intensity of the conflict the Karrayu and Argobba conflict, owing to many factors, has become more intense and bloody over time.

In order to address the Karrayu and Argobba conflict both state centered macro level and community-based micro level approaches have been used. But to their dismay, the conflict still remains unabated. Both groups have used their indigenous knowledge of conflict resolution/management to address their conflict. In the past, the customary authority holders were successful in managing their conflict through their age old traditions. However, gradually but certainly their customary institutions have been eroded and reach the level of being inadequate to handle their contemporary conflicts. For this, the deliberate marginalization by the state, lack of legitimacy and authority to deal with the root cause of the conflict, and the changes in the nature of their conflict deems responsible factors. Here, it should be underlined that integrating the customary systems in the peace making is not a simple choice but a necessity to the concerned body, mainly the state. It is difficult to establish an enduring peace between the two communities by marginalizing the traditional approach. Such endeavor by the central government can hardly bear its intended fruits, and is almost comparable to what Isaac (2008:45) called *"an attempt to fly an aeroplane with one wing"*.

Moreover, the successive Ethiopian regimes have used their own approaches to deal with the conflict. As the state understands the Karrayu - Argobba conflict as merely a product of resource scarcity, the measures taken as a response in pre-federal period was to address the economic factors alone. Thus, settlement of displaced Karrayu groups, and the land compensation which was not realized due to the 1975 land proclamation were taken. But the approach proved futile as it did not consider the socioeconomic and culture of the groups in focus. It was a top-down approach which especially during the Dergue era alienated the indigenous conflict resolution approaches from the peace-making process. The post -1991 periods has shown the commercialization of peace making, which is the untended consequence of the government attempt. The Joint Peace Committee (JPC) which also enlisted community elders as an active member of the peace making has not moved as it planned. There are many limitations that hit hard the works of Joint Peace Committee(JPC), these are lack of commitment and their sympathy to ethnic affiliation, lack of necessary resources to suppress conflicts with speed, the lack of both willingness and capacities to enforce decisions. Moreover, the JPC has neither the

capacity nor the legal mandate to address the root cause of the conflict. But they pointed out that the reduction of the frequency of military engagements, rates of homicides, and largescale cattle raiding are found to be the areas it has achieved a relative degree of success. However, notwithstanding all these, the *Karrayu - Argobba* conflict continues on stalemate and will escalate at any convenient time. Thus, the government needs to address the root cause of the conflict in a meaningful manner.

7.2. Recommendations

This study made it clear that the Karrayu and Argobba conflict is historically embedded and is the result of the interplay of multifold factors- economic, socio-cultural, political, and security centered. As its causes are multiple, we cannot have a single prescriptive panacea to salvage the malaises of their conflict and re-establish their historic peaceful co-existence. To that end, different measures should be undertaken to address both the predisposing and triggering factors of the conflict. This study, therefore, based on its findings, presents the following recommendations that can help to redress the intermittent conflict of the Karrayu and Argobba groups on an enduring basis.

- ❖ The Karrayu and Argobba community should work earnestly to return raided livestock and hand over the culprit to the *Woreda* administration. This would help them build mutual confidence and trust, and hence reduce the tendency of taking revenge that sustains their conflict.
- ❖ The *Kebele* administration of the three *Woredas* should arrange regular awareness creation forums to undertake community sensitization works through teaching the community about the adverse effects of conflict.
- ❖ It is true that their indigenous peacemaking processes depend on the traditional and grassroots notions of justice and community-based dialogue. Thus, agreements reached through it cannot be viewed as an imposition by other external body. Hence, there is a tendency among the communities to be governed by it and accept its decisions. Therefore, in order to establish a long lasting peace

between the stated groups the governments- both federal and regional should promote the use of their customary wisdom of conflict resolution/management institutions.

- ❖ The state owned peacemaking processes needs to widen its scope and enlist youths as its active integral member. So far, the attempts of the 'Joint Peace Committee' to reach the youths indirectly via their elders have proved difficult and less encouraging. Thus, the district administrations should enlarge their peace platforms and participate the youths. This not only creates awareness amongst the youths but it also renders a community face to the peacemaking process.
- ❖ The state represented members of the 'Joint Peace Committee' should execute their official mission of peace keeping in the area without subscribing themselves to parochial ethnic allegiances which they are accused off. To that end, transparent inter –regional evaluation forums need to be made on a regular basis at a period of reasonable intervals.
- ❖ Political parties and ethnic entrepreneurs should not think to realize their immediate and short-term economic and political ends through mobilizing the masses to violent conflict. They rather should play a positive role in the peacemaking endeavors just by giving priority to the re-establishment of amicable relationships between the two groups to anything else. Thus, they should make open conversation with each other and with the two communities in focus, and hence consolidate the peace process.
- ❖ The federal government should formulate effective national policy and controlling system to regulate the proliferations of small arms and light weapons in the study area. But till that the *Woreda* administrations should carry out effective and authentic legal registrations of guns. To achieve this, the government should offer enhanced institutional security to the stated groups, as this will reduce their

propensity of communicating through the language of the gun to address their respective grievances.

- ❖ To alleviate the scarcity of resources and create an alternative source of subsistence to the communities in focus, the state and other stakeholders operating in the area should undertake development schemes, such as promoting irrigation based agriculture and rangeland development that will benefit the two groups directly.
- ❖ Finally, the federal government needs to address the underlying cause of the conflict in a meaningful manner. Thus, the contested border must be delineated officially. While doing that, the state should not make it as a super imposition, it rather needs to involve the two communities as principal stakeholders and listen to their voices.

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Appendix

List of Informants

No	Name	Date of Interview	Place of Interview	Remarks.
1	Sheik MukhtarFentalle, alias, RobaFentalle	Feb, 10 and 11,2009	GelchaKebele and Metehara-Addis Ketema	He is an incumbent Gada leader of the Karrayu. He is like a moving library.
2	Haji QeseroJillo	February 12,2009	Metehara	An ex-Gadaleader and a renowned community elder of the Karrayu.
3	Haji RobaSaqale	February 23,2009	Metehara	A known community elder at DebitiKebele.
4	FentaleGubu	March 1,2009	HaroQersaKebele	An eloquent community elder of the Karrayu.
5	FentaleJarra	March 1,2009	Metehara	A community elder, who lives at Bantikebele. He has a good deal of knowledge about the history and culture of the Karrayu.
6	GebiHawas	March 9,2009	Metehara	A 39 years old karrayu. He works at Fentale agricultural and rural development office.
7	Umar Wachu Rare	March 7,2009	QoboKebele	He is a respected Karrayu elder, who possess a high insight about the issue under

				review.
8	AtoAbayTsegaye	February 24, 2012	Metahara	He is Head of the Administration and security office of FentaleWoreda.
9	BeshirAbulo	February 11,2009	Addis KetemaMetehara	He is a young grade nine student at Marti school. I made an informal conversation with him when I passed the night of 11 February, 2009 with the incumbent Gada leader-SheikMukhtarFentalle, at Addis Ketema-Metehara.
10	Sheik Hussein Seid	January 10,2010	Arerti	He is a religious leader among the Argobba, who lived in Minjar-Shenkoraworeda. He has an excellent knowledge on the history and traditions of the Argobba people.
11	Mohammed Nur	January 7,2010	Arerti	A community elder, who has a pretty insight about Argobba's culture and their relation with the Karrayu

12	NurAli Seid	February 13,2012	Metebila	A perceptive Argobba elder, who possess a good deal of knowledge on the history of the people.
13	Umar Abdella	February 17,2009	AwraGodana	An eloquentArgobba elder who has remarkable Knowledge pertaining to the Karrayu-Argobba conflict.
14	AbdallaHassen	February 12,2012	Metebila	He has a good insight about the research theme under review.
15	Tahiriye Sheik Abdul	February 15,2012	Arerti	A community elder, who in many instances involved, in traditional conflict resolution.
16	AtoAdinew Haile	January 12,2010	Metebila	He is Head of administration and security office of Berhetworeda. I used him as a resource person in narrating the state-centered response to the Karrayu-Argobba conflict.
17	AtoBejerondAbera	February 20,2012	Arerti	He is Head of administration and security office at Minjar-

				Shenkoraworeda. He offered me a relevant data pertaining particularly, to the responses of the state and role of the 'Joint peace committee'.
18	IsamllHassen	February 21,2012	Arerti	He is a preparatory student at Arerti secondary and preparatory school. He served meas a field assistant and made my rapport building among the Argobba of Minjar-Shenkoraworeda somehow easy. Ismail has a critical insight about Argobba's present day political quest.

