

**CHANGE AND CONTUNTY IN AN ISLAMIC COMMUNITY**

**The Case of Muslim Women Statuses  
At Kamissie and its surrounding**

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## **Abstract**

When studies among the Muslim societies were being done, it is often thought that Islam as a religion at a higher degree dictates the women's status and by the same implication affects it to the worst.

But this has never been a case among Muslim women at Kamissie where women stay in public because of the changes taking place around them. Their exposure to the public does not leave them for stigmatization rather the religion itself is interpreted as to enable them to justify both women and men positions in their societies

This thesis therefore, tries to show the variability that exists in women's role and social positions in a changing Islamic community at Kamissie. The thesis claims that the variability in women's role and social positions is not only to be a function of geographical and environmental factors but also a function of the historical in terms of social, economic and political development. The thesis also claims that Muslim women in Kamissie not only differ from other women in Muslim societies, but they also differ among themselves due to their access to different levels of human and material resources.

## INTRODUCTION

It could be argued that most studies in Ethiopia are religious studies. However, scholars in this area have been selective giving more attention and emphasis to one religion (Orthodox Christianity) than others. Islam is one of the dominant religions that has been in the country for very long time in the country, and received much less attention than it really deserved.

I hope that this study will make a modest contribution to this neglected and marginalized religious and gender groups in this country. The focus of this thesis is to show the variability that exists in women's role and social positions in women's roles and social positions in a changing Islamic community at Kamissie. The thesis claims that this variability in women's role and social positions is not only to be a function geographical and environmental factors but also a function of the historical in terms of social, economic and political development. The thesis also claims that Muslim women in Kamissie not only differ from other women in Muslim societies, but they also differ among themselves due to their access to different levels of human and material resources.

The first chapter of this thesis attempts to place Muslim women in Kamissie in the broader theoretical framework, hence reviews literature on religion, social change and gender relations. In the same chapter, is also presented statement of the problem. This is followed by the description of the general and specific objectives of

the research and methodology employed in the process of the ethnographic data gathering.

Chapter two presents the geographical setting and Islamic tradition in Kamissie from a historical perspective. Chapter three focuses on the nature of social change that has affected both the Islamic tradition as well as women's roles and statuses in Kamissie. Chapter four will consist of a detailed analysis of the data presented in the framework of the relevant theoretical literature reviewed. The thesis will end with a summary of major theoretical implications and conclusion drawn.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **1.1 Theoretical Literature review**

#### **1.1.1 Religion, Social change and Gender**

##### **1.1.1.1 Religion**

Before the development of anthropology as a discipline, early social thinkers used to reflect on ideas about religion. Among these social thinkers were Hegel, Feurbach, Marx, Comte, Durkeheim etc. In the earliest time, religion was discussed with in the context of human nature. Feurbah thought that man became self-conscious of his nature, that he had many limitations, his view of perfection is reflected in his thought of a perfect God and thinking as such frees man from all the limitations. Where as Marx saw religion as one of the ideological reflexes of the material life process that came out as man's consciousness of his real situation and conflict. Any ideological forms could be understood in terms of a historical specificity rather than in terms of human biological nature. Marx theory had an evolutionary and historical character. He held that the mode of production. i.e. the productive force and the social relations of production generated by it, was the fundamental element in society,. Opportunities arise for the use of new modes of production and therefore for new classes to wrest economic and political power from existing ruling classes, thus according to Marx ` the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle'. On the other hand, the sub-structure, on which all other institutions, political, religious and familial base is superstructure. For example, in capitalism,

religion provides the poor with spiritual comfort and in a way justifies domination. (Marx and Engles, 1968: 181-2).

Weber is another social thinker who Morris stated, refused to define religion and yet showed its universality (i.e. a belief in the super natural) through out the world. His understanding of religion is associated with his belief in the growing rationalization of societies where by societies become structurally differentiated and economic ideas superceded religious ideas. Marx theory was the point of departure for Max Weber's work on social change- the genesis of capitalism. Weber's theory was that the development of the Western bourgeoisie was necessarily preceded by Calvinism and other puritan religious movements as creators of indispensable psychological conditions. He accepted the Marxist theory of an emerging bourgeoisie seizing opportunities for capital accumulation, the creation of a property less proletariats and the exploitation of the new technology permitting factory production. However, he held that these material conditions though necessary were not sufficient. They existed elsewhere whereas Calvinism or its equivalent social counterpart did not. Weber's method was to use history as a kind of natural laboratory for testing hypothesis. In the *protestant Ethic and the sprit of capitalism*, originally published in 1904 and translated in 1930, he showed the affinity between the ethic of Protestantism and the capitalistic organization of economic enterprise. Then, in his comparative study of the world religion, he sought to establish the non- existence of indigenous capitalism without the ascetic sprit of Protestantism.

From anthropological perspective, religion was taken as universal, but the form it takes was understood differently by different anthropologists. Another great nineteenth century social thinker, Herbert Spencer, saw the evolution of society from small-scale simplicity of structure and function to large scale and powerful differentiation. He gave anthropology in general, and the study of social change in particular, much of its terminology and he advanced his theory of super-organic evolution before Darwin's *origin of the species* appeared in 1859.

Spencer was a well-known functionalist and biological reductionist. With little field experience, he saw the *preliterate peoples'* religious beliefs growing out of lack of adequate scientific knowledge about their social and natural environment. According to him, their belief in spirits is rational as it is seen from their own perspective. He stated that a belief in spirits will transform into a belief in gods and hence from polytheism to monotheism (1876:123). Taylor, another nineteenth century evolutionist and ethnographer claimed that religion could be defined minimally as a 'belief in sprits', and argued that the idea of sprits developed first because of human's appreciation of natural events and his/her need to explain them. In his view, it was such an idea that developed into monotheism. (Morris,1987:100). Thus, it could be assumed that both Spencer and Taylor attempted to show the rationality of man in being religious given the lack of knowledge of cause for phenomena. The American social anthropologist Lewis Morgan also produced a developmental theory of cultural evolution through three ethnical periods- savagery, barbarism and civilization.

For Durkehiem however approaching religion from an individualistic and rationalistic viewpoint is not illuminating. He claimed that religion to be an expression of the influence of collectivity over the individual than it is a conception developed by individuals alone (1915:98). Similar to Spencer's and his predecessor Comte, he believed that its constituents would be replaced by more plausible elements as men become enlightened. Freud also believed that beliefs in spirits are plausible but that kind of plausibility is superficial. For Spiro, however, the very thought of non-human models including God is because men/ women found them plausible in ' providing hopes, satisfying wishes, resolving conflicts, coping with tragedy, rationalizing failure' (1966:96). Geertz has also added to the definitions of religion as:

A system of symbols, which act to produce powerful, persuasive And long lasting moods and motivation in men by formulating conception Of a general order of existence. These conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. ( 1966:4)

But Guthrie said this definition could similarly apply to philosophy, ideologies and even science, therefore the better way to look into religion is to understand its basic feature and the basic feature of religion according to him is that it anthropomorphizes the world. From the increased definitions forwarded to religion, it sounds that no concluding answer is available as to the question what ingredients all religious belief systems involve. From different angles, attempts have been made to define religious belief systems and Geertz once stated they have all produced malaise and dissatisfaction (1976:84) and religion ay not be definable at all as long as it defies scientific consensus (Salibia, 1974:2)

With the assumed growth of science as dominating the world, the tradition in social science gradually showed an interest of distinguishing Science from religious belief systems. Among the scholars who made an effort was Malinowski. According to him, both religious belief systems and non-religious belief systems have their own spheres of social life which they effectively work on (1912: 79).

For the evolutionists however, both should be understood as successive phenomena. Religion has a tendency of evolving and becoming eventually replaced by science. Guthrie however did not agree with this replacement rather he argued that it is difficult to try to distinguish between the two (religious belief systems and non-religious belief systems such as science) in terms of their functions, because as belief systems, both could formulate adequate representation of experience. Perhaps what should be stressed, in his view, is that religion anthropomorphizes the world. (1992: 3)

#### **1.1.1.2 Social Change**

The nineteenth-century sociology/anthropology in general was dominated by the search for a theory of social change, or social dynamics, which would reveal 'the laws of motion' of societies. The rise of capitalist society and the social upheavals, which accompanied it, including urban growth, industrialism and mobility of men and ideas, imparted a powerful stimulus to the sociological/ anthropological analysis of change.

In the early twentieth century attempts at large-scale theorizing about social change fell out of favor in anthropology and efforts were concentrated more on the detailed study of particular societies, communities and institutions using increasingly methods of observation, survey and measurement. More recently the older and still valid problems of economic growth and social development have been tackled afresh, stimulated by the spread of industrialism into the 'underdeveloped' world. There is now no one theory of social change but a complex debate between Marxist, Marxian, and liberal or pluralist theories. Though sociologists/anthropologists now agree, from a variety of ideological standpoints, that change is the normal condition of society everywhere, the fundamental dispute materialist and idealist theories remains.

Particularly the evolutionist idea of replacement of religious systems by science is contested as the unspecified secularizations of modern societies threatens the very social fabric of society and results in the necessity of religion in the provision of moral well being (Horton,1961)

In his book, *Post Modernism, Reason and Religion* in which he carefully analyzed the current revitalization of religion in Muslim societies, Gellner claimed that " the contradiction in our perception that secularization as a central aspect of modernity to be explained in terms of the ancient division between high Islam and Low Islam.(1992: 27) The dichotomy between High Islam and Low Islam exists long in social science tradition and I need detailed review of its own. However a very short discussion will be made here to introduce relevant topic below.

According to Gellner, high Islam is associated with scholars and elites, and the low Islam with unlearned mass living in the rural. The dichotomy between high Islam and Low Islam according to Holy, is just a construction showing the distribution of power. Secularization assumes many different forms; but largely it would seem reasonable to say that it is real but the very real one is Islam. Islam is as strong as it was a century ago, probably much stronger"(Geertz,1968: 7)) with a similar implication, social change does not bring about a final eradication of the little traditions if not necessitates the redefinition of the social basis of its(Rauavere,1992). The perception of religions in terms of aforementioned dichotomy started long ago with in the orient list tradition, which seeks to come up with a historical Islamic essence. Consequently, the little tradition vis-a- vis the big tradition was conceptualized to mean the former as passive, non-autonomous and above all non-sovereign. In effect, studies on local religions around this perspective focuses on deviation from what is normally considered by them normative

Such a tendency is manifested in many anthropological works where specific traits like shrines and saint cult are considered as fundamental to local Islam. A deviation of practice from the script also becomes the major themes of studies.

The classification into big traditions and little traditions or normative and deviant should not be confined to researchers and religious teachers alone. It is true that this dichotomization runs through what we understand by ordinary believers. The ordinary believers may not necessarily have access to the script on which the normative religion is based; however their understanding of the religion expands

through media, migration and various networking albeit not uniformly. Dichotomization is not an easy thought we leave under carpet leaving it to intellectuals rather it has to be understood with in a specific context, and should not be taken for granted to be the same as we perceive it from above. It is also very important that we distinguish this because it has implication for the research one engages in.

In this case functionalism tends to be a weak tool in helping us understand history in the process where cultural traits like religion are created and recreated and to explain contemporary cultural phenomena ( Barth,1981:7) Implying a similar opinion, Holy once described " perhaps it is in the essence of Western thought to see things in terms of dichotomy(.1991,75)

I have given attention to dichotomization primarily because it runs through every model, particularly anthropological models of Islamic society. For the purpose of clarification, I will reduce my review to one of the taken for granted anthropological models of Islam, which is the dichotomization of the sexual domain.

### **1.1.1.3 Gender**

The connection between Gender and Islam has for a long time attracted the attention of researchers and western travelers and it is quite interesting that many confronting models have emerged. For example, it was taken for granted that women in Muslim societies have a low status in economic, political and social spheres " their subordination is mandated by Islam in certain of its legal and religious texts,

and by a complex of traditional value that to some believers who do not have access to the Script.”(Ahmed,1994:94). Anything written out side constitutes the text and justification of their suppression is often taken from such conviction and givens. Of course, it is contested opinions from different directions that correlation should be made between Islam and women suppression, I like to review these arguments on two levels.

The first level is an old and general assumption that Islam reinforces low position of women. Women’s low social position in many Muslim societies is no surprise because as Judaism and Christianity, Islam is also a part of a long tradition of Mediterranean patriarchy. On the contrary, Asad stated" we should distinguish between Islam and Male tyranny; if we are talking about Islam the potential of women in Islam is far superior to anything offered by Confucius in China or Aristotle in Greece or to what Hindu Christian civilization offered. Where their lot is miserable and have virtually no right, it is to be attributed to Muslim male tyranny, not Islamic device (1992:43).

Another feminist approach is forwarded by the Moroccan named Mernessi. According to her, the present position of women in Muslim societies should be understood from two basic concepts in Islam: Honor and rebellion / individualism. Women are considered as “ the embodiment of undisciplined desire” due to their exposure to public or if unveiled they destruct men from reaching unity with God. Secondly women’s rebellion and the freedom to do as they wish leads to individualism which is an anti- Islamic notion (1996:111). In this argument, we see an extension of the problem we face in dichotomisation of Islam as normative and practiced. It seems

that they agree that Muslim women have a low position. However, they do not agree with the contention that it is inherent within Islam (which is the text)

The second level of argument tends to overcome the dichotomization problem and tries to reconsider the meanings bestowed upon the dichotomized sphere themselves. It questions whether the separation of public and private spheres is hierarchical truly, and, as it is understood by the women who are living under Islamic rules. Because, most studies in Muslim societies in earlier times were made by western who really believed that public mean broad opportunity for influence and decision where as private is confinement and loss of control and influence. Secondly, researchers who studied in Muslim societies were often male and access to women and their experience was almost blocked. Hence, the likelihood of attaining a balanced knowledge to fill the gap in understanding the women experiences becomes reduced. Hence defining the women's status in Muslim societies as such reflects only a static approach because women in all Muslim societies do not characterize the same features regarding their statuses. Besides, Muslim societies face economic, geo-political changes that affect the roles and statuses of their people. These changes even have higher impacts on women because their responsibilities in societies are significant. These social changes also lead to a change in anthropology, which has contributed much to the development of an approach that includes variation across space and time.

The main interest in this thesis is to show the variability that exists in women's role and social positions in a changing Islamic community at Kamissie. The thesis claims

that this variability in women's role and social positions is not only to be a function of geographical and environmental factors but also a function of the historical in terms of social, economic and political development. The thesis also claims that Muslim women in Kamissie not only differ from other women in Muslim societies, but they also differ among themselves due to their access to different levels of human and material resources.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

It is a general fact that religion comprises values and norms that guide the life and behavior of the believers. These values although seem unalterable as they are written show different degree of observance.

Despite the basic pillars of Islam that kept the union of all Muslim people through out the world, the practice of Islam also show variation across time and space. The forms of this variation is not only a function of geographical and environmental factors but also a function of the historical in terms of social, economic and political development

Kamissie is the seat for the Oromiya Zone in Amahara National Regional State, located 325 kms, north east of Addis Ababa. In this Zone 97 % of the total population refer to themselves Muslims. The town is undergoing reformed religious ideas under favorable conditions and this has facilitated and increased participation of women in socio-economic and political life of the society in the town. Whether this

participation results in the improvement of their social statuses cannot at this point be included. However, I suggest, will positively impact on their status.

In this thesis, my attempt is to examine how changes in religious ideas can facilitate social change and how such social change is experienced by the different gender categories.

### **1.3. Objectives of the research**

The general research objective of this MA thesis is to present the economic Political and social changes in Islamic tradition of South Wollo, and explore how Muslim women in this part of the region play their roles in this a changing society.

#### **1.3.1 Specific Objectives**

The specific objectives are to:

1. review studies made on Islamic practice in Ethiopia with a particular emphasis in Wollo;
2. assess the understanding of Islam by the local people within changing socio-economic and political conditions;
3. explore Muslim women roles and statuses within the changing socio-economic and political frame; and,
4. provide a comparative data of Muslim women's perspective of change and religion at Kamissie.

## **1.4 Methodology**

In July 1998, I was working on Child labor and its multidimensional effects on children in Dessie. The research was sponsored by Forum for Street Children. For this project, I was hired as a research assistant to professor Seyoum who was the consultant. He is now teaching at the Department of sociology and Social Administration.

In Dessie there is a Family Guidance office whose director was thought by Professor Seyoum. He was very much interested to show to his professor his work and we were invited to one of their field sites. This place we went is called Haik and the majority of the people in Haik are Muslims. The family planning program in this area was very effective and we were impressed by the women who are applying the methods with out any restrictions. Particularly the story about 14 men who were convinced by their women to undergo Vasectomy created a strange feeling in me, previously knowing Muslim women as very much dominated by their husbands.

I came back with the idea of doing my research on these Muslim women in relation to change. By that time we were requested to present our proposals and I showed in the proposal my interest to work at Haik area.

My second exposure to a Muslim society was when I participated in a base line survey administered by Oxfam GB in Bellashangul region among a 100% Muslim population. In a district called Mengi, the majority of the people earn their lives in shifting cultivation and traditional gold mining. The women are the ones who are

actively participating in the cultivation and much of their daytime is spent outside the house. While administering the interview in the villages we often found men and children gathering in the men's house (Hallewa). Again, this experience contradicted with the common knowledge I gained from the literature about Muslim women as confined to the house and not to be exposed to the public.

In September 2000, I went to Haik and fortunately stayed for one night in Kamissie. I saw many young boys carrying Koran in an old leather bag, putting on their shoulder a shawl. They were students of Islam coming from different places in the neighborhood. They said the Muslims in Kamissie have now become *strict* on practicing Islamic rituals and prayers. Many people who want to learn about Islam also come to kamissie and neighboring areas like Daway. I consulted them about my idea of working in Haik. They strongly advised me to work on Kamissie because beside the long history of the area as a center for Islamic teachings, the Muslim population in kamissie and its surrounding is greater than the Muslim population in Haik. Since Kamissie is also a town and a center for trade for the neighboring areas, the majority of the residents speak Amharic which would make it less difficult for communication. (Note that the majority of the people in Haik speak Oromifa).

A letter of support from the Zonal office was necessary to conduct the research in kamissie. This procedure introduced me with different government institutions like the office for women affairs, office for Islamic Affairs and Kebele administrations.

Department of Culture and Tourism had a plan to work on a comprehensive research on the cultural and religious heritage of the town. However there was no any documentation made yet from which I could drive preliminary data.

Although my visit to the region started long ago(because my grand parents live some kms from kamissie towards Addis and I used to pay them a visit ), I went for the first phase of my anthropological field work on September 2001. The first visit I made to the town was to the market where I could see the life of the town. At the market place, both town people and rural people from the neighboring areas come for sell and purchase of various items. The dressing style of rural people and town people is so different that one can easily distinguish them. The rural ladies wear a skirt with a loose cloth made of thread rapped upon it. The cloths vary in its color but are not plain.

They partition their hair and braid it to form a rope. The men wear shorts and some of them put on a loose cloth rapped around their waist. They wear their hair combed and most of them put on butter.

The people in Kamissie however do not have a common kind of wearing styles. They wear a mixture of all kinds of dressings like any town people in other parts of the country.

I used to wear a shawl kind of cloth when I went out to the market. The shawl used to be a cloth for men on their shoulder and was typical for Muslims. The purpose of my wearing a shawl was to show my decency by covering my hair that many

Muslims appreciate. Nevertheless, on the first day of my visit to the market, I was confronted by a cloth seller. He beckoned me and asked if I was a Muslim. In the beginning, I hesitated to answer. Since I wore like a Muslim, I thought may be he liked it. On the other hand, I was not sure what he would be feeling when I told him I am not and he sees me wearing like a muslim.

He said ` you are not a Muslim`

Me `` How do you know?`

Him ` because the shawl you wear is for Muslim men`

Me ` yes I am not`

Him ` Where did you come from?, you do not live in Kamissie, Do you?`

Me `No I don't, I came here to study how Muslim women live?`

Him `did you study Islam?`

Me `` No, but I want to study the way they live not the religion as such`

Him ` But how is that possible?`

Me `` you think it is impossible?`

Him ` you can study their lives, but more than that you need to know Islam for your Sake. Do you know how many Islam's are there?

Me ` I think there is only one Islam?`

Him ` you see, you don't know. There are five Islams.`

In addition, he started describing what we call the five pillars of Islam. The man wanted to teach me the Koran for a short session on market days. He said I should change my shawl or else leave my hair as it is because I am not a Muslim.

Since that day on, I opened my hair. Again, I normally had a short but curled hairstyle, which I wear in Addis. That again very much looked like those men in the rural areas in the surrounding. In addition, I used to receive many comments until I had a braid.

The comments and the questions from the people in the beginning made me feel bad and incapable of doing fieldwork. Given that I was trained in how to be a participant observer, their discomfort about the way I wore and behaved was frustrating. Gradually however, I managed to learn from them how to be myself and still get on with rather than create artificial sameness with in a short period. Moreover, what looked scary about my relation with them created unexpected argument and discussion with them: they wanted to know more and want to teach me more as they know I did not know much about Islam.

The women on the other hand had confused feelings about me. One time, they wanted to treat me as one of the women right advocator, and would like to start any discussion with their low positions, that they are used like beasts of burden, that they have no say on anything.

They also shy away again when I tend to hold a serious discussion with them about their daily lives, domestic relations and how they see Islam verses life. They often the time assumed their men and children know better than they did so that I should discuss with their men and children. Interestingly enough the women representatives at the Kebele and the Woreda level share the same belief, albeit on different level.

The women at the administration believed that the Sheikhs in the office for Islamic affairs are the most relevant people for discussion of any kind like mine.

Therefore, I changed my method of data collection from focused discussion into collecting life stories of women from different strata of the community. I collected the life stories of women of different ages and occupations. Some of the life stories started from the time when they did not come to kamissie. I tried best not to be biased towards a group of women having the same background. For example, in the beginning, the women had access were those who come to the Woreda for Credit. These women were very easy to discuss with, once because the orientation takes some time and they spend some time to wait for those Woreda officials. In the mean time, I could discuss with them. It has some shortcomings:

1. I was bound to believe what they told me and they disperse immediately after they took the orientation and I did not have a chance to lengthen the time of discussion.
2. They come to the Woreda to get Credit and my presence there I assumed, would make them suspicious about my objectives, despite my explanation.
3. Although it was said every poor citizen was able to get the credit, there were women who did not like to take the credit because of religious don'ts (they said they are not supposed to borrow or lend money with interest).

Due to such reasons, I had to find other alternatives by which I collect a representative data. Socializing with them at the market place and getting a chance

to be invited for coffee at their house was one approach I found promising. I was somehow successful in this respect. In kamissie coffee is to be given to every one who came as a guest. They do not complain about the time they waste on making coffee and chit chatting in between. They sometimes told me I could stay a night with them (customary to say in most part of the Northern region as a way of treating well). This approach helped me to go through their life stories deeply. The other women I knew with out a sampling technique were those women I knew through cart drivers. Kamissie is a small town and public transportation for the town is not available.

The temperature gets higher starting from 11.00 and it becomes difficult to walk on foot. However there are around 15 carts pulled by horse. The cart drivers were the most helpful guides and informants I had. They know the residents, the women and any discourse going on in the town. My relation with them became more than a client-patron as I stayed long and used them often. They particularly created access for me to those women who are not publicly known and did not participate in public domains. Particularly the women who at home practice *Attete, Wukabi and Zar* are well known to them. They like to speak about them as they took me to the place where I stayed. One time I asked one of the drivers what was the difference between a mule and a horse, as I could not distinguish them by appearance. He said the mule's ear is just the same as our ears (the cart drivers). it is big as if it wanted to listen everything. In addition to creating contact with women, the information I got from the drivers helped me to shape my questions which I used in life stories. The women do not all the time tell every thing that

occurred to them. Sometimes I had to observe and drive discussions. The cart drivers love to narrate every thing about any body and their long time observation was one of the methods I used to start discussions with women.

There are men and women to whom I talked because I was told they have knowledge about the research I am doing. These were Ato Seid, manager of Trade and Industry, Shekh Ibrahim who owns a pastry shop in the town, Mesfin a social worker at the bureau for labor and work and Ato Debebe, project manager for World Vision Ethiopia. There were also women like Tayech, who lived in Kamissie for the last 40 years, Asegedech, women representative at the Woreda level, Tewabech who is 65 years old who lives on selling traditional bracelets for ladies.

I tried to browse both governmental organizations and non- governmental organizations' documentation units. These are Trade and Industry, bureau for culture and Tourism, bureau for economy and planning, World Vision Ethiopia, Amhara Credit and Saving Association, Bureau for Labor and Work, etc. I dare to say not much secondary data was available in these institutions, however the officials I met all of them were willing to discuss and I gained a lot of information from them.

In doing this research I have applied mostly qualitative methods. I have used quantitative methods for selecting key informants for the case study. The selection of key informants due to the reasons I described was random. In dealing with the changes, I selected informants for each theme I discussed under changes taking place in Kamissie based on accessibility to key people, and the themes of these changes for the discussion were selected by these key informants.

Collection of Life histories is the main methodology in tracing changes that are taking place in women's lives. I collected three life stories of women from the group of women who are receiving loans. Three other women were selected in the discussion held to compare the *traditional belief systems* with Islam. I talked in-depth with one woman who is a returnee from Saudi Arabia about her life, otherwise many were asked about migration to Djibouti. Focus group discussions were held with three groups of men on changes on religion and other spheres. Men whom I met in the town on different occasions were part of the informal discussion.

There are women in the neighboring rural areas like Cheffa Robit and Kachur which I included for representation purpose, and I also discussed with women in the town whose views I considered but did not register their life stories. I limited the number of cases to be able to go more in-depth on each case. I ensured the representativeness of the women in terms of their ages and experiences, so that the increase in cases would not complicate the analysis.

#### **Time Spent for Field Work**

PHASE ONE	SEPT12, 2000-NOV27, 2000
PHASE TWO	DEC 27,200-END JANUARY

### **1.5 Significance of the research**

I believe this thesis will fill the gap in our knowledge of women In Islamic tradition in Ethiopia. This research is meant to contribute to gender and Islam by taking

examples from kamissie. Unlike in countries where Muslim communities exist and where Islamic studies rarely forget the women issue, in Ethiopia the issue has not been given the deserved attention. I consider it as a continuation or an addition to the writings of anthropologists and historians who have worked on Islam in Wollo, and yet have given little attention on women's situation.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **2.1 An overview of the study area**

#### **2.1.1 Geography**

Kamissie town is the capital of Oromiya zone in Amhara Regional State, it is a part of Dewa Cheffa, one of the three Woredas in the Oromiya zone. The town is located 325 kms. north east from Addis and 75 kms south from Dessie City. The main Addis-Dessie highway passes through this town.

Geographically speaking, the town has an altitude 1450m above sea level. It is surrounded by a chain of mountains named Kure in the north, Migira in the east, Kotem in the south and Muri in the west. It borders Dewe Rahmedu Woreda in the north, Arthuma in the east, Antsokia in the south and Kalu in the west. The town connects with the neighboring regions through a river named Borkena. Borkena river sets out from the north West Kalu, passing through the banks of the town flows to Antsokia Woreda and meets eventually Awash river. This river is used by the local people for fishery, irrigation, etc. Another river that used to provide the local areas with drinking water was Worke River. Worke river, although is not bigger than Borkena, causes destruction of houses in the rainy seasons due to overflow. Recently it has been verified that the water from this river also harbors bilharzias and caution is made not to use it for drinking purpose.

The climate has shows big change over the year. The temperature reached its peak towards March and May. Rainfall pattern in the region is said to be bimodal, consisting little during the *belg* season in the months of February to May, and heavy rains in the *meher* season from June to September. It is also insufficient and irregular, and thus drought and flooding are common. Desertification and deforestation are ongoing processes that have led to the increase in temperature and the loss of wild life. Today only, a few types of trees exist and consequently the abundance of wild life has diminished significantly. Woodwork in the town also has increased, with trees coming from the near by areas like Daway, Harbu,etc.

### **2.1.2 Economy**

The majority of the people in Kamissie Apparently engage in petty and small-scale trade. Which refers to both informal and formal trade of a Variety of items including grain, drinks and cooked food.

Officials working at the governmental institutions have also increased in number. According to a statistics made by Urban Development Bureau, 9.9% of the total active population in the town counts traders in the formal sector and 13.38 % are governmental officers. The farming population in the town only counts less than 3%. The majority of the rest of the percentage is embraced in the informal sector. This statistics is made after the restructuring of administration structure when many people from other areas came to work in the newly established institutions. The majority of the rest of the productive population engage in the informal sector like

daily labor, resell of food items and small goods, in transportation, in flourmills and washing in hotels.

When we look at the history of the town, we find that some of the farmers in the area are made to the periphery and the region was administered through levying tax from these farmers. Before the emergence of kamissie as a place of residence around 1952, Kamissie and the surrounding area was given by the prince to his wife princess Medferiashwork as a bride wealth. She herself put Balambaras Yosuf Mohammed in charge of the administration. Balambaras yosuf wanted to separate the arable land from the town. He leased farming land subsequently to an Italian investor. This investor( an Italian) had contributed a great deal to the expansion of the town since he was hiring daily farm laborers from the surrounding places who eventually build houses in the town. Besides, along with the increasing labor power in the town, service-providing institutions like hotels, drinking places, etc emerged.

This situation existed until the administrator terminated the lease contract with the investor and again started taxing farmers until the Derg period, which declared a new era for land holding. Nationalization of land during the Derg period in turn led to mass migration of farmers to the Kamissie town for job opportunities and hence contributed to the expansion of the town.

After the establishment of the transitional government, other professionals started to increase the population of the town. Before this period however the institutions were few like the Police office, finance, department of Education, and Ministry of

agriculture and Health department. This period is particularly traced to 1975 when the town was established as a Woreda.

Since 1992, the transitional government worked towards the establishment of an independent Zone for the Oromiya speaking people in Amhara regional State., consequently in 1993, the Oromya zone was made to function with well organized and increased number of institutions. This development beyond increasing the size of the population in the town and has contributed to the increasing diversification of professionals.

### **2.1.3 Population Distribution and Ethnicity**

The total population of Kamissie town in 1997 was estimated 11,386. Out of this total the number of the female population was 5,769 having almost equal ratio with males. It is known that the zone got its name Oromiya because the majority of the residents in the zone were Oromyfa speaking people. However, other ethnic groups as the Amhara, Tigre and other ethnic groups live in the town. This composition however changed since Kamissie became the seat of the Zone. Many Oromyfa speaking people from Oromya Region come to work in the governmental organizations, which were established after the restructuring of the administration. The working language in Kamissie town is *Oromiffa* but except in bureaucratic processes, not all the time *Oromiffa* is used.

Although the residents in Kamissie surrounding speak same language as those who migrated for work from the Oromiya region, they differentiate themselves from them and do not always feel belongingness. Particularly since the majority of Oromos who came from the south are Christians particularly Protestantism, it was difficult for the local people to accept the idea that there are Oromos who are not Muslims.

#### **2.1.4 Religion**

Kelkelachew's thesis for his Masters in Social Anthropology explains how different religious belief systems in this part of the country coexist without disrupting the order of their systems. (1997, Addis Ababa). Of course, Ethiopia itself defies any imagination as to the existence of an exaggerated conflict due to the coexistence of religions or their expansion. However, it by no means dictates that there exists no tension among them;

The designs for the building of the governmental institutions in the eastern part takes a shape of the Cross, and is understood by the some Muslim people in the town to imply the influence of the new coming Christians to the region. The situation added up to the growing awareness of the religious rights among the Muslim community.

Christians exist in this town for a long time and it is well known. They have their own churches and perform religious practices without any interruption by any other religious groups. World Vision Ethiopia operates in many Muslim peasant associations. The organization is based a Christian vision for its operation. In their projects Poor Muslim children form fellowships with foreign Christian children; through a sponsorship program, they receive various" supports". Their families do not discourage this relationship due to the support their children receive. The understanding between Christians and Muslims in terms of religious practices well can be said is positive. However, some growing factors at both the local and the

national level erode this understanding and lead towards tension. The event took place in November 2000 at the high school in Kamissie, serves as one of the evidences to this statement. Two days after my arrival in the town for the second fieldwork, I was sitting in one of the coffee houses to talk to the lady of the house. Four men were discussing about students who went on strike because they asked for prayer time on Friday afternoons. The students were arguing that if Sunday is allowed a holiday for Christians. Friday also should be considered as such for the Muslim people. These kinds of incidents are not few. I would like however to embark on them later on my discussion on religious revivalism.

#### **2.1.4.1 The History of Islamization in Kamissie**

African's people conversion from their traditional belief systems to either Islam or Christianity has been an important object of discussion for social anthropologists and historians. A considerable number of them have discussed it in relation to colonialism, because of the understanding that conversion is part of their colonial history. Trimingham for example gave the following reasons for African's conversion: the increasing horizon of social life that accompanied colonialism renders African people a task of finding ways to a more complex environment. It was therefore necessary for most Africans to fall into either Christianity or Islam on the one hand or secularism on the other hand; Where as the traditional belief systems proved incapable of giving the necessary framework due to their characteristics of circumscribed boundaries of village life (1987:12). Horton similarly described the conversion as a transition from microcosm to macrocosm: by this he meant with the emergence of massive developments and commerce, Africans needed to embrace

the concept of a Supreme being so as to accelerate the changes which were in the air any way (1987:74).

According to Gray however ` any thesis which gives a general casual explanation for the phenomena as conversion in Africa is suspect, because of the multi dimensional nature of the causes. Hussien, a Historian at Addis Ababa University forwarded the similar opinion when he refuted the models by Horton and Fisher on the conversion that stated that there are three stages to Islamization process. The first stage is the Islamization of the foreign traders, followed by the second, which is the mixing of the traditional belief systems with Islam and the third stage consecutive period of reform of any religious regression by elites. Hussien believed that this model should have only explained a specific context and its application to all situations is doubtful.

The Ethiopian conversion for example may not necessarily go along with such a thesis and may require a study of its own. The so-called Arab traders who were coming to the coast might have facilitated the process, but the edification of Islam owes much to the local religious people. This edification again in accordance with the internal force, weakened and rose again through a long period.

The history of the process of Islamization in Kamissie is not much different from the history of Islamization in northern Ethiopia except in a very specific point. there was for long time an argument that the Ethiopian history did not take account of the Islamic tradition, hence we could hear discourses going on among those few scholars who have sensed this gap. To start with, Trimmingham in his book ***Islam in Ethiopia***

emphasized that Islamization in Ethiopia has been disseminated into the interior region through traders who used to sell their merchandise across borders. His presentation however was said to be not illuminating because it did not explain how and by whom specifically the process continued afterwards. (Hussien, 2001: 34). However Hussien said, lack of a clear explanation of the process of Islamization in Ethiopia, led to see possible factors that as much contributed to its expansion and development in this part of Ethiopia i.e the role of religious clerics.

Hussien argued that it might be of course, difficult to think of Islamic expansion in some parts of Ethiopia in the of the absence of traders and rich people, who might have supported the establishment of teaching places and facilitated people's mobility to other areas for learning purposes; nevertheless, the relation between Islam and trade could have been taken differently from what is believed so far. i.e. instead of the traders taking up business of proslytization while doing trade it sounds plausible that those people who were in search of religious teachings needed to have good financial ground. According to him particularly in Wollo taking traders as the main agents of Islamization process in becomes even weaker because traders were not active in teachings Islam because, of attached stigma to them if they engage in trade and at the same time do the preaching.(2001: 28).

As to the question how the idea of a direct relation between Islam and trade came to exist to the extent that it is held true by the scholars, he explained that the traders were followed by religious teachers called *ulamas*, the *Ulamas* following the traders disseminate the information and help the expansion. From his point of view, there

was confusion as to understand that served the purpose of preaching, among the scholars. The effort made by Hussein on this Issue flows towards elaborating the expanding role of religious clerics rather than rejecting that of the traders in the process of Islamization in the country. Abebe who had done his dissertation on Argoba Muslims drew same conclusion as Trimmingham when he noted, "Traders peddled their merchandise as well as their religious beliefs." Trade would have been difficult if they had maintained different religious convictions. (1992:93).

Regarding to the chronology, Hussien contends that there are three stages, which the Islamization process has undergone:

1. From the second half of the seventh century to the eleventh century, Islam was being spread from the northern coast to the inland by individual migrants, preachers and traders, leading to a well-established Islamic community in eastern Shoa by the late nineteenth century.
2. The sixteenth century saw the emergence of Gagn and a forceful Islamization process. Islam was declining for a short period until the Christian kingdom in the North disruptioned, rendering a renewed political strength for the rise of Islam. Islam according to Abebe made its greatest stride between the ninth and twelfth centuries. The rest of the period, according to Hussein's argument, witnessed reformation of local practice towards purification through teachings and *Jihad*. Jihad in Ethiopia was not as pervasive as it was as in other Muslim societies at the

time. Ethiopia through Negasi First had created conducive environment for the conversion and expansion of Islam. (Abebe, 1992:91).

As Trimmingham maintained, the Oromo migration also had a considerable impact on the expansion of Islam. When the Oromo migrated to the highland and settled for a longer time, they had to give up their own democratic structure and value systems for that of Abyssinians and the only way they could maintain their independence was by adopting Islam. Hussien maintained that the Oromo could keep their independence without being converted to Muslims and he gives examples where the Oromo even were despising those relatives who became Muslims( 2001:42).

As to Islam in Kamissie, the majority of the Muslim people who settle in the town today came from the neighboring districts. They trace back their religious fathers to Daway, a neighboring town. Some of them described to me that the first person believed to live in the town was a Sudanese who followed Islam. He came to Ethiopia with his family renting land for to produce spice. People believe that him and his family have contributed to the growth of number of Muslim people in the town.

Before the Italian invasion in 1896, Kamissie was not favorable place for living. It harbors mosquito and other tropical diseases. It had jungles with big trees and beasts. The Muslims who were marginalized and despised by the central governing power at the time also used to stay in Daway, 20 kms away from Kamissie to receive religious teachings and could strengthen the teaching without any interruption. Even today, people refer to Daway when they talk of Islamic teachings and teachers,

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **3.1 Change in livelihood**

Kamissie also served as a transit town and a center for the trade that went through the area starting from the early 19th century and onwards. According to Hussien, trade in this part of the country started to decline around late 19th century. Factors that contributed to the decline at the time however were different from the kind of decline I am discussing here today.

People in Kamissie talked of a decline of trade for the last ten years. Some of my informants were even particular about the time. In 1992, they said the establishment of a strong organized zonal administration reinforced the legalization of trade through internal revenue and tax. After the establishment of the town as the capital for the Oromiya zone of Amhara region in 1992, trade was also legalized. Line bureaus like trade and Industry became responsible for controlling the smuggling of goods through exacting tax and internal revenue. Previously men who could cross boundaries and bring goods for sale from Djibouti. The restructuring of the administration after 1992 in the town however has changed this situation, i.e. the number of traders who use Daway trade route was significantly reduced due to the increased taxation following legalization of trade.

The free market policy was made practical by the year 1992. The policy provided other emerging traders access to goods in all directions, which rendered the competition very high and the profit of individual trader very low. Today those who were active in trade talk about it with contempt that they lost all they had. These

traders have not now moved to a single economic activity neither did they leave trade altogether.

Some of them still engage in trade on a very small scale and with little financial standing. Some have opened restaurants, coffee houses and bars with money they saved. Still others turned back into farming activities. Nevertheless, since the majority of men could not alone meet their family's needs, the women's roles in income generating out side the house has increased significantly. For example, the men who used to engage in selling goods like electronic goods, clothing and luxurious goods were not comfortable to engage in selling farm produce like grains in the local markets.

On the other hand, since they could not get same income as before, their women started to go out to the market to resell grain and subsidize the household income. In addition to that, women who had cash and wanted to start business, before they had the business in their husbands or in men relatives' name as it was hold by many of them that women could not manage to deal with the legal procedures as men do. More over the distance covered in traveling and the means of transportation used was assumed incompatible to women's physique. Again, these women started to have now formal business in their own name. According to the department of ministry of trade and Industry in the zone, today around 350 ladies have established firms at different scales in the town alone. Among these firms, some are food processing and hotels, etc.

Before discussing the lives of these women, I will elaborate a bit on the contributing factors that favor the emergence of these kind of women entrepreneurs.

### **3.2 Women Income generating groups**

#### **3.2.1 Amhara Credit and Saving Association**

The association was established in 1996 after a need assessment was made in Amahra Region. It first started in Arthuma Jille Woreda and extended to Kamissie and the neighboring Woredas with three branches. The objectives of this association is first to build the capacity of poor households by financing small scale income generating activities according to their interest. Moreover increasing the women participation in public activities is assumed to achieve improved status. The association also aims to save the women from taking loans from rich people with a bigger interest.

In the beginning, the association gave loan to heads of households. The heads of the household more often than not were men except in single-women headed families. The association evaluated its programmes at two levels. At the first level, since members of the same group are required to know each other well, every member makes sure that other group members use the loan productively and can manage to pay it back within the expected time frame. If the loan is not paid, the whole group is responsible for it and the members will not be provided for the second time in case they need.

The second level of evaluation is done by the association itself following the sustainability of the program. It is in this evaluation that they came to realize that most men who received the loan neither could pay back, nor use it effectively to improve their lives. The association started using a different approach: availing the loan to the women of the households. The women form groups of five to eight who were poor and citizens of the town. The amount of money a woman could borrow differs from other members of the group depending on her capacity to invest and pay the loan. Nevertheless, all members of a group are given the loan at the same time. The women in WIG groups normally live close to each other. If a woman is married, her husband should present himself at the time of loan taking and consent to the loan with his signature there by he would be made responsible for the payment of the loan with his wife, If a woman is single, divorcee or a widow she is not expected to bring any person responsible for the repayment of the loan.

The income generating activities of the women with the loan vary. If we categorize them as women in the rural districts and women in Kamissie town, the women in the surrounding rural districts normally engage in agriculture, poultry, and livestock production.

The urban ladies would sell grain or open small restaurants, tearooms, do manufacturing/processing and petty trade. The amount of money they borrow ranges from Birr 200 to Birr 3000 depending on the type of the activity they engage in and the ability of the woman to use the money properly (that they do not use it for household consumption and have difficulty to pay back). For the ladies who are

living in the rural areas, the time frame for the completion of the payment of the loan is one year because of the assumed production time. Whereas those in the urban areas are expected to pay each month a certain amount of money. Around 6516 households were beneficiaries of this program at the time of my fieldwork. Out of this, total 5580 of them were under women's name.

Although the association had its own office in the town, the ladies were given orientation about the Credit through the women office in the Woreda administration office. Asegedech is the chairperson in the Woreda administration office and benefits from the loan association. Although she finished, high school could not find any Job. She is married to a man who is working in one of the governmental offices. With the Credit she got from the association, she owns a restaurant inside her house.

*"I sell cooked food in my house. There are women working for me and I pay them a monthly salary. The business helped me much to increase the household income. Although my husband gives me some money for the household expense, it would not be enough to cover all the expenses. Now I sell food, drinks in this restaurant, and can get money that enable me to spend on what I want. My husband often does not ask how much I gained out of the business, in fact most of the time he goes out for field work and I do not stress him to give me more money."*

At the time, I went to her to introduce me with Muslim women, around twenty ladies were coming for the orientation. Some of them had already made their groups. The

women were both married and single ones, however the majority of them were married. I will describe the lives of three ladies who are beneficiaries of this loan and saving program.

Aminat Yesuf is a fifty-three years old lady. She lives with her husband who is working as a porter in the town. When I met her in the Woreda office, she was just coming to apply for the third round. She sells charcoal and enjera to top up the income gained by her husband:

*My place of Birth is in Ancharo. My family and grand parents all live in Ancharo. They were part of the royal family. My mother was given to a man she did not like. She divorced the man and came back to her parents house. I was born then and accompanied my mother to her family house. When my mother went out for another marriage, I stayed back with my grand mother. My grand mother brought me up until I was thirteen years old. A man came asking my grand mother to marry me. I was given to this man and he bought all the beads and Jewelry to symbolize my engagement. After five years of engagement, I married this man. this man was a farmer. He had a mother who stayed with us. She always used to enjoy sending me to carry wet wood from the farming place. I was very young then and got tired of her orders. I one time told her that she would not do this to her son and she wanted me to suffer. She got furious and told my husband that I was scolding her through out the day. My husband also was furious and start to bit me up. At that, time old people used to say that we would be eaten by strange creatures if we try to go to cities. I left my husband*

*and runaway to my grand parents. When I left my husband, there was nothing I took from the house. I even left all my clothes with him. While I was staying with my grand mother, Derg took power and all the conditions in the rural areas were changed. I no more sit with my family in poverty because their land was taken from them. I married another man and came with him to Kamissie. My second husband was a petty trader. While we were living peacefully with him, one day he told me that he will be going to Jimma to bring goods for sale. He went to Jimma and never com back since then . I again married another man because I could not live by my own. My third husband also was a trader. He often used to travel to Shashemene. I think he used to see a woman there because after his leave for the second time, he stayed very long and eventually sent me a message through people that he wants a divorce. In the mean time, I was telling about his disappearance to one of my neighbors who was a man. This man suggested I should forget my husband saying that if a man stays away for three months without notifying to his wife, She will not have Nika by him and is free to marry another man. Any way, since my husband also sent me the divorce paper, I had no other alternative but immediately married the man who used to consult me on my marriage. I became Christian because he was. He was working as a guard. His monthly salary was 50 Birr. After some years of our marriage, I gave birth to a son by him. His salary also increased to Birr 250. As his salary increased, he started keeping money behind. I asked for explanation and it was in vain: I was happy with him because he was wet and that is why I got a child by him. His behavior grew worse and we had to divorce.*

*Again I became a Muslim and married the man with whom I am living now. I have five children by him. He is a porter and carries any thing around the bus station. Before we got married, he was a farmer in Bedena where he was born. He came to Kamissie thinking that he would find a job.*

*Now, we take the loan from credit association to subsidize our income. The first time I took the loan, I bought a cow with it but the cow ate a poison prepared for the mice and it died. However, we managed repaying the loan. For the second time I took and kept the money in the house until I knew what is profitable business. One day my brother who is a driver had an accident. I rushed with the money to the hospital where he was taken. I spent the money there for the medication and other expenses. Since then, my husband refused my taking loan from the association and I am still trying to convince him.*

### **Woinyu**

She is a 25 years old Muslim woman. She is separated from her husband five years back and is now living by her own. She sells tea and bread on market days inside the house she rented in Kamissie

*Five years back, I was married to a man who is a farmer. He lives in Kachur, a nearby Woreda. Before I married him I had another man. My present husband himself was married to a woman who deserted him. It was after two months of his wife's desertion that he married me. I did not have job when I married him. After five months, his deserting wife came back to him and he let her to stay in*

*the house. I was very frustrated and said to him he should choose one of us. however, he refused to do so. He even told me that he could marry up to four women as long as he can administer them all. then I insisted on our divorce but he refused . I told the case to the Kadi, a religious Judge who witnessed our marriage. The Kadi repeated the same thing my husband said to me. Therefore, I left my husband. There were properties I brought to the house when I married him. He did not want to give them to me. That is why he refused to divorce me. But I formed a group with my friends and got a credit from Amhara loan and Saving association. Now I have rented a house and sell tea and bread with the credit. My husband now knows I am earning some income. One day he came and gave me a letter that he would kill me if he ever sees me with any other man. Because now he knows, I can manage with out him.*

**Zemzem and her sister in law**

Oasis Hotel where I normally took coffee and held discussions with my informants is situated about a hundred meters distance to the center of the town. I either took a cart or walked when I wanted to go to the town. While walking, I saw two ladies in front of their houses working on embroidery. Some of their products were displayed on the wall for sale: bedspread, pillow covers and pieces for armchairs. I was curious to talk to these ladies as I rarely saw ladies in the town who engaged in such kind of activities, at least not outdoors. One of the ladies was shy and she wanted to concentrate on her work. She was not that interested to discuss about it as if she was not happy with the work. Another young lady came out from the house and greeted me warmly. My attention was taken to her, as she looked happy to talk. She was working on the sewing machine like the other lady. In our discussion, I found out that both of them are wives of brothers who live next to each other. The second lady narrates her life in the following way:.

*I am thirty years old. I am married and have three children. My husband owns a small shop. He sells food items and accessories for the town people. The income we earn from the shop could not cover all our expenses in the house. Nowadays the living cost has gone higher. Therefore, I had to work. I went to Dessie where my cousin lives. in Dessie I took a training in embroidery. I came back to Kamissie and started doing the embroidery. I hanged my products on the wall so that people can order the design they prefer. I managed to increase the income we got*

*in the family. In the mean time, I used to train ladies on embroidery. My sister in law is one of them.*

As the ladies who are trained start working, the competition increases and the profit I made declined.

*One time I thought of taking my products to other places for sale. But my husband was not comfortable with me leaving for other places. In Islam, a woman should not see a man who is not her husband or related to her by blood, we call this person Hajjinnebi. my husband thought that if I work in the market, then I am likely to speak to men who are Hajjinnebi and he does not like the idea.. We know that things change; if you do not have any thing to eat then you would not die sitting in the house. Even in the Koran, a woman is allowed to work out side if she does not have any income and cannot live. We prefer to stay in the house. If we can get all our needs. but that not possible now and we need to go out for work. The two ladies are not members of the women income generating groups. They said it involves interest, which is not allowed in Islam.*

**Tayech Ali**

When I went to Kamissie, I had a letter with me to a lady who owns a hotel saying that she introduces me to ladies in the town. One day when I was sitting in her bar, two ladies came to visit the lady. They both were neighbors and friends of the hotel owner. One of these ladies was very beautiful. At first sight, Tayech looked in her middle ages, but gradually I could see in her face that she was older. She was so clean and well dressed. She smiled a lot while talking and looked proud of herself.

I was introduced to her in the bar because she was also a woman representative at the Kebele( the lowest administration in the town), and she definitely was helpful. During my stay In Kamissie I heard more about her. People talked of her as a strong, beautiful and modern woman in the town. I collected her life story through her cousin who lived with her for five years.

Tayech was born in a place called Jara. Her father died when she was very young. with her mother she moved to Kamissie, by then she was married to a man who was a car driver. After some years, she gave birth to a girl. The neighbors were telling to her husband that she had an affair with another man. Her husband was annoyed and they started arguing every day. Tayech eventually decided that he should divorce him. When a woman wants to divorce with out the consent of the husband, then they have to pay *Metlo*, a certain amount of money given to the husband as compensation.

She left his house paying the Metlo, and rented a house where in she could sell drinks and food. She received a loan from the Amhara Loan and Saving Association to start the business. Although she was divorced, her former husband used to come

to the bar and disturbed her clients by breaking glasses, etc. He stopped doing that when he married another woman. While she was doing her business, an Arab man was traveling to Dessie and he stayed for some time in Kamissie. During his short stay in Kamissie, he saw Tayech and was attracted to her. Since that time, he came to visit her often and he even took her to Addis for a vacation. Perhaps he also supported her financially to establish in her business. The Arab left to his homeland, and Tayech again married another Ethiopian man who worked in Kamissie. She stayed with the man for four years. Her work necessitated her going out to the bar, which her husband did not like. She again started disagreeing with her husband and eventually divorced him. The divorce was executed through civil law. They shared their properties based on the court decision.

As said by the neighbors that Tayech did not like house work. Her mother and her daughter worked for in the house, cooked food, arranged things and managed the house.

In the morning, she woke up and had her breakfast with her family. The morning finished while cleaning and ordering some arrangements for the Bar. After lunch, she had a special program for the chat ceremony. Tayech chew chat in side her house with ladies who were renting rooms at the back of her house or with their husbands. This chat ceremony is different from the chat ceremony we called Wodaja. In this chat ceremony, she socialized with the people she feels close. One day I went to her house looking forward to see her. I was guided by a man whom I met at the Kebelle. As we arrived, her daughter informed us that Tayech had guests at home and she would talk to me the next morning at the Kebelle. The man with me

commented that it means that she is chewing chat and she did not want to be interrupted.

### **3.2.2 Women at the Market place**

In Kamissie town there are two main Market days: a big one on Thursday and a small one on Monday. Farmers from the neighboring areas like Daway, Senbete, Harbu, Antsokia, Ataye, Cheffa Robit come to sell their produce. Different items are sold. Grains, spices, vegetables, fruits, skin products, cotton products, grass materials are the major ones. Farmers come with their produce the same day for the market. Traders also come from near by places and far places like Dessie and Addis Ababa.

The market is hot around 10:30 in the morning. I always watched rural people walking in a chain to the town on the two market days. Most of them were women. I once was told by one of the World Vision Staff members that absenteeism from the school in the rural areas on market days becomes very high that it has now become a serious issue. The girls particularly consider market days as a place for holiday and entertainment. They beautify themselves and style their hair. They wear ornaments around their wrists, necks and ankles. One of the interesting thing I observed was that an average young girl wear ornaments that are worth Birr more than 200 at one time. The three big Maria Teresa coins they wear around their neck costs 55 Birr each. The bracelets cost 15 Birr to 30 Birr on average, depending on the design, the weight and the material. A girl will have a minimum of two bracelets on her arms and three coins around her neck.

They also wear different kinds of beads, but the beads are not as expensive as the silver bracelets and coins are. People at the market told me that the coins are made of old silver and were used for exchange in earlier times. I saw old Sudanese coins also being sold for One Birr. The tourists coming to Kamissie market are not many compared to those tourists that come to Senbete, located sixty-five kms far from Kamissie to Addis. However, the sellers distinguish the local people from the outsiders and it becomes expensive for the outsiders to buy items particularly souvenirs. I was always asked by ladies at the market to buy from them their bracelets. One day I asked a man if their husbands were not disappointed with them when they sell the bracelets. Because their husbands buy for them at the time of their engagement. The man answered that " the girls sell their bracelets to make a profit. For example, a married woman sells a bracelet for 40 Birr to you and immediately afterwards she buys the same bracelet for 30 Birr, which means she can have a 10 Birr profit. Her husband would not say anything because he would not see her selling it, neither does he notice the difference."

The other ladies are those who sell fruits and grain. There is a difference between a woman from town and a woman from the rural areas coming to market for sell. The women from the rural areas do not make any effort to attract buyers, sometimes you need to get their attention by asking them how much it is the item they are selling, because they are too absorbed by the scenes taking place around them. They greet and inform each other with birth and death news at their places. Their price is often fixed and not much room is given for haggling. Ladies from the town on the other

hand are active in calling the buyers and persuading them to buy. There are also women who deliver their produce to men who resell it at the market. These women can spend more time in purchasing household necessities and visiting their relatives in town.

The market becomes thinner starting from around 1:00 p.m. and most of the women turn back to their houses, except some who stay back for lunch and coffee in town at their relative's house. Men often stay late in the afternoon in the town to enjoy drinks in bars. I was told rural girls now start accompanying men to these drinking bars. Particularly if a girl is engaged, her fiancée takes her to a bar and invites her to soft drinks. One of the men who often bring his girl to bars said " we also have a girl-boy friend ship as you have it in the city, and we enjoy inviting them out, why not? " Although the men consider it as part of courtship, it is not very much appreciated by the majority of the local people. Some young men have experienced stigmatization and they prefer to sit at the back of the bars in darker places where they can stay almost hidden with their sweet hearts.

It is very difficult to generalize about the activities at the market place. Marketing as I witnessed largely involves social relations. it is an opportunity for some women to have information on the price of items, on death and birth of people they know. It is also a forum where they exchange ideas among themselves. On the other hand, trade is practiced everyday in the town. There are both women and men who are active in different types of trade in the town; one of these is small-scale trade like shoe shops, cloth shops, chat corners and other petty trade. The number of women

who engage in small-scale business although has now increased, the majority of women are in non- formal petty trade.

### **3.2.3 Labor migration**

With regard to labor migration, what becomes difficult is to find a more comprehensible point of departure for the discussion. This is because people started migrating short and long distances in this region very early for different purposes. From studies made on migration in the north Ethiopia, we understand that causes for migration vary considerably because of intermediate factors like gender and time. Reasons may also range from unexpected disasters like famine to gradually growing impoverishment and to assumed advantages in the place of their destination. This migration is also accompanied by growing social problems like early marriage, streetism and human abuse of various kinds.

I already mentioned trade, which is one of the reasons for people in Kamissie and surroundings to move to other places. I called this migration because of the long distance, they travel. Some of them settle in the place where they leave to depending on job opportunities. Migration due to trade was earlier done by men rather than by women due to the distance they had to cover crossing borders and enduring hardship.

Nowadays both women and men travel crossing borders. If we look at the migration of people from Kamissie to Djibouti, perhaps it will provide us with information about

the extent of labor migration of people in Kamissie to Muslim countries affects their religious behavior. In Kamissie and its surroundings, many people for example used and still migrate to Djibouti. Their root of travel starts from Kombolcha where they could find transportation to take them to Assayta town in Afar region. In Assayta, there are camel herders who are engaged in guiding these migrants to the desert of Djibouti. The camel keepers demand a fixed amount of money from the migrants and since they are Pastoralists, they could cross the boundaries with a lesser difficulty followed by the migrants. After helping migrant cross the border, depending on the deal, they are either left in the desert of Djibouti, or escorted to one of the bordering towns like Darra, Randa and Yibuk.

Among the people who migrate through this line of migration, young women were very few. Most of the women who migrate to Djibouti travel by truck rather than on foot.

In this root, like the men, the women use trucks to reach to Assayta or Asab and then they contact truck drivers who will take them to Djibouti. These women sometimes face problems crossing the border and are caught at places like Galafi, but the drivers will be responsible to deal with the security at the spot. Sometimes the migrant has family or relatives who stay in Djibouti, and this relative can send them the necessary passport to make possible their entrance. In Djibouti, the men normally find jobs like attending camels, keeping houses and attending gardens for the Afars. If they are lucky enough to come to towns in Djibuti, they might find

positions in hotels or in rich men's houses to teach children the Holy Qoran. The latter position requires however religious knowledge.

Often the time, the women engage in domestic work. Even though their settlement is illegal, being caught and deported is not common as they are working inside the house the situation is different though for men who are exposed to public works and therefore are likely to be detected by the insiders as illegal immigrants. they are deported as soon as they start getting salaries

The emigrants are also have the chance to contact Muslims in Djibouti. The direction of the assimilation of this Islamic knowledge however depends on their destination. According to one of the migrants for example: "If you are in one of the rural areas of Djibuti where the Afar reside and if you know the Koran, then you can be a teacher." Many men who go there became teachers and the Afar who live there need people who came from Ethiopia with Islamic Knowledge. As a result the role of local religious teachers in the dissemination of the religion goes far to the neighboring areas. Some also migrate from Djibouti to the Yemen Republic. In this root of migration, the Afar who own boats deal with middlemen who connect the migrants to the boat sailors. The middlemen charge an average of 200 Birr and the Afar gets 600 Birr from the migrants to go to Yemen. Again, from Yemen, they walk on foot or rent a track to a place called Gizan in Saudi Arabia.

The other and the bigger means of migration to Saudi Arabia is through Umra and Hajj. According to informants, Umra is an Islamic visit to holy places any time,

whereas Hajj refers to the pilgrimage made to the Kabba once a year. The number of women who go through Hajj and Umra is higher compared to those who go to Djibouti, although precise data is not available.

Umra is the most preferable means of travel because as soon as they reach there, any person can receive them and the likelihood that they can stay back is higher. Where as in Hajj, they would be all received and taken to the Holy place until the ceremony is over, and they would be sent back by the same Islamic authority as soon as it is over. The women who migrate for Umra and Hajj will face a problem to secure citizenship. This lack of citizenship makes a visit to Ethiopia difficult for them because they cannot go back without going through the same process they passed before. The small number of returnee women I found for discussion repeats the same statement. Moreover, the transportation fees required are higher for a short visit to the homeland. Most women after going for Umra, have a possibility to be received by family and they can stay there for long time. As I mentioned, the root of trade extends from the nearby towns like Daway to Djibouti and Arab countries in the Middle East.

The women as long as they can pay the air fair, they could accompany a man traveler who will be used as pretext that he is a husband or a relative. This is because of the rules of the religious pilgrimage that did not allow unaccompanied women. This 'religious travel' however for the many of these girls in the town has become a pretext for migration and after their arrival to the place; they access a contact person through whom they find jobs, usually domestic service. According to

informants, there are also other roots of migration for young girls who do not have the amount of money required for the formal procedures and air ticket (one needs about 10,000 ETB). These girls follow the root from Assayta to Djibouti and Yemen on foot and cars.

The types of jobs found in Djibouti consist of domestic services. Jobs are only available again through middlemen and women, who either migrated before or know the people who live there. Such migration has encouraged a large number of girls/ladies in the town to go to Arab countries as they seek for the betterment of income as others who left.

I could find only a few female migrants who returned to settle in Kamissie from the Arab countries. The first lady I talked was Zerthun who now lives in Cheffa- Robbit Cheffa Robit is found in Arthuma Fursina Woreda, one of the three Woredas in Oromiya zone. It is located 25 kms, far from Kamissie. Cheffa Robit is a small village with no electricity. The majority of the people live there are farmers. I was told that many women live there engage in traditional belief systems like Wodaja, Attete and Wukabi, etc. The reason for my choice of Cheffa Robit among other neighboring Woredas is to meet these ladies who engage in traditional religious practices. Besides, It was also interesting to meet some women in veil. I went to Cheffa Robbit hoping I could talk to them. However, unlike what I was told the women were not many, rather they were only two who were related by blood (they are cousins to each other). Both of them were married to Muslim men who live in Saudi Arabia.

Their husbands, according to the informants do not allow them to expose themselves to public and they should veil themselves.

Most people in this place do not remember their face when they were even children. The main gate to their house is often closed and it looks as if they are isolated.

In this area, you also see houses with roofs made of corrugated iron. Most of these houses are built by families who sent one of their daughters to the Arab countries. Zerthun's house was one of them. Zerthun went to Saudi Arabia through the formal way of Hajji and Umra. she got the idea of going to Saudi for the first time, when she visited her uncle in Addis. By that time, she says 'every one in Addis was talking about going to Saudi Arabia including my cousins; it also came to my mind that I could also give it a try and with my cousins I started the process'. Then after two months, she went to Saudi Arabia. Telling of her life story at Chefa Robit before her departure to Saudi Arabia, she says,

*"My father was a salesman. He sells foodstuffs and accessories in a shop. My mother was a housewife. She died while giving birth to her third son. My father's relatives pressurized on my father that he marries a wife, and they brought him a woman. When he married to the second wife, the youngest son was two years old. I used to help my stepmother in the house after I completed twelfth grade. I took the Ethiopian school-leaving exam two times after the first exam; nevertheless, I failed to score the required grade to join any college.*

*My father used to allow me to visit relatives in Addis. During one of the visits in the summer, I came to know that my cousin was intending to go to Saudi Arabia. I came back to Cheffa to convince my father to let me go like my cousins. My father eventually allowed me to proceed.*

*There were men from Eritrea who my uncle knew. These men were going to Saudi and gave their consent to accompany me to Saudi because you cannot go to Saudi without men who are either your relative or someone who claims he is your husband. As soon as I reached there I found a job as a domestic servant with the help of my boy friend's relatives, who live there. During my stay in the Saudi, I could manage to earn a good amount of money and I kept sending this money to my uncle who lives in Cheffa. I sent it to him because I knew he was economically better off and has enough money of his own and will be saving the money I sent. After two years when I came back the situation was completely changed and my uncle had finished his own money and had used the money I sent. I understood, because there was nothing I could do; besides Cheffa has changed a lot. Most men who engaged in big businesses have now stayed at home.*

*I came back when I no more want to stay in Saudi. I now got married to my previous boyfriend. He teaches in the elementary school. Before I left to Saudi, we were planning to live together, but he was a Christian and his mother always warned him not to be converted to a Muslim. Up on my return, I found out that his mother died and he became a Muslim and now we are married and living together.*

*The first year of stay in Cheffa after my return created a strange feeling in me and for the people in Cheffa as well, I felt almost detached from my own people. The town looked very old and the people, very poor. I had a fairer skin due to the climatic change and the people almost assumed I was a white woman, except those who closely knew me. It was very hard for me to go out for visit or shopping for some time before I got my original color. I am now bored here, there is nothing one can do, I still kept on trying to take my school exam believing that I might pass and join a college. Of course, it might be a bit difficult to leave My husband and join a college, but I believe I will convince him to let me go; if he is not convinced, I will leave him.*

Her house looked different from the neighborhood that there is much added to it from her migration, the pictures of the *Kabba* she brought with her is hanged on the wall, there is a very big drawer in the living room in which beautiful drinking glasses are orderly put. There is no proper chair in the house; instead, two big mattresses are diagonally displayed on the floor. I was sitting on this mattress while I was discussing with her. Unlike the other people who treat guests with coffee, Zerthun presented me tea like the Arabs. She behaved free with her husband while discussing with me (and the fact that they are both young couples perhaps contributes to the this effect). The way she dressed was not that different from the other young ladies in the town, where they, except few, do not cover their hair and wrap their bodies.

The village people mostly young girls sometimes envy the women who are leaving to the Arab countries. On the other hand, the old people, particularly men, do not appreciate those girls who migrate; they believe that it is poor girls who migrate to help themselves and their families. Besides, they stated that the women who came back from Arab countries also suffer from confusion and mild insanity and that it takes them quite long to come back to the original mental state.

Zerthun told me that access to such a travel is often made through a loan from rich people and through middlemen who facilitate the migration and Job. The money borrowed is repayable to the borrower as the girl receives her monthly pay. Of course, many people believe that these girls come with the money they earned, or send it back to their families to improve their families' life. Nevertheless, it is difficult to conclude that it dramatically improves their life due to the experience that they soon finish the money with out any investment.

The girls come with all kind of gold and sell it, then nothing remains afterwards. Some men purposefully go for these women because they are tempted by their money, and because they are considered modern and cleaner.

When I talk about returnees, the readers should note that I am referring to those who are deported. The percentages of ladies willingly come back after their migration is very low.

#### **3.2.4 Access to religious and formal schools in place of migration**

During their stay in the Arab countries, the ladies normally do not have access to formal and religious schools. There are two main reasons for the lack of access to formal and religious schools. The first reason is that migration for most of the ladies has economical cause and as soon as they arrive there, will be hired for the domestic service and it becomes difficult for most of them to join school as the employment requires a full time work. The second reason is that as we mentioned before, most of them migrate illegally and they avoid any kind of public exposure due to lack of citizenship in the country. However, they pick some religious traditions that are expected of them when they live in a Muslim household. For example, they wear a black long dress that covers their body (*Abeya*), They pray regularly.

As it is observed from the returnees however, they will drop wearing the dress after a short period in Cheffa. and except some of them, the prayer becomes less and less regular as their stay in the locality gets longer. Nevertheless, for men and women whose husbands migrated for religious purpose out side the country or to religious teaching centers within the country, the situation is different.

The cause of migration to Arab countries in Kamissie and its surrounding is mostly religious than it is economic. This is not because there is no economic need for men instead it is because the chance of getting jobs in Saudi Arabia for uneducated man is very much less. However, men still migrate to religious centers in Saudi Arabia, Djibuti or Dawwey. When they return home, they more than ever observe Islam and the degree of their influence on the rest of members of community becomes high.

Their women are also expected to be strict on the practices. Zahara once told, "*If you do not pray for example regularly, he might not even sleep with you*".

Zahara was married to Jemal after two failed marriages she had by arrangement. She married him on her own consent because her father previously decided over her marriage and the marriages did not work. Her father died and her mother no longer could arrange her marriage. Jemal went to Ataye and Daway for religious school and got some training on Islam in Daway. He is very strict on the Islamic practices and Zhara is accordingly expected to go to the Mosque every day for prayer. He earns his living by selling grains like teff and wheat.

I used to make interview with Zahara in her house. Inside her house, the men's room is separated from the women's. In the man's room, there is a very big bed with mattresses on the floor, and above the bed, a bag carrying the Koran is hanged. I was always invited to come to the inside where there is another room that takes you to the kitchen. This room is the women's room. Here in the women's room also there are mattresses spread over the floor. My interviews with Zahara always are made in her room and her husband never saw me although he knew that I am coming to visit them often. Because from a religious perspective, it is not proper to stare at and talk to a woman who is not a relative or a wife.

### **3.2.5 Awareness and Emphasis on Religious Rights**

Two days after my arrival at Kammissie for the second phase of my fieldwork, I met an old man who was sitting in one of the corners where I was taking coffee. He was talking to the owner of the café about his son who refused to go to school the man said his child did not have even a clue about which direction he should pray. He was furious while he was talking. He continued talking about the high school students who had been on strike for the last two weeks. His son was among them. They went on strike against the school's decision that says 'students should be attending lessons on Friday afternoons'.

Long time before this decision, Muslims students (the majority of them are) used to go out for prayer every Friday afternoon and come for the second class as they finished their prayers. Although such an arrangement was not approved by the school's administration, it was tolerated. This led to students to miss out classes to do their prayer. One time the school administration noted to parents about the growing number of students, who missed lectures, a meeting was held to discuss about it.

The situation was also said to affect the learning-teaching process adversely. After the discussion, it was decided that the school should provide a separate prayer place within the compound for the Muslim students to save the time, and to control other students who go out under the pretext of Prayer. The school administrator at the time of this decision was said to play a role in facilitating the praying place because

he was a Muslim man. This situation lasted for some two or more years. This year the same issue was raised and the school made its' final decision that students should be punctual for their lectures, and no student should be allowed to go out in the name of prayer.

The school's decision, according to some teachers had been made under pressure from the regional administration, that schools are not places for religious practices. This decision created a riot among Muslim students. All of them including those who do not pray and are Christians refused to go to school. Some of them related it with religious rights saying that every one can practice his/her religion without any interruption. Some others said that the present school administrator is an evangelist and he is not interested to let things go the way they were going. Eventually, parents again were called upon to consent to the school's decision. If the students and parents did not show up to report to the schools, they were told that the school administration would understand that the students decided to leave the school.

The parents groups emerged as to the consent to the decision. Most of them argued that their children should pray and could not consent to the school decision. Some Muslim parents were even furious and they capitalize on the suppression of Islam in the region. Others tried to rebuke their children who refused to go to school. These parents of course believed like that of the school administration that their children were using prayer as a pretext to escape lecture time. In addition, their children raising prayer as their own issue for some parents was a discomfort since they understood that to mean the parents did not take their religion seriously. A Sheikh

who owns a pastry shop said once " How come that our children tell us that they know Islam better than us? They try to teach us about Islam, define what is in Islam and what is not, some times they defy our practices and even go as far as to tell us that we are Christians"

Informants described that children also no more listen to their families. They run away from their families, spend nights out and make decisions that affect their lives early in their ages.

Girls as well as boys made the strike against the school decision. According to the figure given by national statistics, there are around 3000 students in both elementary and high school. Out of this figure, the number of girls counts to 1797, but the number of girls decrease, as we go higher in the level of their grades. I often heard that girls stay in school only until they marry. After their engagement, they stay in the house because their parents fear that they might be spoilt and learn unaccepted behaviors at school. According to them, a girl who does not marry early for different reasons is likely to finish her study. I saw when girls who are attending school also could attend Islamic teachings given at the Mosque in afternoons and weekends. Those girls who go to school are also well versed with the Koran.

I remember a day when I was asking to a lady of a small hotel to find me a Muslim lady who could teach me about Islam. The hotel lady was a Christian, and she told me that she knew about Islam as much as any Muslim woman knew because she has cousins who are Muslims. I asked her to introduce me with one of her cousins, she

brought a lady with a long dress, rapped her. The lady was in her middle age. She was very shy to talk about herself.

There were assumptions she made about my questions. She said, " We Muslims do not have any problem, we live naturally like any other woman." When I further asked her if she could tell me about her life in relation to Islam she said that her daughter knows better than her, about any thing related to Islam. She was doubtful about her knowledge of Islam "we just live, we do not go to the mosque regularly, the same opinion is given by children about their parents. Many of them in my discussion stressed that their parents are 'traditional' and they mix Islamic practices with traditional ones. Once Zerthun was telling me about her younger sister who now joined Allemmaya College. Her name is Birtukan. Birtukan was known for her best performance in the school and her religious commitment. She was taken as a religious teacher in the house and any reference was needed, they consult her. On the other hand, as she increased her attendance to both prayer and teachings places, she always used to suggest the family that they should become strict on prayers and should drop Attete.

### **3.2.6 Islamic revivalism and local religious practices**

The first impression I had about Daway was that it is a place for rich traders with an orthodox Muslim belief. Of course, many inhabitants believe that Daway is a place in the north where Islam got its strength. In the history of Islam in the country, Sufism has been mentioned. The revival of Sufism also was described as it was typical in the area and many including Hussien studied this aspect of Islam (2001). I do not want

to go into the detail of Sufism, as it is a very much related to the issue I want to deal with. I will instead describe the religious practices today in Kamissie and Its surrounding.

“Islam has become stronger” is what one often hears people in Kamissie saying. They do not consider their commitment to Islam the same as before. Today people pray and follow the teachings given by Islamic clerics in the mosque more regularly. There are three mosques in Kamissie alone where people regularly go. The first mosque was established in 1953 and is the biggest mosque. The second mosque was built in 1964 and the third one named Daway mosque started functioning since 1978. There is also now a new and very organized mosque being built since 1994. Teaching sessions are regularly held inside this new compound among the Muslim believers. Most afternoons religious men teach the Koran to both men and women. The women constitute both young girls and married ones. They have a separate place from the men’s place, where they sit and listen to the men's teaching. They can only listen to the men’s voice but could not see them. I observed many women particularly young girls attending these teaching sessions. They wrap their hair and cover their body with long dress stretched to their feet. For the old married ladies such style of dressing is not common out side the mosque. Nevertheless, the young girls normally wear this style even at school. Ato Seid, the director of Industry and Trade, told me about his younger sister at school who is 15 years old and wrap her hair. ‘She does it by her own; sometimes I am surprised that she tries to convince me why she started covering her hair by citing the Koran. No one told her to cover her hair in the house where she grew up, when she started attending the teachings

at the mosque, she also started covering her hair and becoming strict on prayers.' She is convinced about her religion and she wants to convince those who are asking her about it. Seid said he was surprised by his sister's fast growing Piousness.

He believed the teaching at mosque has changed the behavior of many children than the rules of the house, which is provided by their parents or families. In fact, sometimes furious arguments take place between the children and their parents, because, the children after coming from the mosque try to correct their parents' attitude towards some of the religious practices. According to the children, their parents are practicing religion, which deviates from what the Koran is saying. I will be discussing in detail about these religious practices later on. However, it is very visible from the parents statements that they are not comfortable with the opinion forwarded by their children on their religious practices. " It is youth, we know. By the time they mature, they forget what they are now saying", Said Sheikh Ebrahim, one of the elders who seems to be very annoyed about the situation. Even though he did not want me to consider it as a serious issue, mentioned that there are even some children who do not want to eat slaughtered by those parents with whom they do not agree on religious matters.

Surprisingly not many of the children know how to read Arabic, in which the Koran is written, and yet through those religious teachers who acquired training in other places it is translated to them and they can directly involve in an argument with their parents. I have a case of a student who was arguing with his father.

It was the time when students went on strike against the school decision. The father was telling his son to go to school under any condition, even up on the school decision that he should miss out his prayer time on Friday afternoons. The child asked his father which was the Ultimate goal of a human being: Prayer or Schooling? The father was confused as to what he should answer him. The father told his child has to make his own life better and for that he need to go to school, but he could not tell this fact to his child because he thinks it was not expected from a father who need to teach about his religion to his son and from that perspective the child was right.

While I was discussing about the students' strike about prayer, mention was made by some people that student's awareness about Islam has increased dramatically. Prayer has become central to their lives. Religious teaching in the area is given due attention by people who came from neighboring areas like Daway and Ataye and Saudi Arabia. After receiving the religious study from within and from outside the country, these Muslims strive to separate tradition from Islam. however these people are considered by the local people as 'Protestants of Islam' rather than Muslims and other times as *Wahybia*. Of course, no one says I am a *Wahybia*, and those people who told me that there are people called *Wahybia*, they told me with a careful tone from their mouth as if they are not sure that what they are saying really exists.

One time it sounds that they are afraid of the people they are referring to and some other time, it seems that the people assume unfairness towards these Muslims because they call them *Wahybia*. To start with, what already has been mentioned

above under religious teaching, adults normally do not agree with children who come up with a different understanding of Islam and Islamic practices. The old men strongly believed that religious tradition that came down through generation should be maintained and the young children came up with an idea that tries to separate local tradition from Islam. And in between there are these men called *Wahybia* who have come from Islamic countries to disseminate the new Islamic teaching for young boys/girls. 'There are two men who came from Saudi Arabia to disseminate the new idea of Islam' said one of my informant, an old man, who seemed to be disappointed by the situation 'One of them live in Ataye and the other one lives here. They tell us our religious practices are not within the Koran. But we have lived this way for centuries in this place. Our parents and grand parents lived this way and taught us to live this way. The two men come now and say we should not celebrate the Prophet's birthday and should not slaughter anything near the shrines.

The Prophet's celebration is one of the days with in the year on which we provide the poor with meat who never tasted it with in the year. Besides, we go to the graveyard of those Sheikhs because they were big religious fathers to whom we owe much of our religious tradition.'

The young men and women who are attending Islamic teaching at the mosque on the other hand see *Wodeja* differently. " It is the old women who do not know anything about Koran who believe and practice *Wodeja*, they are ignorant of Islam" said a young man named Girma who was a convert from Christianity. A hotel owner, who lived in the area for long time suggested that I should discuss the issue with the

people whom he and the majority of the people in the locality call *Wahybia*. He warned me not to mention his name neither did he show me their place of residence. I took some days to find these people and yet it was difficult to find them by just calling *Wahybia*. Wherever I go and mention *Wahybia*, people asked me who were these people and there was suspicion about what I wanted from Wahybia. More over a stigma was attached to the word and it became a barrier for communication. And no person dares to neither introduced me Wahybia nor come anybody saying he/ she is a Wahybia

I discussed this fear of lack of communication with Mesfin who is a social worker in the Work and Social Affair department at Kamissie. His comment was that the relation between the majority of the people and the *Wahybia* is one of stress and no one talked about the other in public.

I found it also very hard to exhaust practices, which are dubbed as non-Islamic by those people who are called *Wahybia*. The categorization of Islamic from non-Islamic practices was not always clear. The description on the literature on traditional religious practices and “not Islamic” may not necessarily go along with the description made by the local people. If I clarify with an example, during my visit to Cheffa robit where I met many old ladies known as *Duberti*. These ladies engage in *Wodaja*, a traditional/ religious practice where women gather for a coffee ceremony and appeal to their God. *Wodaja* is held in time of sickness, birth, assumed danger or any other social problem faced by the women and their family members. The women gather in the house of the lady to whom *wodeja* is held. One of the ladies, often the

oldest one serves as *duberfi* who will make the blessing and the curse of the vice. After the coffee is made, they start chewing chat and present the affair to their God. They ask for His blessing and mercy on the woman, that her problem be solved. This can be done by any woman any time she feels she should make a wodeja ceremony. In Cheffa Robit, I was taken to Ejigayehu's house by a young Muslim man named Awraris. Awraris grew in Cheffa and came to Addis to look for a job. I happened to meet him in Addis and he consented to join me to kamissie.

The idea of visiting Ejigayehu came up when we were discussing about traditional belief systems in the area. Awraris told me that she was a Muslim woman and she was known for practicing traditional belief called Attete. I was introduced to her in her house

Ejigayehu is a 43 years old widow with three children. When I first met her she rapped a shawl over her head. We asked what happened to her since that was the normal way of rapping a head for those at home with a headache. She said it is her *Attete* I would like to use her own description of *Attete* as follows:

*When I was fifteen years old, I was very beautiful and was almost ready for engagement. One day while asleep, I dreamt of a girl just like me I saw her running towards me to chase. The girl was so beautiful with a hairstyle like an Oromo girl. I woke up. The next day I was severely sick. That afternoon the same day, I was daydreaming again. A lady of middle age came with a plate of*

*porridge. At the middle of the porridge, there was butter and grass. As I ran to receive the porridge from her, she pulled her hand back and the dream continued for a long hour. Eventually, I woke up. My mother was worried because as I was daydreaming, was staring at one place for a long hour. I told her about my dream and she told me that my grand mother's Attete was transferred to me. She cooked porridge and gave me to eat. From that time on I provide ever year A fowl and porridge for the Attete. This year I did not have money and could not manage doing all the sacrifice and I am now sick. I had wodaja last Saturday believing that I would be better, I am still sick. At wodaja, we praise the Prophet. This has never contradicted any thing in our religion, Islam"*

A man in kammisie however described *Wodaja* as follows: We (Muslim men) know that *Wodaja* is not a part of Islam, however since it does not contradict with anything in Islam, we tolerate its practice and leave the women to practice it." Similarly, there were women like W/o Merium who do not see the difference between Islam and *Wodeja*. Wro. Merium is a 50 years lady whom I always met at the market place selling sorghum. She said "it is so hard to drop *Wodaja* because it is our tradition and by practicing *Wodaja* we praise and appeal to Allah and the Prophet, and they listen to us."

### **3.2.7 Media, Communication and Literacy**

One of the contributing factors for increase in Islamic knowledge for the young generation is the press. In kamissie, the Muslims have access to religious (Islamic)

newspapers and magazines that are produced in big cities. These Magazines are written in Arabic and Amharic and easily can be understood by the Muslim people in the town. They contain translations of Koran and Hadith (the teachings of the prophet) with explanations. Questions not understood by believers regarding Islam are also treated in separate columns. This increased the user group who did not understand Arabic and hence the Koran well.

This knowledge gap between a child and his/her parent in religious matters is felt by many of them and many factors can be cited for this Gap. Men's migration to Islamic societies, awareness of religious rights and the press are some.

### **3.2.8 Women Association at Governmental Structures**

Along with the restructuring of the regional administration, the women association was established with a new election in side the Woreda and the Kebele offices. The association at the Woreda level is more active than the one at the Kebele. The women who were represented at the two levels are also different. Tayech represents the women association at Kebele where as Zhara and Asegedech represent the Woreda office.

Zhara had her office in the regional bureau for the council. This office does not have clearly documented information on women and their socio-political conditions. I met more women at Asegedech's office inside the Woreda than at Zhara's in the bureau of the council. This is because most economic affairs relevant to women are

discussed at the Woreda level. I found Aseggedech supportive in bringing me into contact with the women. Zhara however, strongly believed that I should follow the correct procedures for interviewing women. This procedure starts from the need to have a letter of support from the house of council in the region.

After presenting the letter to Zhara, I asked her if I could first discuss with her on some issues related to the association and its activities. She knew the objective of my research that I am very much interested in studying how Muslim women live in Kamissie with respect to their religious tradition. She had doubts about the reply I would receive from the women and that I might take it for granted. She insisted I first discuss the issue with the Sheikhs at the office for the Islamic affairs.

The majority of the cases presented to this office however were family matters related to marriage and divorce. I myself had doubts about taking my issues to the office because it was a time students were striking against the school's decision. Any intervention by an outsider in terms of interviews therefore could mean to expose this mob. The situation was sensitive enough at the time and I thought of dropping the idea of going to the office for some time before I manage to collect enough data. However, Zhara kept on insisting on my going first to this particular office. I assumed her insistence was due to her frustration resulted from the general opinion of people that Muslim women have low social status. She said If I want her to discuss with me , then I should write my points of discussion so that she would be writing the response on a paper. Since no other alternative came to my mind at the

spot, I consented to her requirements. But the answers she wrote were very short and did not say much about the women.

After two days I reread her interview and thought of other informal way of discussing with her. The fasting season made my informal discussion and visit to her house discomforting. Therefore I decided to wait until fasting is over.

In the mean time, I went to the Civil court. In this court I was informed that not many women come with their cases because they prefer to settle it with *Kadies*. When they face family problems, the women prefer *Kadis* because *Kadies* are given a higher status in deciding marital issues.

During my second fieldwork, I met Zeynu coming to Asegedech for the orientation to get a second round loan. Since she told me about her marital problems, I was curious to know what happened to it since then. She said still refused to give her divorce and, that prevented her from marrying another man. She stayed with out having a child for the five years of separation from him. I asked her why she did not present the issue to the women association in the house of the council so that they would direct it to women association to help her settle the matter. She said there is no as such clear division in the office that deals with women's family issue. She believed that the women represented cannot manage to solve marital cases and their power to decide over the matter is so restricted. She was consistently emphasizing the role of the *Kadi*- the religious leader who witnesses and executes marriage. She has a great hatred to wards the Kadi who witnessed her marriage though. She said the *Kadi* is supporting her husband by telling him he could keep more than a wife and I have no any ground to argue on that.

Zeynu's brother told her husband that he must divorce his sister. Her husband said he would divorce her and he declared the divorce on the street: I divorced you, while he was walking. According to Zeynu it could not be considered as divorce. Divorce is valid only when he presents himself to the *Kad* and confesses to the *Kadi*. The *Kad* is the judge and confirms to her property rights. Zeynu said however, the *Kadi* was a friend of her husband and lingered on the procedures for five years. Aminat according to her friends did not appeal to the Sheikh. Sheikhs in this context are those old religious men who listen cases from both side and pass judgment. If the person who is found guilty does not conform to the sheikh's judgment, then it is believed that the sheikh will cause him/her danger through his curse. Therefore people go to sheikhs often when the matter cannot be settled through elders. Muna, Zeynu's friend said to me " Aminat loves her husband and she wants him back to her, that is why she cries all the time. she does not want to take the case to the sheikh, because if the sheikh hears to the case he will judge them. Since her husband does not want to share the property, he will refuse to listen to the Sheikh and the Sheikh will curse him. If a Sheikh curses you, you will die. Zeynu does not want her husband to die; she loves him so much."

In kamissie, there is also a civil court. According to the staff in this office, even if the women marry under Sharia law, they can bring the divorce case to the civil court. However, many women preferred to settle their family matters through their *Kadies*. their preference to *Kadies* is once because they are muslims and secondly they are not exposed to civil laws.

#### **CHAPTER FOUR**

## **4.1 Data Analysis**

### **4.1.1. The Impact of Political and Economic reforms**

Ethiopia has undergone both political and economical reforms for the last some decades. Accordingly, Kamissie as part of the nation has been affected by these changes. It was described that the trade, which went on for decades in the region, made the town a transit town. No rail way crosses this region and all it required was strong people walking a long distance with camels caring all goods to the town across the borders. Where as the majority of the people living in the town came from the neighboring areas to work in small hotels and pastry shops and pensions, which serve the merchants. Particularly since the Ethiopian People Democratic Republic Front (EPRDF) took Power and started, ruling, tremendous changes were made in the economic spheres.

These changes have been reflected in different ways in the life stories of women I collected. However, for analysis reason, we will dwell on two major changes, which are the privatization of the economy and growing mobility of people to foreign countries.

#### **4.1.1.1 The Privatization of the Economy**

The country which used to follow a nationalization policy and for a short period a mixed economy during the Derg regime completely transferred to a private ownership policy. In the mean time Investment, policies were put into practice.

Merchants who smuggle goods on camel backs and sell them in town face other new coming and competitive merchants. These new coming merchants bring all kinds of goods from all directions in the region. Goods increased both in quality and in quantity.

The situation made profit of individual merchant very low because goods became abundant by those people in the formal sector. As described above men that used to participate in smuggling of goods gradually reduced in number and some of them were even unable to get loan later on because of their failure to return the loan. This trend in return forced women of the house to go out and engage in the informal sector, and somehow earn an income to support the family. What becomes very difficult all the time is to make a statement as women of a certain groups are confined entirely to the house because their religion says so. Similarly, although the majority of them at Kamissie do not engage in agricultural activities where the women role in part of Africa is said to dominate, the women in this town highly engage in activities related to trade. As the data collected explained, most men who used to engage in smuggling of goods and related businesses refuse to go to the market at Kamissie and sell grains, fruits, spices, etc. and it was left mainly to the women to generate income for the house. This being the main reason for increased participation of women in the public economic spheres, some new development approaches also have added force to their participation. One of these development approaches is the gendered micro financing schemes.

One of the premise for this approach was that economic empowerment of women can be achieved through such projects like provision of micro financing and credit facility that cater for the need of women. At Kamissie, micro finance schemes were organized by both the government and non-government organizations working in the area. However, the Amhara Credit and Saving Association was more visible in its activities. Women have more access than men to such a credit. The reason for this inclination to women often is referred to the experience gained by the association that access of credit for men did not always result in the increased income for the household. Accessing credit for women therefore was taken as a better approach and yet married women must accompany their husbands who should co-sign to get the loan.

This loan has contributed a lot more to women involvement in public spheres as women more than ever became active in market, bars, teashop, cloth shops and even in the small-scale industries like mill houses and flour factories. The cases cited among the women income generating groups are just some of the examples to this effect.

At the same time, it has increased the workload, as women should also take responsibility of the domestic chores. The men who withdrew from smuggling did not remain at home sharing any of the domestic activities rather they either start selling *chat* resort to farm activities in the rural areas and still a number of them are entirely dependent on the women.

The relation between men and women in such a condition in the house has not always been full of consensus or without conflict. My informants stated that a woman who always fights with her husband finds it very easy to leave her husband because she believes she could get a loan from Credit Association and can start her own life.

Statistics on divorce rate is literally absent in the town. Marriage can be concluded with the help of civil law or the *Kadies*, religious Judges. Most of my divorced informants divorced their husbands through *Kadies*, according to the women, who are very partial to the men. These men often the time represent the Sheria and their judgments are unalterable, and were taken by most Muslims as genuine. Those women, who did not share properties because of lack of apparent reasons for their separation from their husbands, as it is understood by the Kadi, continue leaving as separated women but supporting themselves with the credit, they get from the Association. although statistics is not available for the causes of separation, according to my informants extra marital relations are the major one. At kamissie polygamy although has been described as a common phenomenon, the likelihood that a man keeps more than one wife legally is so rare. The religious law( sheria) also bestows upon the lady to consent to her husband's marriage with another woman, which does not happen all the time.

However, the extra marital relation with women by the husband often than not is taken to mean the same thing with that of polygamous marriage. Kadis play a

paramount role in this by negotiating with the wife who needs to conclude the marriage as a result.

#### **4.1.1.2 The Restructuring of Regions**

With regard to the political reforms, since 1996, the country was divided by ethnic regions, hence Kamissie, which used to be a part of South Showa became a capital for the Oromya region in Amhara Regional State. Line bureaus were established. Among them was bureau for Trade and Industry, Culture and Tourism, House of Council, etc. Some of these institutions like Bureau for Culture and Tourism have not been strong enough in terms of their activities. The bureau for trade and Industry at least has now been effective in controlling the smuggling of goods and providing license for traders who want to run formal businesses. The growing number of non-governmental institutions in the country as well as in the town also contributed to the expansion of the town. Parallel to these institutions were the growing number of people working in them. It has also increased the differentiation of roles for both men and women.

#### **4.1.2 The relation between Economic, Socio-political changes and religion**

##### **4.1.2.1 migration and Religious Behaviors of Migrants**

It is known that during the Derg regime, Ethiopia's relation with foreign countries was so limited and was defined by political ideologies. Nowadays this relation with foreign countries has been broadened and it has accordingly has had an impact on the people's movement to the outside world. The number of people traveling from

Kamissie to Arabian Countries like Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Beirut as explained in the ethnography grew for the last decade large. We have stated that women have a bigger chance of staying in these countries and the reason for their travel was for most of them was to seek employment. Despite the fact that they migrate to Muslim countries and use Islamic pilgrimage as pretext for migration, their religious behavior did not take any form of fervency as they come back; rather most of them, as informants explained drop all the Islamic practices except the dressing style. The fact that they are confined at home in the place of migration and do not have any access to whatever form of education be it religious or formal is the main reason for their less piousness.

However, they are considered as agents of change only because they come with or send money for their families who will have a better living conditions as a result compared to their respective neighbors. These families particularly in Cheffa are identified with houses whose roofs are made of corrugated iron. On the other hand, men who often travel for religious school have access to religious schools otherwise the likelihood of staying abroad is so low due to lack of jobs. These men as they come home will find ways to teach the Islamic lesson they gained to the local Muslim people at Kamissie. As I described some of them go to extreme to separate traditional religious practices from Islamic notions and practices they are thought abroad, they are given a name *Wahybia* and some other times *Protestants of Islam*. The impact of these religious men however is not negligible. The majority of the Muslim people at Kamissie appreciate their caliber and level of knowledge. The impact however differs largely across age.

When people migrate to places where religious practice is homogeneous perhaps, the tendency to be converts or to take up a similar religious practice is predictable. This is because religious practices are hard to be detached from other elements of the culture with which the migrant come into contact. The same principle applies when missionaries and people with different religion come to settle in the areas different from their own. This diffusion of culture including religion occurs although the direction is dependent on specific historical situations. Leif Manger, A Norwegian anthropologist had an interesting research on the Laffofa people of the Sudan, the Laffofa people according to him are not strict Muslims and this is a result of their history of becoming Muslims. The Laffofa consider their being Muslim largely as a means of identity than any thing else. (1999: 35).

#### **4.1.2.2. Distribution of Religious Knowledge**

No believer in Islam says there are two Islams. One of the reasons why I moved from Haik to Kamissie was however the fact that I heard many Muslim people saying that Islam is now changing in this region. Most of them appeared to be happy with that change. They told me that Muslims nowadays pray more regularly than before, they have started learning Islam by people who know the Koran better. These are some of the words thrown here and there. Detailed investigation however reveals that there is much to be studied with in this change. This process of religious change is not understood in the same way within the population and the implication that this change has on them also largely varies. As it was explained in the ethnography, the women at the rural surrounding practice more the " traditional religious belief

systems." There are also groups of people who mix Wodaja and the commemoration of Mouldid with Islam which again is no more accepted by another group of Muslims called Wahybia. In these cases we observe layers of Islams, One that accommodate traditional belief systems like *Attete*, the other which accommodate some traits of local Islam like *Wodaja* and the third which can not tolerate the combining of any traditional belief practices and local Islam elements. In a situation where this kind of mixture of religions prevails, it becomes a very difficult task to argue on any theoretical perspective. i.e the role of religion, whether it fosters social change or retard social change could not be understood easily as the religion (Islam in this case) is perplexing it self. Weber analysis of the relation between religion and social change in the first place be understood when according to him, the religion emerges with in that society. Here Islam has been exported by those men who migrate to Muslim countries although local clerics have had some impact on that part (Ahmed, 2000)

#### **4.1.2.3 Conflict Among Generations**

Women and men have different response to the Newly coming Islamic teachings. Most of the women in the town cannot read the Koran, they are entirely dependent on their husbands and children who have a better access to Islamic teachings and Koran. As women informants described they do not understand the new Islamic teachings. However there is still a difference between Muslim women Kamissie and in neighboring rural areas like Cheffa or Kachur. The women in the town did not want to disclose that they practice Attete and Wukabi. The young women and men always

mock on those who practice traditional belief systems like Attete,wukabi saying that they pretend as if they are possessed by a spirit. They also say Attete and Wukabi were make-ups by ladies themselves.

Young girls do not show interest in Wodaja. They said it is " old ladies business." They chewed chat at various occasions like in restaurants while serving. They chewed in the weekends with their boy and girl friends. Some jokes were sometimes made imitating the Duberti before they started chewing, but unlike old ladies, they did not take it seriously to be religious. In rural areas on the other hand, women openly say that practice traditional belief systems. *Wodaja* is considered as a mere environment where by a lady can communicate with her/his God. Here in most cases the women although did not say they practice *Attete or wukabi*, Practically they do, they do when they have headache or some sicknesses.

With regard to men, the impact of Migrant men on the local Muslim men often embraces tension between. The local Old Muslim men have agreed and claimed for long that they are Muslims. when the new teaching says what used to be practiced in the area was not Islamic, it highly confronts their belief that they were Muslims and are Muslims. People who held the local Islam also constitute the Sheikhs over whom a new form of religious leadership was established. The conflict between the old generation and newly emerging religious teachers is reflected in the household between children and parents in private rather than between new and old religious teachers in public.

The students strike at school by many people in the town is associated to the teachings by those religious people called *Wahybia*. As I mentioned before in *Religious Revivalism*.

The word *Wahybia* is mentioned as unclear and fluid. What is clear is that some religious teachers exist who stress on the separation of tradition from religion.

Young Muslim children at school often go to the mosque to hear these teachings. At the same time, they have access to the religious magazines and books, which are, produced in some other areas in the country and even outside the country. The children are convinced that traditional religious practices are not part of Islam and similarly strive to convince their families to give up practicing them. Children may refuse to eat what is slaughtered by their parents because their parents according to them are not Muslims.

They engage in a continuous argument over traditional practices like *Wodaja* and *Attete* or *Wukabi*. They also made strike for religious rights against the school decision. Some of these students even made such decision despite their parents consent.

Unlike Durkehim who believed that religion serves as cohesive element of social life by bringing solidarity, Islam in Kamissie cannot be said successful in this respect. It rather created conflict between generations. children and parents, between different groups of men and women.

#### **4.1.3 Traditional Belief systems with in change**

I have explained that the traditional belief systems described as *Attette*, *wukabi* and *Wodaja* were said to dominate in this area. However, either the practices are been underscored publicly or they were reduced minimally. *Wodaja* and *Attete* for example are limited to old women who live in rural areas like Cheffa than young women or else in the Urban Kamissie. The main reason for my visit and inclusion of Cheffa is due to absence of women who claim they practice *Attete* or *Wodaja* but all the time trace some of the families who practice them are in Cheffa. Practicing *Attete* is taken as an embarrassing and Anti-Islamic by most Muslims; Where as *Wodaja* is a relatively tolerated practice.

One of the traditional belief practices that have been dropped was the sacrifice offered to saints near a specific tree. The tree where I heard people used to gather around is located near the entrance to the town, close to the newly built mosque. It is fenced. This tree has a very big hole in its trunk. Inside the trunk, was said to me coffee was served. They say eight people can sit inside at one time. this ceremony according to informants was held on the day, *Alfatir*, a holyday following the fasting season. I fortunately was present at the time of *Alfatir* and no one came to the tree for the occasion. The women described the reason of dropping the sacrifice because they were told by religious men that it was not Islamic.

I present you one example of this difference in religious matters between the town and the rural women who are also different in their ages.

Zhara is a 28 years old Muslim woman working as a health officer under World Vision Ethiopia. She had an aunt who was living in kachur. Her aunt was a 62 years old woman who practiced attete. Zhara always used to tell her aunt to drop the Attete because it was a traditional belief and was not in the Qoran. Her aunt was also afraid to do so because she believed she would fall sick as a result. She was very poor and there were times she could not buy all the things needed for the ceremony. This year she had no money at home to buy the fowl, the butter, etc. She sent Zhara a message that she should send her money for the ceremony. Zhara did not want her to practice the *Attete* therefore she did not send her any money. After some days, her neighbors came to tell that aunty was severely sick and that she should buy the necessary items for the *Attete*. Zhara refused the money and suggested to bring her aunt to Kamissie for medication. However, the day she brought her to Kamissie, the aunt died. Now none of her neighbors talk to Zhara because they believed that if the *Attete* had got her claims, it would not had killed her. On the other hand, Zhara believed that her aunt had highpertention and it killed her because she did not go to hospital immediately after she felt sick.

In Cheffa Robit also where I met Egigayehu, she told me about Attete. She never mentioned the relation between Islam and Attete, neither did she see any contradiction between the two. She had I quit practicing Attete because her son in Addis warned her that he would stop his support if she kept on practicing Attete. I had a chance to discuss about it with her son . He said that not only was he against her belief in Attte but also in her belief in Wodaja with the sheikhs. "There are men who are moving around those women houses, telling them that they could make

blessings. Then they stayed the whole day in the house chewing chat. In the meantime, the women were expected to provide them with their meals and coffee. It is very expensive to keep such men. I tell all the time my mother that she should stop doing that because she is getting poorer and poorer and receives nothing in return. The men are cheats. And there is no as such in the Koran showing their blessing better than any other person”

Egigayehu almost stopped her affiliation with those religious men. However, she said she was getting weaker and weaker as she stopped celebrating days for the Attete. It was true with Woynu who quit for some time practicing Attete. At the time of my visit to her, she had the headache because of the Attete.

These women in the rural areas are equally aware with those women in the urban about the Islamic reform, which insists on breaking the tradition from Islam which is said to be based on Koran alone. Nevertheless they are comfortable to give opinion that the traditional belief systems do not contradict with the Islam they know. Because both of them serve different spheres of lives. The psychological function, as Malinowski stated always leave them to practice traditional religious practices as it provides the ritual for psychotherapy(1925:102) and Islam as it is presented by the new groups does not provide such conditions or forum.

However it does not mean that the dichotomy between the ideal and the actual are not part of the religious tradition, as Gellener described Islam may not exist classified as low and high or little and big but the religion itself being different serves

different functions. As dichotomized, as many researchers stated is not restricted to religious leaders and researchers, but rather is a common discussion held by the ordinary people where we can not make a clear boundary. In my discussion with many of them, they always describe to me that there are people who contend that mixing traditional belief systems with Islam as it is written in the Holy Koran is wrong, Nevertheless, let alone to define the group who dictate such a doctrine, the people do not even mention a single person they know near by teaching this.

Naming those people as Wahibya at times might carry a political connotation for them, and yet they believe that many of the ordinary people are convinced that they do not live up to the ideal. However they also hold upon some religious practices that are more relevant to the lived experiences. Once I remember the lady in Cheffa Robit telling me a story about Wukabi. She told me that there was a man possessed by the Wukabi, a spirit. She said there was also another young man who was all the time making Jokes about the man who is possessed. We were telling this young man to stop his jokes because we know that the Wukabi is very dangerous. The young man did not stop annoying this man and one day he was scolding and mocking over him. The young man died at the spot. This is what we observe and it is very difficult for us to give up the belief practices. We see things happen and we believe. Some people also say of-course,“ Islam does not include the practice of traditional belief systems but our lives are such that we do it” The distinguish between the ideal and the practice is always made by almost every individual and the ideal always help them in measuring individual’s position verses the other. To my surprise some of the old men contend that the ideal it self as it is thought by those men who have been to

outside does not necessarily symbolize Koran because they know Koran and it worked in the religious tradition with out any contradiction. And that the new teaching reflects religious invasion by outside Muslim societies.

with regard to women status, the women in this discourse are bit shy mainly due to their restricted knowledge and access to the Koran. Those young girls who have been thought by those religious leaders from outside understand Islam the same way their teachers understand. Nevertheless, they are only called strict on their religion. They never achieve any social status over other women; neither does their influence go further in to the society as that of men. This is perhaps because the women forum unlike the traditional belief practice is very much specified to their prayer times at most in the mosque. Those women who have had a chance to migrate to Arab countries do not have as much access to religious teachings and trainings as women who are in Kamissie but have had chance to attend every day with out any restriction religious teachings.

The development of religious reform in the area although is well known to the people who are living in the area, it could be said that its implication is mixed with other socio-economic changes taking place and affecting women lives. I know that most consider the reformers idea of breaking tradition from religion eventually tries to define the women place, compelling them to cover up their bodies and hair, their daily prayers and refrained from public exposure. In the mean time, the growing impoverishment and the need to increase their income along with the expansion of development strategies planned at the national level compel their strategies to

reconcile themselves with their religion. I was told by a man that some people forget the fact that our lives are influenced by changes taking place around us than the religion which has been all the time unchanging as it is in the Script.

The women in Kamissie Of course as it is presented believe in Islam. They have a strong belief that their practices largely are Islamic. Those who never had access to Koran relate their religion as they were told by big Sheikhs through out their lifetimes. Dichotomization of Islam takes now a different form from what is normally discussed. As it was described by Gellner(1992,30) The big tradition was considered as that based on the Script and the little tradition maintained by the mass and the local.

For the majority of the Muslim people in Kamissie defining the ideal from the real exists, nevertheless, it is between the culture imported by the few from The Arab world and the culture the people think is theirs and that lived in them for long. The refusal to accept of this doctrine also to some degree goes to this understanding of power relation. Those who are trained in the Arab countries are not able to proselytize those old generations compared to their young children. The relation between young children and old female generation is very interesting. The women have now more hope in receiving support from their children who go to school and who some of them migrate and send money than their men. They listen their children even at times they tell them to stop traditional belief practices. This is prevalent in some of the cases like the young man who was warning his mother that she should stop her Attete and Wukabi.

The men not to mention all have deteriorated in their economic status particularly after the decline in trade. Most of them are either dependent largely on their wives activities in the public spheres. Here no argument is raised by a man whose income is very low to meet needs in the house but whose wife has access to income generating activity in terms of her working out side. The public-private dichotomy itself is a very poor representative of women in kamissie. We have seen that women are now through different programs are active in public spheres as well as domestic spheres. Their engagement in both spheres of course might increase their load. Nevertheless, it gave them also a life opportunity to make their own lives at times where divorce takes place and no structure is present to take the issue of property right.

#### **4.1.4 The Conflict between women's Economic and Social Statuses**

The loss of place of men in the market due to decreasing trade possibilities and the development efforts to improve women economic status have as we explained in detailed, contributed much to women change of positions. i.e. women increasingly could participate in public and have more access to cash. However, it again becomes difficult at this level to definitely say that they have achieved improved status in the social and spheres as well. I can substantiate this with the data I collected from women stories.

The women although have access to cash credit, they cannot all the time utilize the money on their own decisions. The premise for the association to give credit for

women rather than men partly goes to the reason that women spend the credit on family needs rather than spend it on individual needs. In some cases, still the men highly dictate where to spend the money. For example Zemezem and her sister in law do not take a credit for the association because their husbands said Islam does not allow loan with interest. However, they have started working on embroidery at home and yet they cannot sell them outside. They have to avoid any kind of contact with *Hajinebi*. *Hajinebi* is a name given to any kind of a man who is not related by blood to a Muslim woman. Since women exposure to market exchange create contact with *Hajineb*, her husband could not allow her to go out. However, this does not mean that he prohibited her from working on the embroidery because he knows that she could earn some money for the family. Therefore, the only option for her is to spread her products in front of her house. Zemzem believes in Hajinebi that Islam does not allow her to shake men's hand that are not related with her by blood or marriage. She well knows that she could make more money if she could go to the market with her products but she has also a great fear that she will disappoint her husband and the neighbors if she does so.' *She is a Muslim and she is out in a public, that is what they say'* she said.

The fear of being isolated and stigmatized does not always happen. A young married girl whose husband is working may find all religious reasons to stay at home. Nevertheless, the woman whose husband has no work goes out and earns some money for the family. And even the neighbors would not talk about her going out. Because they say even In Islam if a woman has no one to support her, she could work out in the public and support the family.

The women Income generating groups, although were considered to have a double goal, that beyond economic achievement will let the women to organize and discuss their other common goals, it rather in some ways serve as a forum for conflict among themselves. Since the women have to form groups to get the loan, they are also responsible for the payment as groups. In almost all groups, there are defaulters who cannot pay back the credit because they used the money in the house. Because of an individual lady who did not pay credit, the whole group members do not get the second round credit. The defaulter should explain all her reasons for not paying the credit. In this kind of forums, individuals private stories are made public and as such their social status as well as economic status is defined and made.

The Women Income Generating Groups (WIGs) never mentioned the word *Hajinebi*, neither said their exposure to the public is some how related with Islam. The whole discourse is the Credit and the payment.

Still other factors could be mentioned in relation to women Social status vi-a vis economic status. If I start with a case study on Woynu. Woynu when separated with her husband, she \could get a loan and live by her own. With the credit she got, she could sell bread and tea. However, all the time her worry was that her husband could not divorce her and she cannot marry another man. The fact that she is 25 years old without having a baby is bigger a problem than the property right she will be entitled on her divorce. She has a suspicion that everyone in the town will point finger on her that she is still single. Marrying and having a baby is considered one of the ways that define women's status in this area. Islam combined with socio-economic factors may

facilitate the women status but can not be deductively be said that it promoted it fully

I have described factors that have brought economic changes at Kamissie. These changes some of them were results of a quick reforms and others were gradual changes

#### **4.1.4.1 The Impact of Formal and Religious Education**

Education is one of the factors assumed to change women status in society. In kamissie as it is the case in the Northern part of the country; early marriage stands as a major reason detracting girls education. Girls participation in the elementary school is higher compared to those who are attending the high school. According to one man, earlier time people prefer to send their sons to outside the country or other religious teaching centers within for religious purpose; where as girls used to stay in the formal school until they get husbands. Now days the number of girls attending school has increased. There are two main reasons for the increase in participation. Firstly, non- governmental organizations that start operation at the time of famine in the area facilitate educational services and with in their program, they include girl education as part of their goals. Secondly, marriage no more is considered as the ideal for women and they have started now to appreciate the use of formal schooling. Those girls in the high school are more interested in religious affairs than those who never attended classes. As we follow the discussion Said had with his sister and the lady who refer me to her daughter, they are more active in praying and attending teaching lessons. They have access to Koran and its translations by

their religious teachers. The magazines coming from the neighboring cities also circulate among them. Most of the girls at school do not appreciate their family leniency towards their religion.

Data dictate interpretation or theory define the data collection and interpretation in many social science researches remain anthropological a question. Most of the efforts made now by many African social scientists owes largely to such a belief. When studies among the Muslim societies were being done, it is often thought that Islam as a religion at a higher degree dictates the women's status and by the same implication affects it to the worst. It was taken for granted sometimes by the local people themselves and practically you see men and women shaping their behavior in accordance to that belief.

Due to the fact that most of the studies were made by Europeans, initially the argument remains whether Islam as written or lived religion in its own historical time reinforces the low status of women. Many argue by memorizing the Script, how it defines their position and citing the powerful women in the Holy Koran. They refer any mistreatment of women in a Muslim society to tradition, which sometimes takes a form of patriarchy. In kamissie where this research has been conducted, the majority of them claim that they are Muslims. In this part of the region, as I was exposed to it long before my fieldwork, Islam was discussed as to be very much lax and the people as lenient towards the Islamic norms and practices. And yet the women's position is said to be low and they have all the time a customary way of describing that they marry more women and their women do not go out'. I will be

discussing about it in detail by referring it back to my data. But this has never been a case where women stay in public because of the changes taking place around them. their exposure to the pupil does not leave them for stigmatization rather the religion itself is interpreted as to enable them to justify both women and men positions in their societies

This religious reinterpretation could be defined as a reform or another form of Islam. Nevertheless, as I tried to argue in my discussion unlike what Weber argued despite the differentiation of roles and economic and political developments religion remains paramount in their lives. The traditional religious practices were not ready to accommodate all changes that took place dramatically and yet they were not rejected rather their roles were limited to the immediate and practical ones.

## **Conclusion and Theoretical Implication**

In many anthropological studies, two outstanding perspectives prevail-the one that look at religion as a functional element of social institutions that provide (explanation) or that satisfy wishes, resolves conflict and rationalize failure (Spencer (1876), Taylor(1913), Durkeim(19150 ,Geertz(1968,)). Islam in Kamissie does not all the time serve as constructive or solving mechanisms of conflict, rather it creates conflict among different groups as it was observed in relations among generations.

Positivists and evolutionists also believe that societies as they progress depend less on religious ideas for justification or explanation of phenomena. In kamissie where I collected my data, Islam grew stronger than ever as it is explained by the Muslims in the town. Men have now a days have a better chance of going abroad for religious studies, women have a better chance of traveling abroad and there by generating income for their own. More mosques and religious fora have been created where both woman and men can attend religious teachings; people have more awareness of right for religious practices. The traditional belief practices at the same time co-live serving separate spheres of lives. Unlike the positivist, belief that religious beliefs would be replaced by science does not say much in Kamissie's context, rather the traditional religious practices are confined to the private spheres of life serving the more Psychological and ritual needs of the Muslims as Malinowski stated. In this sense, religion has a positive function.

The other perspective looks at religion as a mystification and justification to the power relations. Such a theoretical thinking is more prevalent in the work of Marx. Religion whether it be Islam or Christianity could be used as a drug or mystification

depending on the context. However, the context is equally important as the role it plays in a society. Similarly, Islam in Kamisse also fosters some social changes, combined with other factors. As Weber maintained In his *Protestant Ethic and the sprit of Capitalism*, Islam also played partly a role in facilitating for example women's roles. And more importantly the roles and status of Muslim women largely depends on the socio-economic and political development of their respective society rather than a seemingly unalterable religious norms and notions

More studies however could be further developed as to the meaning of what we mean by religion in different contexts. In a kind of place where layers of religious thoughts and religious practices and traditions are observed and where religion develop out side and are adopted, theories that did not consider such a situation may not be comprehensive in grasping religious behaviors fully. As such, applying theories of religion to Kamissie does not help much In understanding Islam.

Despite the fact, that many anthropological works comprise religious studies on both Christianity and Islam, it is very difficult to conclude that much has been done with regard to this in Ethiopia particularly on Islam. Ethiopia has been defined as a Christian nation for long and the possibility of having comprehensive study on other religious traditions is very much reduced and yet a significant number follow in Islam. Therefore studying Islam and the behavior of Muslim people equally contribute to the study of religion and religious behaviors.

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**Declaration**

This thesis is my original work, has not been presented for a degree in any other university and that all sources used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged

Signature

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**Confirmation**

I confirm that this thesis can be submitted for defense

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Signature