Addis Ababa University

School of Graduate Studies

Dagu as a Cultural Regulator among the Afar People: The Communication Aspect

By

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Journalism and Communication in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Art in Journalism and Communication

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Acknowledgements

I would primarily like to thank my God, the permitter of the ‘be,’ which, without his will, would never come true.I would then like to express my sincerest thanks to my advisor Prof. Abiyi Ford who helped a lot in making this paper be ‘be’ with his invaluable comments . My heart-felt appreciation goes to Ahmed Mohammed Haidra, a Heritage Expert in the Culture and Tourism Bureau of the Afar Regional State, for making everything possible in the data gathering.. I also am indebted to all my informants who made my field research successful.

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Abstract

This paper aims at investigating Dagu, the traditional and indigenous communication system of the Afar, as a central subject of inquiry. Previous studies on Dagu tend to overlook its dynamism and only peripherally treat it as a means to other communication ends. However, this study looks into Dagu as a cultural communication entity as opposed to a mere oral, interpersonal communication. It examines Dagu as a traditional communication performance while looking at its unique attributes that can make it different from a simple interpersonal communication. To this end, convenience sampling method was used to select places; and purposive sampling technique to select informants for the study. Ethnographic and qualitative data collection methods of observation, focus group and individual in-depth interviews were employed. Hence, Dagu is found to be a ritualistic exchange of information which requires distinctive cultural discipline in the reception and transmission of communally important information in the Afar community. A Dagu ritual comprises three phases where the first is the ritual prologue and the second phase is the mainstream Dagu, which includes the exchange of current information, while the third phase winds up the ritual. It is also found that the information in the first and second phases are reportable while anything exchanged in the third phase, pleasantries and personal chats, are not reportable. The third phase, which is the ritual conclusion, is also described to be a phase where extraneous information from non-Afar sources can be exchanged but not reported. Therefore, it can be seen that Dagu insulates exogenous information and the claim, as emphasized in local related studies, that Dagu can be synergized with the modern mass media is found to be a bold one. The findings of the study also show that Dagu is protected from falsehood and inaccurate information through its cultural mechanisms, and that it is very much related to issues of identity, security and communal welfare beyond communication.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Background

'There are now three things that are certain in life: death, taxes and communication (Stone, Singletary and Richmond, 1999: 47), and human communication is the most appealing one. Long before the print revolution and the production of a written text, orality and oral communication was the basic form of communication in the primary oral culture, a culture where one had not even looked up anything and the expression 'to look up something' was an empty phrase (Ong, 2003: 64). But even in those times and much earlier than then, communication was there and done, and 'to communicate' was as important as 'to live and eat.'

On the other hand, oral interpersonal communication, as an earlier form of human communication, is the most common and comfortable form of communication which provides the advantage of immediate feedback with greater accuracy on interpretation of verbal and non-verbal behaviors (Scott and Brydon, 1977:15). However, information disseminated through such oral, interpersonal communication also has a higher chance of being distorted, as explained below by Knapp, Stohl and Reardon (1981):

> During the course of a single day, hundreds of verbal messages are directed to us in face-to-face encounters for evaluation and response; during one's lifetime the quantity of interpersonal messages processed must be staggering. Most of these messages have a relatively short life; they are processed, responded to, and forgotten (P. 27).

And that marks the fundamental drawback of an oral interpersonal communication.

In light of the above explanations, a person can easily be tempted to view, *Dagu,* the traditional face to face information dissemination system of the Afar people, as a mere oral communication with a natural chance of being wide open to distortion. Some scholarly writings on *Dagu* and (Gulilat, 2006:4) in his unpublished thesis couldn't unequivocally treat *Dagu* in a rather different spectacle than oral communication though they were able to find out that Dagu is culturally controlled and responsibly held in a highest of regards among the Afar community. Nonetheless, realizing the acceptance and credibility of *The Dagu* among the Afar community, remaining

skeptical of it being a mere oral communication may pay dividends and that is what ultimately justifies the need to do this study.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

There are two basic views of communication among scholars in the field: a transmission view of communication and a ritual view of communication. These two views of communication have predominantly impacted communication studies for many years and resulted in the upbringing of fraternities of communication thoughts in the two big camps. The transmission view, the commonest of the views, is defined by terms such as 'imparting,' 'sending,' 'transmitting,' or 'giving information to others' (Carey, 1992:15). It tends to see communication as the transportation of messages over distance / space. The ritual view of communication, however, tends to be expressed through terms such as 'sharing,' 'participation,' 'association,' 'fellowship' and 'the possession of a common faith' (Ibid: 18). It emphasizes not on the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs. It is, hence, important that any investigation/research on communication would represent all the views and be able to offer comprehensive explanations. It is with this regard this paper attempts to look into the famous indigenous communication system of the Afar, *The Dagu*, in a rather wider perspective than previous studies which tend to overlook the ritual view of communication.

Even though I don't belong to the Afar ethnic group, I was born and raised in Afar region where I was well-acquainted with the culture and values of the Afar people. From all the cultural values of the Afar, the information concept of members of the Afar community and their systematic and controlled information dissemination network excites me most. The regulated manner of *The Dagu,* together with the fact that there is a highly minimized chance of the dissemination of falsehood and distorted information used to amazed me even from my childhood. In *The Dagu,* details of a subject with a highest level of accuracy are due to be available wherever you are within the communication lines of *The Dagu.* I can, therefore, quite gladly emphasize that *Dagu* has been a centre of my research interest since I started scholarly study on communication

1.3. Objectives

1.3.1. General objectives

This study generally aims at looking into *The Dagu* as a traditional communication medium/system and exploring the distinctive features of this indigenous communication system. It also attempts to see the extent to which *The Dagu* can offer the opportunity to disseminate and promote exogenous information among the Afar community.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

The research specifically:

- ✓ Finds out the unique features of *The Dagu* as opposed to traditional face-to-face communication.

- ✓ Looks into *Dagu* as a cultural regulator and culturally regulated traditionally medium, and the role it plays as a ritual communication performance.

- ✓ Identifies how information is perceived and dealt with in the indigenous communication system of the Afar..

- ✓ Analyzes some attributes of *The Dagu* to explore its appropriateness and effectiveness in the dissemination and promotion of exogenous information.

1.4. Research Questions

This paper is mainly geared towards answering the following questions with a view to meeting the above objectives:

- ➢ Does *Dagu* have unique attributes that can make it different from an oral, interpersonal communication?

- How is information exchanged through the *Dagu* as a ritual communication performance?

- How accurate, reliable, timely and significant is the *Dagu* information?

- How appropriate and effective is *Dagu* for the transmission of exogenous information?

1.5. Limitation and Delimitation of the study

This study has not at all been free from time and money and constraints. It is undeniable that extensive stay in the study areas would have given the study extra edge and dimension of quality. However, the study has only been limited to answering the questions it sets out as its concerns.

On the other hand, the study attempts to explore the Dagu as a subject of inquiry and is not concerned with showing ways of using Dagu as a tool for any subject of communication as opposed to previous studies about it.

1.6. Application of Results

The results of this study can potentially be at the disposal of:

- Governmental and nongovernmental organizations that are involved in developmental efforts and activities within Afar Regional State.

- Those concerned with and interested in indigenous knowledge and its value as a means by which exogenous useful information/product can be effectively adapted and adopted to the benefit of the people.

- Those attempting to further investigation on the area and who are generally keen on finding out more about this indigenous communication system of the Afar.

- Bureau of Culture and Tourism of the Afar Regional State and the Federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism as they have the mandate of promoting and preserving indigenous cultures with a view to handing them down to generations to come.

1.7. Organization of the Paper

This paper comprises five chapters of introduction, literature review, methodology, analysis and presentation, and concluding remarks. Chapter one introduces background of the study, Problem statement, objectives, research questions, application of results, limitation and delimitation, and organization of the paper.

The second chapter reviews literatures pertinent to the concern of the study. The chapter covers basic concepts of human communication, models of communication, the relevance of culture to communication, and orality and oral culture.

The third chapter sets out issues of research design, procedure and sampling, and methods of coding and analysis. The fourth chapter presents analysis, presentation and interpretation of findings. In this chapter, *Dagu* as a ritualistic performance and cultural regulator, its mannerisms, the information flow within it and its appropriateness for the dissemination of exogenous information is presented and interpreted. Finally, chapter five concludes the major findings and the major remarks. Besides, references and annexes are found following the remark section.

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

In this chapter, diverging issues on human communication, which are considered relevant for streamlining the analysis of indigenous communication systems, like *Dagu*, are reviewed. The review examines the basic concepts of human communication, models of communication, the relevance of culture to communication, and orality and oral culture. This thesis also presents a review of local studies.

2.1) Human Communication: Conceptual Framework

Although communication is defined in a number of ways by a number of scholars in the field, the notion 'one cannot communicate' has been undeniably shared and commonly relied in any effort of investigating communication (Civikly; 1974:3). Showing how staggeringly delicate is to define communication, Wood (2000:15) claims that in 1970, Frank Dance, a communication theorist, counted over 100 distinct definitions of communication proposed by communication experts. In about four decades since the survey, even more definitions of communication have surfaced: from linear view of communication to transactional; from a focus on transmission of messages to an emphasis on the creation and interpretation of meaning.

Nowadays, however, communication scholars have strived and continued to strive to come up with a more comprehensive and repository definition representing numerous views of communication. Julia T. Wood defined communication as a systematic process in which people interact with and through symbols to create and interpret meaning (ibid: 15). Her definition particularly aimed at emphasizing the words: process, system, symbols and meanings.

In the above definition, communication is viewed as a process which is on-going and always in motion. It takes communication as moving ever forward and changing continuously and that we, human beings, cannot freeze communication at any moment. The other point emphasized in the definition is the systematic nature of communication; it implies communication as a system of interrelated parts that affect one another:

> In family communication, for instance, each member of the family is part of the system. In addition, the physical environment and the time of day are elements of the system that affect interaction (ibid).

The above definition of communication also emphasizes symbols, which are abstract, arbitrary and ambiguous representation of other things. Symbols, as Wood claims, are all of language and many nonverbal behaviors, as well as art and music. The last element emphasized in the definition is meaning. Meanings are defined as the significance we bestow on phenomena-what they signify to us.

Some of the points raised in Wood's definition are also echoed by the definition given forth by Stone, Singletary and Richmond: a two-way process by which one person stimulates meaning in the mind(s) of another person(s) through verbal and /or nonverbal messages (1999: 48). Their definition acknowledges that human communication is an ongoing, dynamic process and not simply a one-way transmission. It also emphasizes meaning noting that individuals stimulate meaning through either verbal or nonverbal messaged, or both.

Judy C. Pearson et.al also share the idea of putting emphasis on meaning while defining communication as the process of using messages to generate meaning (Pearson et.al; 2008: 09). They explain 'meaning' as the understanding of the message. For Pearson and his friends, understanding the meaning of another person's message does not occur unless the two communicators can elicit common meanings for words, phrases and nonverbal codes.

Overall, the effort to define communication has witnessed a shift from the earliest focus on transmission of messages to an emphasis on the creation of shared meaning in the recent decade.

2.1.1. The Communication Process

As has been explained by the scholars mentioned above, communication is a process which is ongoing, not a series of incidents pasted together like photographs in a scrapbook, but is more like a motion picture in which the meaning comes from the unfolding of an interrelated series of images (Adler and Rodman; 1994: 06). The main point, as argued by all of the scholars, which justifies the completion of a communication process, is when the message is received and responded by the receiver. They argue that sending by itself is not sufficient to create an act of communication; there needs to be some response to a message as well. However, this act of receiving and comprehending messages is usually affected by the selectivity processes within communication (Stone, Singletary and Richmond: 1999). The scholars identified, as reviewed

below, five selectivity processes; selective exposure, selective attention, selective perception, selective retention and selective recall.

Selective Exposure is referred to as a person's conscious or unconscious choice to receive messages from a specific source (ibid: 94). Most people, consciously or unconsciously, make decisions about which television shows to watch, with whom to communicate, and to whom to listen and whom to tune out. Often these decisions are made based on preference for the subject or person. Receivers can make predictions about the nature of the message by knowing the message source. The choice to receive messages from a specific source can be improved with attention to message qualities such as: utility, enlightened self-interest, proximity, involvement, and consistent and reinforcing.

Selective Attention occurs when receivers cannot avoid exposure but simply select not to pay attention to the message (ibid). Factors mentioned to affect selective attention are receiver's attention span and message novelty, concreteness, size and length.

Selective Perception: messages do not carry meanings (ibid: 100). The meanings behind the messages are in the minds of the receivers. Selective perception is the process of attributing meaning to messages. The meaning that is stimulated by a source depends on both the message and the receiver. This depends on factors like puzzling messages, absence of message redundancy, absence of receiver schema, early experiences, and assumptions and biases.

Selective Retention is the decision to save or not to save information in long term memory (ibid). Short term memory is 'in one ear and out the other.' Thus, source and receivers must work to share information in long term memory so it can be recalled when needed. Some of the factors mentioned to affect selective retention are absence of: highlighting, redundancy, schema, and tangible application; and primacy and recency principles.

Selective Recall is the successful retrieval of information and it depends on whether the source has been able to overcome all of the previous selection barriers (ibid).

2.1.2. Elements/ Components of Communication

The field of communication is broadly explained and classified by the components or elements it involves. The elements/components, as identified by many scholars, are the parts that are highly regarded to play the major role for any communication to be effective.

Many different scholars attempted to identify and come up with various elements/components of in their own terms. Though they tend to subjectively explain the elements and label them with varied names, they commonly agree on most of them and share common understanding of what is needed for the communication process to be complete. Below are the elements/components of communication commonly shared and given forth by many communication scholars.

2.1.2.1. People

People here are meant to play two roles in the human communication process. They serve both as the source and receivers of the message. Scholars like Stone, Singletary and Richmond (1999) classify the source and receiver roles of people independently. They treated the source and receiver of a message as separate, distinctive elements in the communication process. However, treating these two roles independently is rejected by Pearson et.al (2008) claiming that individuals do not perform these two roles independently; instead they are the sources and receivers of messages simultaneously and continually. On the other hand, Stone, Singletary and Richmond (1999) argue that the source is the critical component who often determines how the receiver will react:

> The source usually has three functions: decide what should be communicated to the receiver; encode the message (put it in terms the receiver will understand); and transmit the message to the receiver. If a source fails in any of these steps, the message the receiver acquires may be distorted, confusing or simply uninterpretable. This often happens in the process (Stone, Singletary and Richmond; 1999: 51)

Pearson et.al (2008:11) also admit that people do not respond uniformly to all messages, nor do they always provide the same messages in exactly the same way. Individual characteristics of people, including race, sex, age, culture, values and attitudes are mentioned as affecting the way people send and receive messages.

2.1.2.2. Message

Message is defined by almost all the scholars as being the verbal and nonverbal form of an idea, thought or feeling that one person (the source) wishes to communicate to another person/group of people (the receivers). The message includes the symbols (words and symbols) you use to communicate your ideas, as well as your facial expressions, bodily movements, gestures, touch, tone of voice and other nonverbal codes (ibid: 11). Stone, Singletary and Richmond (1999) claim that a source must think carefully about what the message will be prior to sending it, and that the real communication stems from messages that are intentional, or have a purpose. However, this notion is contended by Pearson et.al (2008) who argue that since intent is sometimes difficult to prove in a communication situation, real communication can occur through either intentional or unintentional messages. But messages, as either verbal or nonverbal triggers, are claimed by all to be catalysts (triggers) that evoke or produce meaning in the minds of receivers. Hence, messages, as elements in the communication process, can be effectively fulfilled with the underlying assumption that the source and receiver both have a shared understanding of the verbal and nonverbal messages being encoded and hopefully decoded correctly (Stone, Singletary and Richmond; 1999: 52)

2.1.2.3. Channel

The channel is regarded by the scholars as the means by which a message moves from the source to the receiver of the message. A message moves from one place to another, from one person to another, by traveling through a medium, or channel. Channels come in many forms such as touch, sight, sound, hearing, smell, interpersonal talk, billboards, faxes, computers, books, television and many others (ibid). On the other hand, Pearson et.al (2008: 11) claims:

> Airwaves, sound waves, twisted copper wires, glass fibers and cable are all communication channels. Airwaves and cable are two of the various channels through which you receive television messages.

Though the scholars mentioned above agree on 'channel,' as a means of conveying messages from the source to the receiver, they tend to be different in concretizing this concept of channel. Stone and his friends cite TV as an example of channel while Pearson and his colleagues claim airwaves and cable as channels for TV messages, rather than the TV itself. Hence, even though it

was easy for all the scholars to unanimously agree on defining channel, they still diverge on identifying the right and all-agreeing channel 'channel' for any 'message' in question.

2.1.2.4 Feedback

Feedback is the receiver's observable verbal or nonverbal responses to the source's message. A receiver's response to the message is critical because this feedback helps the source know how to react, construct new messages and adapt to the receiver. If feedback is reduced or absent, the communication process will often be flawed (Stone, Singletary and Richmond: 1999). Moreover, Pearson et.al (2008) underline that even no response, or silence is feedback:

> Say you are in a building you have never been before, looking for a restroom. You ask a person quickly passing by, 'excuse me, can you tell me….' But the person keeps on going without acknowledging you. In this case, the intended receiver did not respond, yet even the lack of response provides you with some feedback. You may surmise that perhaps the receiver did not hear you or was in too much of a hurry to stop (ibid: 12)

Furthermore, Stone, Singletary and Richmond (1999: 52) emphasize feedback is too important in a communication process that not having effective feedback or being unable to interpret feedback can lead to communication misunderstandings, distortions and inaccuracies.

2.1.2.5. Noise

Noise is commonly defined as any physical, semantic or psychological stimulus that distracts participants from focusing on the communication process. People have difficulty concentrating on message being sent because of external noise, the time of day, hunger, change in seasons or a host of other distractions that prevent from giving their full attention (ibid: 53). Noise can also be mental, psychological or semantic such as daydreams about a loved one, worry about the bills, pain from a tooth, or uncertainty about what the other persons are supposed to mean (Pearson et.al; 2008:14). Considering all the views of the scholars, it can be generalized that noise is anything that interferes with receiving, interpreting, or providing feedback about a message.

2.2) Models of Communication

Theorists create models to describe how things work. Over the years, scholars in communication have developed a number of models which reflect increasingly sophisticated understandings of the communication process (Wood; 2000:16).

Models are drawings, charts, diagrams, pictograms, schematics-possibly even cartoons- used to reduce complex ideas to graphic representations (Stone, Singletary and Richmond; 1999: 26). Models are highly valuable in the study of communication as simplistic and intelligible descriptions of communication process. That is why Adler and Rodman (1994:14) explain the importance of model as ways to understand more about what it means to communicate and describe what happens when two or more people interact.

Mortensen (1972) defined model in a broadest sense as a systematic representation of an object or event in idealized and abstract form. For him, models are somewhat arbitrary by their nature. He contends that the act of abstracting eliminates certain details of focus on essential factors and that the key to the usefulness of a model is the degree to which it conforms-in-point-by-point correspondence-to the underlying determinants of communicative behaviors.

On the other hand, communication models are claimed to be merely pictures. They can even be regarded as distorting pictures because they stop or freeze an essentially dynamic interactive or transactive process into a static picture (ibid). Models, as borrowed from the physical sciences or engineering fields where they accomplish basically the same goals of representing relationships, flows, structures or interactions, are also criticized for being too oversimplified. Duhem (1954, cited in ibid) believe there is no value in model by saying that 'We can guard against the risks of oversimplification by recognizing the fundamental distinction between simplification and oversimplification. By definition, and of necessity, models simplify. So do all comparisons.' Kalpan (1964: 280) noted: Science always simplifies; its aim is not to reproduce the reality in all its complexity, but only to formulate what is essential for understanding, prediction, or control. That a model is simpler than the subject-matter being inquired into is as much a virtue as a fault, and is, in any case, inevitable.

So the real question is what gets simplified. Insofar as a model ignores crucial variables and recurrent relationships, it is open to the charge of oversimplification. If the essential attributes or particulars of the event are included, the model is to be credited with the virtue of parsimony,

which insists-where everything is equal-that the simplest of two interpretations is superior. Simplification, after all, is inherent in the act of abstracting (Mortensen: 1972). On top of that, models can also miss important points of comparison as ironically pinpointed by Chapanis (1961:118): 'A model can tolerate a considerable amount of slop.'

The other critique on models is that they tend to have a premature closure. The model designer may escape the risks of oversimplification and still fall prey to dangers inherent in abstraction. To press for closure is to strive for a sense of completion in a system. Kalpan (1964:279) claims:

> The danger is that the model limits our awareness of unexplored possibilities of conceptualization. We tinker with the model when we might be better occupied with the subject-matter itself. In many areas of human behavior, our knowledge is on the level of folk wisdom ... incorporating it in a model does not automatically give such knowledge scientific status. The majority of our ideas is usually a matter of slow growth, which cannot be forced.... Closure is premature if it lays down the lines for our thinking to follow when we do not know enough to say even whether one direction or another is the more promising. Building a model, in short, may crystallize our thoughts at a stage when they are better left in solution, to allow new compounds to precipitate.

Hence, all the scholars commonly urge to foster a belief that one can reduce the hazards or limitations of models only by recognizing that physical reality can be represented in any number of ways.

In a different spectacle, many communication researchers would argue that a new idea in the discipline is not worth discussing or exploring unless the idea can be represented in a model. Those who take this position do emphasize that a theoretical discussion among colleagues, say over drinks after a long day at a conference, is nothing more than idle talk until the theory being discussed can be represented in a model (Stone, Singletary and Richmond; 1999:33). If this viewpoint is accepted, then every person in the discipline including beginners should be able to depict an idea in the form of a model. Actually, models are not that difficult to form (ibid). Regardless of how difficult it is to form models, communication scholars showed differences over half a century on the ways they describe communication as a one-way, two way or transactional process.

2.2.1 Linear Models

Linear models of communication are given forth by scholars who viewed communication as a linear or one-way process in which one person acted up on another person. As recently as forty years ago, researchers viewed communication as something one person does to another (Adler and Rodman, 1994:14). The earliest of linear models of communication was forwarded by Harold Lasswell (1948) who formed a verbal model consisting of five questions that described how communication works:

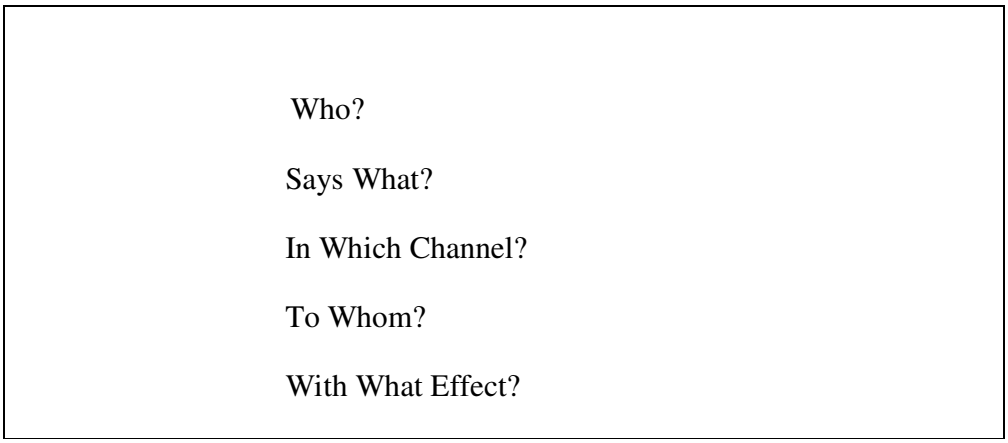

Fig. 1. Lasswell's verbal model of communication, adapted from Adler and Rodman (1994)

Lasswell, a social scientist, was describing human communication as a speaker delivering a persuasive message to an audience. 'who' is the speaker or the message sender, 'says what' is the message itself, 'in which channel' might refer to the difference between a speaker at a podium in a conference hall versus a politician using radio, 'to whom' is the receiver; and 'with what effect' is the outcome or receiver's reaction to the message (Ibid: 27).

A year after the formulation of the above verbal model of communication, Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver came up with a more technically comprehensive linear model of communication. Shannon and Weaver tried to explain how transmitters send information, in their case defined as signals rather than messages, through electronic circuits or airwaves to receiving devices. Their concern was to formulate a theory to guide the efforts of engineers in finding the most efficient way of transmitting electronic signals from one location to another (Shannon and Weaver: 1949).

Hence, the Shannon and Weaver model is a linear model that describes what happens in the electronic flow of signals.

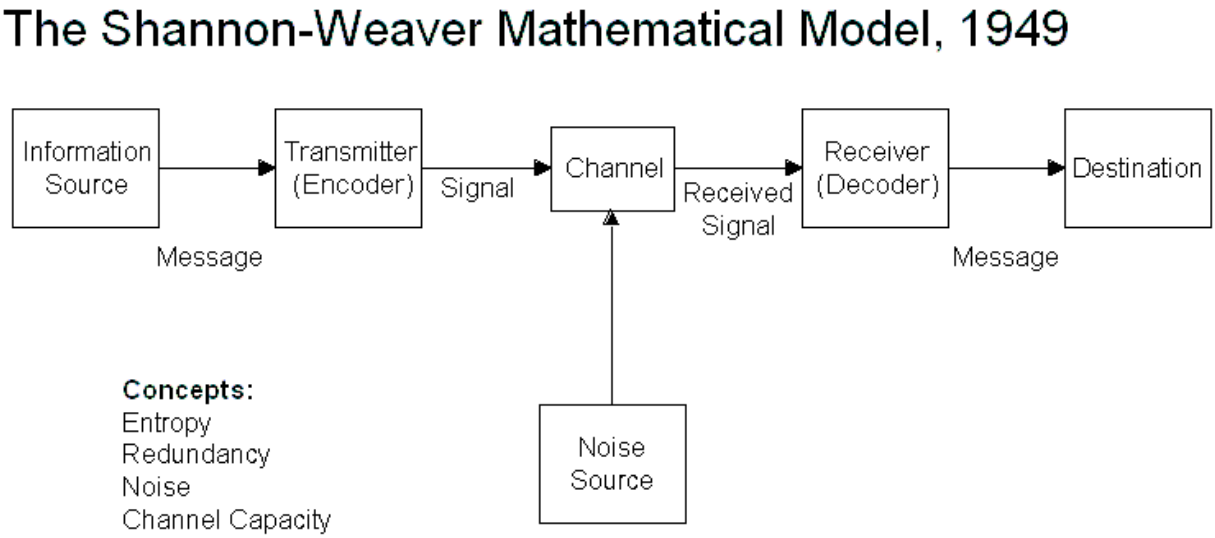

Fig.2. the Shannon-Weaver Linear Model

'Transmitter' is the switching and amplification device that breaks the message into coded signals(bits), sends signals through a wire (or over airwaves) to a 'receiver,' a decoding device such as a television set, which translates the signal back into the original message that a receiver or 'destination' can understand (Stone, Singletary and Richmond; 1999: 28).

This model introduced concepts like Entropy, Redundancy, Noise and channel Capacity. Information is regarded as a measure of uncertainty; or entropy, in a situation. The greater the uncertainty, the more the information (Littlejohn; 1983: 116). According to the model, when a situation is completely predictable, then no information is present. Another concept introduced by this model is redundancy which means the degree to which information is not unique in the system. Those items that add no new information are redundant. Perfect redundancy is equal to total repetition (Mortensen:1972). Redundancy is taken as an important concept to overcome problems of noise, another new concept introduced by Shannon and weaver. Noise is anything that might reduce the fidelity, clarity or integrity of the signal on its path between transmitter and receiver (Stone, Singletary and Richmond; 1999: 28). In their electronic terms, it is any additional

signal that interferes with the reception of information. The channel capacity is yet another concept introduced in this model. It is the measure of the maximum amount of information a channel can carry. With all its positive steps towards the development of communication researches, it is also criticized by many for only being applicable to machines, not human communication.

Another Linear but highly regarded as a humanistic model of communication is given forth by David K. Berlo (1960). It is an adaptation of the Shannon and Weaver model into human communication (Mortensen: 1972).

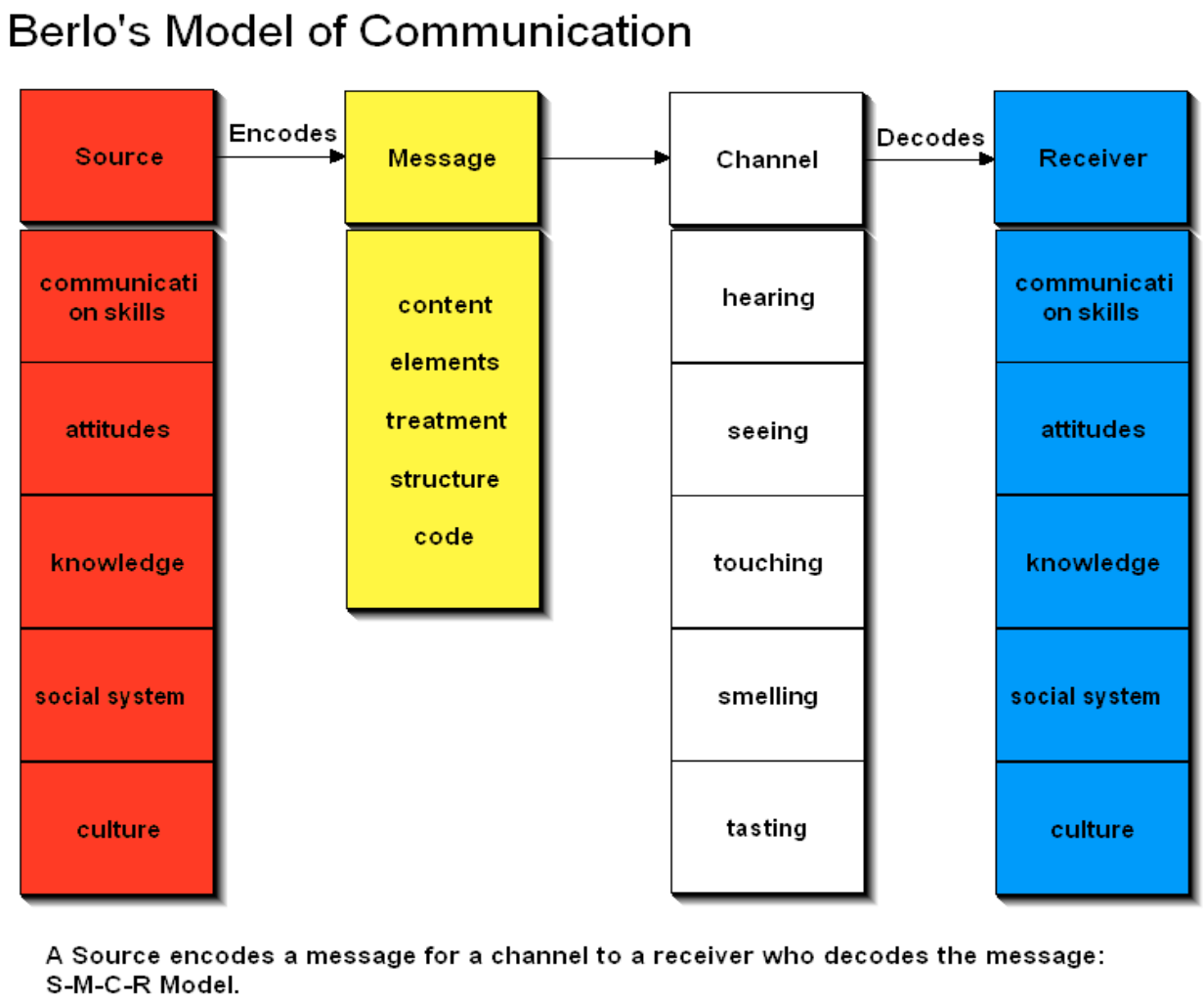

Fig.3. Berlo's Linear Model

This model showed that the source and receiver columns contain the same five elements; message includes five components of communication; and channel includes the five senses. As revealed by Stone, Singletary and Richmond (1999: 31), the model originally depicted the message component as a huge, wide 'M' with the five components winding their way inside it which showed 'message' was made the central element, stressing the transmission of ideas. The idea of source was also made flexible enough to include oral, written, electronic, or any other kind of symbolic generator of messages. This model also accentuated the notion of 'encoding' and 'decoding,' which emphasized the problems we all have (Psycho-linguistically) in translating our own thoughts into words or other symbols and in deciphering the words or symbols of others into terms we ourselves can understand (Mortensen: 1972). It even seems to stress that most problems in human communication can be solved by technical accuracy-by choosing the "right" symbols, preventing interference, and sending efficient messages. However, it can be criticized that even with the "right" symbols, people misunderstand each other. "Problems in "meaning" or "meaningfulness" often aren't a matter of comprehension, but of reaction, of agreement, of shared concepts, beliefs, attitudes, values. That is why Mortensen pinpointed the weakness of this model by saying 'to put the *com-* back into communication, we need a *meaning-centered* theory of communication.'

2.2.2 Interactive Models

The major shortcoming of linear models was that they portrayed communication as flowing in only one direction, from a sender to a receiver (Wood, 2000: 16). This suggests that listeners only listen; they never send messages (ibid). It is seemingly implied that listeners passively absorb senders' messages and do not respond. This implied assumption of linear models is also contended by Adler and Rodman (1994: 15) who argue:

> For one thing, it makes the questionable assumption that all communication involves encoding. We certainly do chose symbols to convey most verbal messages. But what about the many non-verbal cues that occur whether or not people speak: facial expressions, gestures, posters, vocal tones, and so on? Cues like these clearly do offer information about others, although they are often unconscious; and thus don't involve encoding.

Hence, scholars strived to come up with a more interactive model of communication. Wilbur Schramm (1954), thus, came up with his famous interactive model of communication. Schramm made provisions for the two-way interchange of messages. He conceived of decoding and encoding as activities maintained both by sender and receiver.

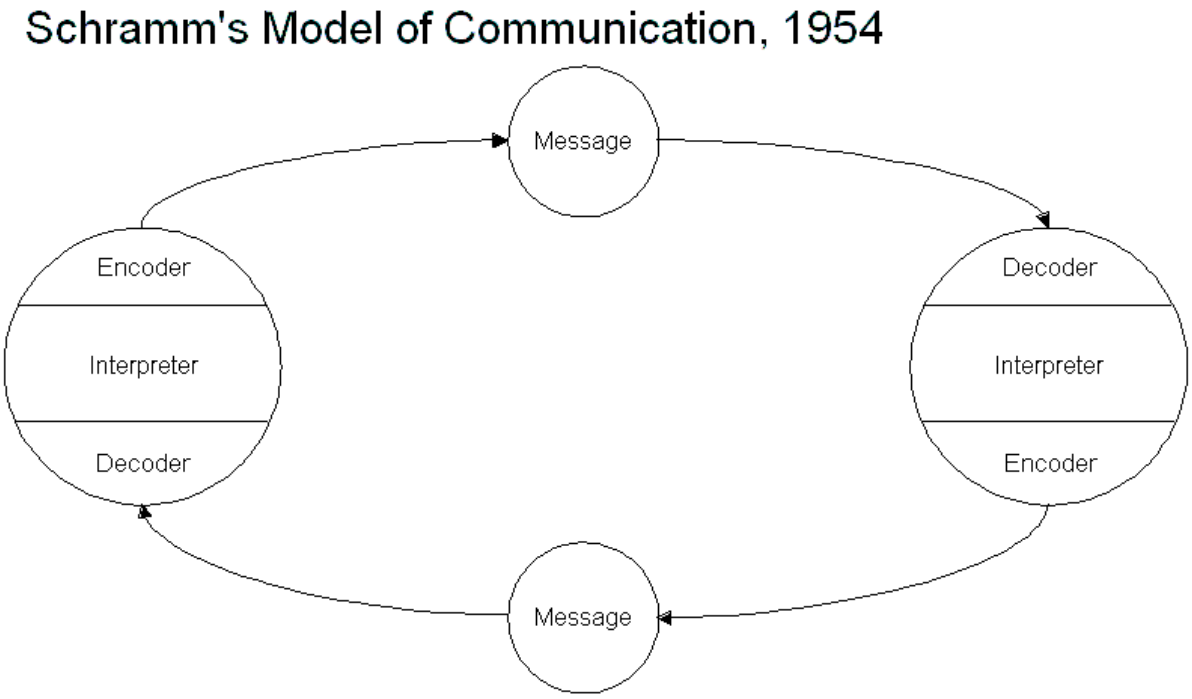

Fig.4. Schramm's Interactive Model

One of the most important concepts raised by Schramm is **field of experience.** This concept refers to the psychological frame of reference that implies the type of orientation or attitudes which interactants maintain toward each other. It suggests that successful message encoding and decoding depends on the source and receiver having sufficient commonalities, such as similar language and cultural backgrounds. Another concept introduced by Schramm is feedback, the information the receiver sends back to the source, which is used by the source to clarify or otherwise alter the future message. He also included the concept of context that a message may have different meanings, depending upon the specific context or setting. Besides, he included the role of culture in communication. A message may have different meanings associated with it depending up on the culture or society. On the other hand, Schramm's model, while not linear, still accounts for only bilateral communication between two parts. Mortensen (1972) criticized

this model for the reason that it doesn't take into consideration the complex, multiple levels of communication between several sources.

2.2.3) Transactional Models

Though Interactive models are an important improvement over linear ones, they still do not fully capture the dynamism of human communication (Wood, 2000: 18). In interactive models, one person communicates to another, who then seeds feedback to the first person. This view is criticized for not recognizing that people may communicate simultaneously, instead of taking turns.

Transactional models, however, reveal that we usually send and receive messages simultaneously so that the images of sender and receiver in a model should not be separated as if a person were doing only one or the other. Adler and Rodman (1994) urge for the description of communication process using transactional models for they give us the opportunity of explaining that at a given moment, we are capable of receiving, decoding, and responding to another person's behavior, while at the same time that other person is receiving and responding to ours. One of the typical examples of such models is Dance's Helical Spiral:

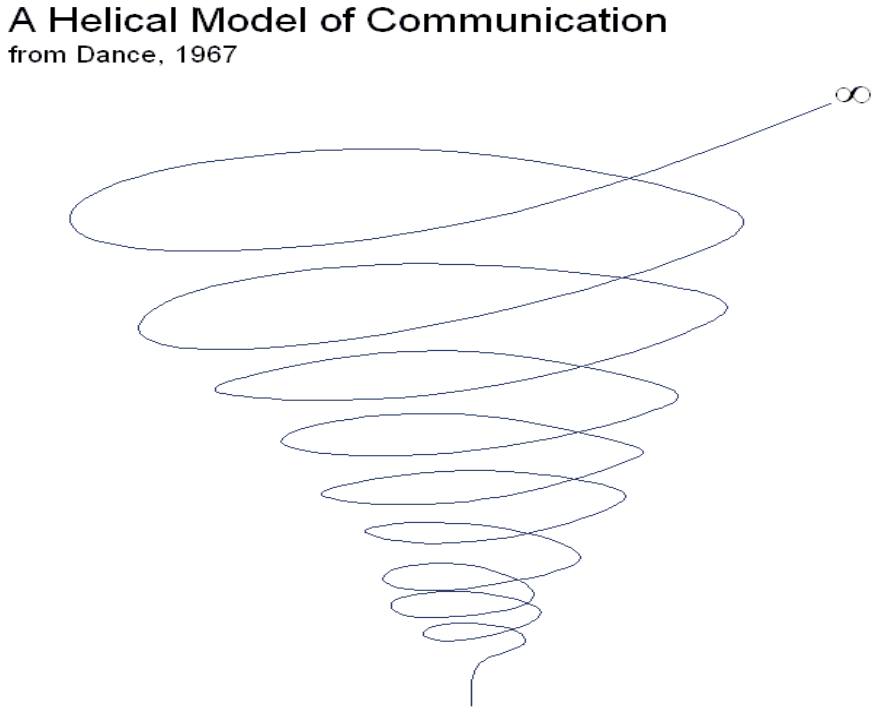

Fig.5 Dance's Transactional Model

Mortensen (1972) emphasizes that the helix represents the way communication evolves in an individual from his birth to the existing moment. Dance himself, as cited in ibid (P. 296), explains:

> At any and all times, the helix gives geometrical testimony to the concept that communication while moving forward is at the same moment coming back upon itself and being affected by its past behavior, for the coming curve of the helix is fundamentally affected by the curve from which it emerges. Yet, even though slowly, the helix can gradually free itself from its lower-level distortions. The communication process, like the helix, is constantly moving forward and yet is always to some degree dependent upon the past, which informs the present and the future. The helical communication model offers a flexible communication process.

On the other hand, this model doesn't also escape from criticism. Mortensen challenges the model for being too abstract and implicit to be a model: If judged against conventional scientific standards, the helix does not fare well as a model. Indeed, some would claim that it does not meet the requirements of a model at all. More specifically, it is not a systematic or formalized mode of representation. Neither does it formalize relationships or isolate key variables. It describes in the abstract but does not explicitly explain or make particular hypotheses testable.

2.3) Communication and Culture

Culture and communication are claimed to be highly interrelated by many scholarly writings. Smith (1966) claimed that communication and culture are inseparable. This earlier point was also echoed by Hecht, Andersen and Ribeau (1989). In a more recent study, intercultural communication scholars Larry Samovar and Richard Porter (1998) emphasized that communication and culture cannot be separated from one another because each influences the other. They assert that culture is reflected in communication practices, and at the same time, communication practices shape cultural life. One example of this insight is that cultures generate symbols, rituals, customs and formats (Dodd; 1995: 23). Thus, cultural misunderstandings occur when we fail to match the appropriate symbols and general communication system to the culture.

Based on the development of various concepts relating to both culture and communication, scholars identified two, somewhat circular, ideas about the links between culture and

communication. The first of these ideas is that culture is deterministic of communication, and the second is that communication is a vehicle for the transmission of culture and, therefore, deterministic of such culture.

Numerous communication and culture researchers have expressed the view that culture shapes and determines human communication behavior. Harms (1973.30) states that 'the cultural background of a communicator influences almost every detail and every pattern of his communication activities.' Kim (1979: 435-436) describes the impact of culture on communication behavior by saying:

> Culture is imprinted in the individual as a pattern of perception that is accepted and expected by others in a society. Since we are programmed by culture from the very day we are born, we are rarely conscious of the 'hidden grips' of culture that influence the way we think and move , and the way we express ourselves verbally and nonverbally….., we are deeply controlled by culture.

Hence, the notion of cultural determinism appears to lead to the conclusion that cultural homogeneity is associated with similarities in communication behavior, whereas cultural heterogeneity is related to differences in communication behavior (Atwood: 76).

In a reciprocal claim, scholars who present major arguments concerning the deterministic nature of communication emphasize the value of communication with regard to the maintenance and transformation of culture. Wood (2000: 97) claims that communication simultaneously reflects and sustains cultural values and that each time we express cultural values, we also perpetuate them. The scholars also voiced how communication through the western mass media happened to influence cultures in the developing world.

On the other hand, there appear to have dual views in the endeavors by many scholars of defining communication itself: the transmission and ritual view of communication. The transmission view of communication is defined by terms such as 'imparting,' 'sending,' 'transmitting' or 'giving information to others.' It is formed from a metaphor of geography or transportation. The ritual view of communication though is linked to terms such as 'sharing,' 'participation,' 'association,' 'fellowship,' and 'the possession of a common faith.' Carey (1992:18) underlines that if the archetypal case of communication under a transmission view is the extension of messages across geography for the purpose of control, the archetypal case under a ritual view is the sacred

ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality. The ritual view of communication, like in rituals, focuses on 'commonness,' 'communion,' and 'community.' Rituals often express the ethos of a culture better than do most other forms of communication (Condon and Yousef, 1975: 25). This view of communication, therefore, well explains how interrelated and integrated communication is with culture and cultural systems, as cultures inherently contain communication systems (Dodd; 1995: 23).

2.4) Oral Culture

Scholars who studied orality and oral culture underscore how difficult it is for literate persons (who can write and read) to imagine what an oral culture is like, a culture with no possibility of writing at all. Ong (2003: 64) claims that in an oral culture, words as such have no visual presence, even when the objects they represent are visual; they are sounds. He further argues that in such orality, restriction of words to sound determines not only modes of expression but also thought processes. Ong emphasizes that thinking in mnemonic patterns shaped for ready oral recurrence help to effectively solve the problem of retaining and retrieving in an oral culture. He asserts:

> Your thought must come into being in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulary expressions, in standard thematic settings, in proverbs which are constantly heard by everyone so that they come to mind readily and which themselves are patterned for retention and ready recall, or in other mnemonic form. Serious thought is intertwined with memory systems (Ong; 2003: 66).

As well explained in the above paragraph, memories or memorizing play an invaluable role in an oral culture. Vansina (1985) emphasizes no one in oral societies doubts that memories can be faithful repositories which contain the sum total of past human experience and explain the how and why of present day conditions. Vansina claims that whether memory changes or not, culture is reproduced by remembrance put into words and deeds, and that mind through memory carries culture from generation to generation. Vansina asserted 'how it is possible for a mind to remember and out of nothing to spin complex ideas, messages, and instructions for living, which manifest continuity over time is one of the greatest wonders one can study.'

It is, therefore, important to note the scholars' claim that mnemonic devices (both material and words) have a central role in an oral culture in the transmission of messages within such culture and preservation of culturally valued messages over time.

2.5) Review of Local Studies

The only study available with respect to the concern of this paper, that is *Dagu*, is Gulilat Menbere's thesis (2006) entitled 'A Study on Trends and Communicative Potentials of *Dagu* for HIV/AIDS Communication in the Afar Region.' The study particularly aims at unveiling the communicative potentials of *Dagu* as a traditional HIV/AIDS communication tool in the region. The findings of the study show that *Dagu* is a traditional tool of communication that is immensely embedded in the community's day-to-day life and activities, and that the Afar community highly values and invariably employs *Dagu* as a primary channel of information exchange. He found out that *Dagu,* for the Afar people, is not a mere means of information exchange but also an important social capital and traditional heritage to pay respect to. Finding out the flexibility, trustworthiness and acceptance of the *Dagu* among the Afar, Gulilat concluded that *Dagu* can be synergized with other mass media like radio in HIV/AIDS communication. He finally underscored that *Dagu*, as a room for discussion, question and debate, coupled with its compatibility with old social establishments can be a potential traditional medium to be effectively exploited in HIV/AIDS communication campaigns.

2.6) A Brief account of The Afar

The Afar are East-Cushitic speakers of the Horn of Africa like the Saho, Somali and Oromo. These people are closely related and are believed once to have made up a single speech community in Southern Ethiopia amnd Northern Kenya. They are believed to occupy their present territory as a result of a continous north and eastwards movement of Cushitic speakers to the Horn of Africa (Lewis cited in Siseraw, 1995: 11). The Afar now live in three countries of the Horn of Africa: Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti.

In Ethiopia, the Afar are traditionally nomadic herders who principally reside in the Northeastern lowland deserts. They are bounded by the *Issa* Somali and Eastern Oromo (*Itoo and kereyu*) in the south, the Wollo Yejju and Raya Amhara, Tigre and Oromo agricultural groups in the west,

and by the Saho groups in the north (Siseraw, 1995: 11). The Afar people live in both trading raiding and trading relationships with varying intensity at various times. They engage in a perpetual hostility and violence against their neighbors, especially of those who pursue similar way of life. While the Afar have strategic advantages over their settled neighbors, they face fierce competition and constantly engage in armed conflicts with the nomadic pastoralists, the *Issa* Somali and the *Kereyu* Oromo who are their traditional opponents (Ibid).

Although some Afar have migrated into cities and adopted an urban lifestyle, the majority have remained nomadic pastoralists, raising goats, sheep and cattle in the desert. Wondering around looking for waterholes in the desert lowlands, camels form the most common means of transportation. An Afar tent house is known as an *ari* and is made of sticks covered with mats; beds of mats raised on sticks are used. The *burra* or camp consists of two or more ari, and is the responsibility of the women. The Afar supplement their diet of milk and meat by selling salt that they dig from the desert along with milk and animal hides.

The Afar are organized into clans and a number of clan families or sub-clans. However, there are two major classes, each containing quite a number of sub-clans: Asahimara and Adohimara (Getachew, 2001: 35). Asahimara (White Afar) mainly reside north of Gewane while Adohimara (Red Afar) dominantly inhabits southern Part of the region though there are cases where both live in the same localities.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

In this chapter of the paper, issues of research design, procedure and sampling, and methods of coding and analysis are presented.

3.1. Research Approach: Why Qualitative?

While studying such issues as social contexts, actions and cultural institutions, it will almost be compulsory to employ qualitative research design for the central concern in such studies is 'not with establishing relations of cause and effect but with exploring the ways that people make sense of their social worlds and how they express these understandings through language, sound, imagery, personal style and social rituals (Deacon et.al, 1999: 6). The rationale behind employing a qualitative research design can be well justified by the interpretive philosophical underpinnings it presents. Its assumption of 'reality' far more conforms to the goals of this study: plural, simultaneous and local phenomena that are also socially constructed by and between human beings in their expressive and interpretive practices (Bryman; 2004: 266). This design is, thus, apt and right if a researcher wants to describe the social contexts, understand the complexities of social phenomena and interpret things from the perspectives of the subjects being studied.

Qualitative research, as an interpretive research design, places particular emphasis on the ethnographic practices where researchers immerse themselves in a particular social setting, getting to know the people intimately, observing how they organize their everyday lives and talking to them at length about how they see the world and themselves (Deacon et.al, 1999: 6). This notion of understanding and explaining social phenomena in their natural setting, therefore, well befits the concern and interest of this paper, which in turn justifies why qualitative research design is solely employed as the only design pursued under this study.

Moreover, the emphasis of qualitative research on the basic issues of subjectivity against objectivity, naturalism against artificiality, content against method, and description against statistics makes it appropriate and relevant with the purpose of this study.

3.2. Research Procedure and Sampling

Ethnographic methods are employed while gathering data as the aim of this study is not about testing an already set-out hypothesis but on exploring the nature of a particular social phenomenon (Flick; 2002:147). Full ethnographic design of study is not claimed to be implemented under this study owing to time and resource constraints. However, combinations of basic ethnographic methods like observation, and in-depth individual and group interviews are employed. Deacon et.al underscore the need to employ such basic ethnographic methods while studying a particular social phenomenon in the impossibility of implementing full ethnographic study:

> In researching social action, however, it is not always possible to conduct a full ethnographic study. Researchers may be denied access to the settings they want to investigate; they may only be allowed in for a limited time; or they may lack the time and resources to spend a sustained period 'in the field'. In these situations they may work with a pared-down version of ethnography, borrowing the basic techniques of observation, open-ended interviews and group discussions, and using them either singly or in combination in a more concentrated way (Deacon et.al; 1999: 8).

In light of the above explanation, focus group interviews (FGIs), individual in-depth interviews and observation are employed in triangulation. Research sites and participants were selected using theoretical sampling or snowball sampling in which researchers aim for typicality rather than generalizability through their sampling strategy (Henn et.al; 2006: 156). The relevance of the research sites or respondents to the theoretical focus of the research is needed in theoretical sampling. The sampling is thus governed by the selection of those respondents who will maximize theoretical development. Unlike in a quantitative method where statistical representativeness is highly valued, a qualitative researcher employing theoretical sampling is focused on the representativeness of concepts in the research, and of being able to access the social processes in which she/he is interested (ibid). To this end, the study was conducted in Dubti and Afambo Woredas, with respondents purposefully selected using snowball sampling, which a strategically important contact recommended other possible participants in the data gathering. The detailed procedure and the methods employed are elaborated one by one as follows:

3.2.1. Focus Group Interviews (FGI)

The intention behind conducting focus group interviews according to Henn and his friends is 'to stimulate discussion among people and bring to the surface responses that otherwise might lay dormant' (2006:164). Focus group interviews are regarded as an excellent way of gathering information quickly from several people. They offer the advantage that 'what one individual says may trigger a response from someone else, a response the person may not have thought of if interviewed singly' (Stone, Singletary and Richmond; 1999: 341).

Discussions in focus group interviews enable participants to clarify their views and opinion positions or, on the basis of engaging with others, to articulate more clearly than they otherwise might; the interactive dynamic is thus considered to be a crucial element of the focus group approach (Henn et.al; 2006: 165). This approach additionally offers the opportunity of checks and balances among the group members 'that weed out false or extreme views (Flick 2002: 113).

In the selection of participants for the focus group interviews, I purposefully approached people who I believe are well articulate and have strong insights about the Dagu and the Afar culture. I first thought of including clan leaders in the focus groups but I later understood that this might cause the group members to lack that interactive dynamic and opportunity of probing each other for it is almost impossible to say against or challenge the clan leaders culturally. I thus excluded clan leaders and conducted four focus group interviews whose members were formed mainly through snowball sampling. I had only four groups because I was able to see that a 'saturation point' was reached and no new thing would be learned with anymore focus group interviews.

The first two focus group interviews, in Dubti and Asaita towns, were conducted in Amharic language for the fact that all the group members were fortunately capable of speaking in Amharic and that I could better express myself in Amharic. It is here important to confess that I have a limited ability of expressing myself in the Afar language, if not listening, even though I was born and raised in Dubti town, Afar. However, the other two focus group interviews in Dubti and Asaita rural kebeles were conducted in Afar'af, the Afar language with the help of a translator who helped clarify my ideas spoken in a novice Afar'af utterance and facilitate the discussion though I had no problem of listening or understanding the Afar language and the ideas discussed in the groups.

Five members were included in each group, the minimum number recommended by Deacon et.al (2006: 57). I wanted to keep the numbers down in order to make the groups manageable and convenient for tape recording. I did my best to construct the groups with different age and sex, not because the study is gender or age specific, but I saw an advantage in having different age groups and sex for the purpose of enabling participants to reflect their different look and taste towards an issue in question. However, I was only successful to include two women in each of the first two groups in towns due to religious and cultural reasons.

Assuming a moderator role in the discussions, I tried to forward the questions in the interview guide, not in their original form, but in a rather relevant and compatible way to illicit further discussion. I guided the discussion keeping a grip on the thematic questions I want answered, and occasionally intervening, when the discussion goes off the course, to refocus the attention of the participants.

3.2.2. Individual in-depth interviews

Unlike structured quantitative interviews, qualitative individual in-depth interviews are open-ended, using interview schedules or aide-memories, rather than carefully crafted pres-structured questionnaires (Henn et.al; 2006: 162). The intention behind employing qualitative interviews is, therefore, to capture the point of view of the respondents rather than the concerns of the researcher. It can thus be claimed that such qualitative interviews are 'conducted in situations where the researcher's intention is to share control of the data gathering exercise with the respondent, to allow the respondent to craft her or his own account of the matter in question, rather than to gather highly structured data which can be directly compared to the results from interviews held with others (ibid).

Stone, Singletary and Richmond (1999:340) claim that interviews are complex communication events that should be thought of as 'guided conversations.' Thus, qualitative interviews should be conversation-like, but well controlled, and there should be a shared exchange of information, rather than the one-way extraction of data implied by the highly structured (and hierarchical) survey-type quantitative interviewing method (Finch cited in Henn et.al; 2006:164). Qualitative interviews are, therefore, less structured and less formal, and allow for the respondent to do most of the talking with the researcher keeping the interview on topic and progressing.

As in most qualitative interviews, I carefully crafted my interview topics in a manner well-suited to answering the research questions posed at the beginning of this study. I basically used the interview guide used in the focus group interviews but was also made to fit the understanding level of my interviewees. Hence, I conducted the interviews as per the interview guide but in a way that suits the context and in a manner that yields extended response for a topic in question. I also used follow-up questions with a view to clarifying some rather ambiguous responses.

I purposefully selected individuals for interviews from the focus groups I had earlier based on their manifested understanding of the subject, that is Dagu, and their reactions during the discussions. I also interviewed two elders of the Arabta and Ahmedin Siraj clans, dominant in Dubti and Afambo woredas. On the other hand, I wanted to have the views of the officials working in the Afar Regional Bureau of Culture and Tourism, and interviewed a couple of them. One of them was a heritage expert in the bureau and is native to the region, and thus I had a great deal of valuable information, kind cooperation and the "subjects' view" of the issue under study. I also interviewed elder women about their role in Dagu.

The central issues in the interview guide used in all of the interviews are the same. Many of the interviews, except with one of the clan elders and respondents selected from the focus group interviews conducted in the rural kebeles of Dubti and Asaita, are conducted in Amharic for the interviews were all capable of expressing their ideas in Amharic. But, the interviews I had with one of the clan leaders and the two respondents from the rural areas were conducted in Afar'af, the Afar language with a help of my translator.

3.2.3. Observation

During observation, the researcher observes social interaction aiming to acquire cultural knowledge and identify and make sense of patterns of social interaction in people's natural environment (Henn et.al; 2006: 171). In conducting ethnographic observations, it is 'assumed that the study of people's behavior can only be conducted in situations where people do not feel under surveillance; the task of the researcher therefore is to observe people in a sensitive and unobtrusive fashion (ibid). The role of the observer in any observation can vary from an outsider observer through participant observer (the researcher participates in the activity to some extent),

to complete participation (subjects don't know they are being studied, and the observation takes on a secondary role).

I with my friend and translator, Abdusommed, a native Afar, went to the rural kebeles of Dubti and Asaita, and tried to observe how Dagu, in its natural setting, is done. I would have easily observed it in Dubti town, where I was born and grew up, but I preferred to observe it in the rural areas where Dagu takes place more naturally. My acquaintance with the study area provided me with an orientation of what and how effectively I could do the observation.

I approached many pairs of Dagu participants and inconspicuously observed the manners in which the Dagu is done for the fact that Afars do not do Dagu with a non-Afar or allow a non-Afar to participate in it. I, of course, was able to hear and see the way they did the Dagu and what they were exchanging. While doing the observation, I did it as an outsider observer, where subjects don't know they are being researched. I did it this way because I believed that my presence there could somewhat affect the way people do the Dagu. Moreover, most of the people there took me as a non-Afar teacher and did their Dagu as usual even though I was in most cases only in a half-meter distance closer to them.

Moreover, I used a notebook and pen to accurately record what was going on. Stone, Singletary and Richmond (1999: 339) advise that 'while observing, normally it is possible to record only brief notes, so it is essential to type out a full description from the notes as soon after the observation as possible.' To this end, I, up on returning from each observation, wrote a full description of the brief notes to avoid sorting errors, and in case they could be forgotten.

3.3. Data Analysis Procedure

The taper-recorded in-depth individual and focus group interviews were translated and transcribed into English with an utmost care taken towards making sure that each translated text reflected the nearest possible meaning, if not words, of the data in the source language.

Thematic coding method of analysis was used in the study through developing a set of codes that could be applicable to the data. The codes weren't pre-set but they rather grew out of the data gathered. Hence, I took some time to read through my observation notes, individual and group

interviews, and jotted down patterns or themes that, I thought, are too important to answer the research questions posed at the beginning of this study.

Quotes from the individual and group interviews together with vignettes from my observational record were used in the course of the analysis. The analysis was then presented in a narrative structure by triangulating ideas and concepts available within the data gained through the three methods (Individual, focus group interviews and observation).

Chapter Four: Presentation and interpretation of findings

This chapter presents and interprets findings with regard to *Dagu* as a ritualistic performance and cultural regulator, its mannerisms, the information flow within it and its appropriateness for the dissemination of exogenous information.

4.1. Dagu as a Ritualistic Communication Performance

As in any ritualistic performance, Dagu is a ritual expected to be, or culturally vested upon any member of the Afar community to be performed. However, doing Dagu can't only be taken as a mere 'ritual performed to sustain or express the ethos of a culture' (Condon, 1975:25). It is a rather an invaluable cultural way of exchanging information done among the Afar to ensure the continuity, if not their culture, of their livelihoods. Mohammed Ahmed Haidra, a native Afar and Heritage Expert of the region, unequivocally treats Dagu as a question of life and death:

> Dagu for the Afar is as important as the cup of water and meal we daily have. We have to do it daily, not only because we want to perpetuate our culture and value, but also it is indispensable for living in the pastoral lowland area of Ethiopia.

As explained in the statement of one of the interviewees above, Dagu is metaphorized with the daily water and meal which the Afar should do to stay alive in the desert lowlands. But he also agrees that it is one of the many rituals of the Afar which give them a unique brand of Afarness. On the other hand, Ali Aydahis, one of my interviewees from Dubti town, argues against the idea of labeling Dagu just as a ritual. He contends:

> Dagu is not only something we do to express our culture and sustain our lives as Afars. It is rather something that we do as human beings to survive. I think Dagu was given birth by our pastoral and mobile life. If you ask me why I get involved in Dagu, I can not only say it is just my culture; it is because I need the information from Dagu to live, for my life.

The idea raised by both of the interviewees in the above quotations is geared towards a common end: Dagu is a ritual which is culturally performed but its value and importance for the daily lives

of the Afar far more exceeds and overwhelms the sense of a mere ritual performance literally attached to it.

Dagu, as a ritual performance, however, has got its own system and cultural rules of performance. As expressed by all of my individual and group interviewees together with my observational notes, Dagu has its own ritual prologue and conclusion. When dagu is done, it follows three phases of progress, as graphically shown below:

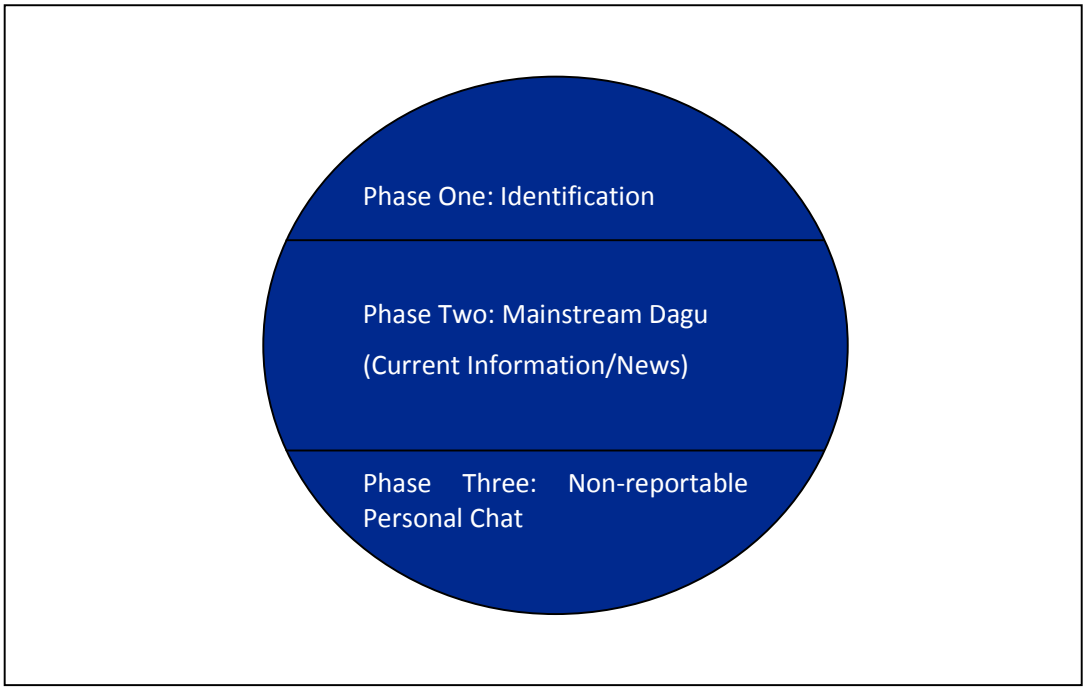

Fig.6. Phases of the Dagu Ritual

The three ritual phases of Dagu are separately treated as follows:

4.1.1. Phase One: Identification

This is the opening phase when two participants sit for the Dagu ritual to be performed. Dagu is done by two people in a face-to –face exchange of information. As all of my interview

participants agree, it is basically a dyad (interpersonal) oral communication involving two people. Ahmed Ali from FGI1, explains:

> Dagu is of course done by two people. It doesn't mean that Dagu can not be done in groups. People in social gatherings exchange Dagu information, but you get paired and do the Dagu. It is basically a two-men involving exchange of information even though you are part of a gathering.

As well-explained by Ahmed, it is a ritual involving two people at a time. When the Dagu ritual is done, it starts with a prologue of identification. Because Dagu is not done based on acquaintances and should be culturally done by all members of the afar community, two Afar men must be primarily introduced to each other. This prologue is not only done for the sake of getting introduced to each other, it helps in attributing any information which is received through Dagu. This is done to assure that the information is heard from a firsthand source. As firsthand news/information is highly regarded as reliable by the Afar people, attribution or attributing information received to a primary source should be done. It is at this phase that such information for attribution can be found. This need/wish to find the firsthand account of the information is reflected in the following favorite proverbs of the Afar:

Kok iyiiyie kok iyie nummuk iyiiyie

(Who told you; who told the person that told you?)

Tiiya digaayie tiiya waaga

(To literally mean: Firsthand news is reliable, secondhand news is taken with a pinch of salt; or One is definite, the other questionable)

Hence, the name of the person, the area the person comes from and heading to, the clan or sub-clan he belongs to, the purpose of his journey, etc will be asked in this phase. Many of the participants of the FGI claim that such identification is not only done for the later purpose of attributing the information to someone; but also to answer questions with regard to safety and security, which will be treated in detail in the later sections of this chapter.

This introductory phase of Dagu is comparable to the news presentation in the modern media. It dominantly includes the 5 Ws and H, which the lead of any story in a newspaper begins with. Mohammed Ahmed Haidra emphasizes:

> This ritual prologue must answer questions with regard to the overall address and whereabouts of those participating in the Dagu. As much as possible, the questions of who, what, where, when, why and how would be answered and exchanged between the participants. This would help not only to do the main Dagu freely but also to comfortably report it to other fellows in a sincere way.

In relation to this, the point which was debatable in some of the FGIs was the extent to which the attribution continues. The question how long can Afar fellows continue asking 'who told you; who told the person that told you?' was warmly debated in the FGIs. Yayo Mohammed, one of the FGI 2 participants, contends:

> You cannot go on asking everyone 'who told you; who told the person that told you' the whole day. This question would stop somewhere. What remains at the end of the day is the address and the overall account of who first said it. Thus, what is left within the Dagu channels a while after is the identification of the person who first reported the story/event.

As all the participants of the FGI agreed, and as was also confirmed by clan elders interviewed, the identification of the firsthand source of the news will continue to be told along the channels of the Dagu (This is treated in detail in the sub-topic- Accuracy and Reliability: culturally guaranteed?).

4.1.2. Phase Two: Mainstream Dagu

This is the main phase where Dagu information giving and receiving importantly takes place. This marks the moment where the two important ritual questions are asked:

> Aytii mahaa tobbie? Intii mahaa tubilie?
>
> (What have your ears heard? And what have your eyes seen?)

These are the opening statements that mark the start of the main Dagu information exchange. The information exchanged here is timely and current, which can technically be regarded as 'hard

news.' Parker, in one of her writings about Afar, pointed out 'as passing on the news is such a vital part of the Afar life, all the news is shared in detail. The topics, as may be expected, cover all the vital matters of daily living, such as may be found in newspapers. These include: accidents, weddings, births, deaths, rain or lack of it, animal news, quarrels, sickness, visitors, new comers, results of council.'(1971: 232). Aden Ali Aydahis, one of the elders of the Arabta clan, underscores:

> While doing Dagu, you tell everything you saw and heard which are relevant to the life of an Afar. The information is current, and is told with the extra obligation of reporting to others who have not seen or heard. The information is too timely and exchanged between the participants. There isn't such a thing as 'I don't need this or that;' you have to attentively grasp and report all the information which comes through the Dagu as it is collectively important to the Afar community. We can't keep any piece of information for ourselves. We have to report all in all as we are culturally obligated to do so. For you are continually asked for Dagu along your way, there isn't any single chance of keeping it to yourself.

As explained above by the clan elder, it is a cultural obligation to share what an Afar all has when he sits for the Dagu ritual. All of my interviewees claim that there is not such Dagu information as irrelevant or useless. They contend that even if it is irrelevant or unimportant to one person, there is a communal feeling that it can be necessary for another, and thus shall be reported. Besides, they all claim that the Afar people are too curious to pass on any information received and indeed vie for it. Mohammed Ahmed Haidra adds the following:

> Let alone keeping it to yourself, you will even be despised in Afar culture for not having anything to pass on. Culturally, you should have some Dagu to report and thus, you will do every effort to exhaustively gather and report what you have. This way, people even compete to report as well as receive something.

As underlined by the subjects of the study above, anything said or exchanged in this phase is due to be reported to other fellow Afar.

4.1.3. Phase Three: Non-reportable Personal Chat

This phase is a concluding phase of the ritual. After the participants of the ritual have exchanged what they have, they enter into the third phase where only personal matters are discussed. Abdella Haro, an interviewee from the rural kebele of Beyehaile, says:

> In the concluding stages of the Dagu ritual, you exchange words of respect and politeness. The participants even tease each other to laugh and have a fun. They can freely talk about their personal problems; the scar on his face and the cause of it, an amazing thing he heard from non-Afar source or the radio, etc. It can even be about an issue happened a month or a year before.

As Abdella explained it well above and forwarded by all the interviewees, this is a phase where pleasantries and personal matters are exchanged. An issue which is not current can be raised and exchanged, which can technically be called 'soft news.' Strange information outside of the Afar community or information from the mass media is also exchanged here.

The most important thing worth mentioning about this phase is the fact that everything exchanged here is completely non-reportable. Ali mohammed, one of the participants of the FGI in Dubti, underscores:

> Both of the participants know that after the main Dagu stage, everything they chatted personally can't be reported. When they finish exchanging the Dagu information, they will notify each other about it and continue to the third ritual phase where they bless each other and exchange funny statements and pleasantries. They can even talk about older happenings; but they are never reportable.

As well accentuated in the above explanations, unlike the other two phases which are reportable, any information exchanged in this third phase of the ritual conclusion is non-reportable and thus cannot go through the Dagu channels.

4.2. Flow of News Information within a Dagu Ritual

This sub-topic refers to the flow of information within the main exchange of information: the mainstream Dagu, which is the second phase in the Dagu ritual as explained in the previous

section. Thus, the flow of information is meant to refer to the 'hard news,' which is reportable as opposed to the third phase of the ritual that involves personal chats and pleasantries which are not reportable. Parker (1971: 232), who studied the Afar stories, riddles and proverbs, pointed out three ways in which news (as she referred to the main Dagu information) is passed on:

a) When meeting someone casually on a journey. Even though people are traveling in opposite direction, full details of all their doings and the doings of others are exchanged.

b) Making a point of contacting travelers who may be by-passing. If travelers are seen either by other travelers or by residents of a hamlet or village and paths either do not cross, or the travelers are not making a stop at the settlement, then someone will detach themselves either from the second group of travelers, or go out from the settlement to get the news.

c) When coming to any settlement from outside, whether this be a visitor or a resident returning from some journey.

In a different spectacle, the direction and the flow of the Dagu news can generally be regarded as either being linear or interactive based on the data from the interviews held with the subjects and observation.

4.2.1. Linear Flow

When it is referred that there is a linear flow of information within Dagu, it does not mean that the overall communication within Dagu is linear. As explained well in the literature review part of this paper, there are many verbal and non-verbal cues exchanged among participants of communication and thus communication cannot be linear. However, when the flow of the news information within the Dagu ritual is observed, there can be a case where there is a linear flow of the news information. Even when the news is linearly passed on, it does not still mean that there are no other non-verbal cues responded. But the responded gestures or other non-verbal cues are not news as the linearity in this subtopic refers to the news information flow only. After all, Pearson et al (2008: 12) claim that even no response or silence is feedback. Nevertheless, the concern and interest of the study under this sub-topic is only to refer to the flow of the news information, not other non-verbal information. Having this in mind, it is appropriate to see the case where there is a linear flow of news information within Dagu.

As the life of the Afar is highly pastoral and nomadic, persons, especially men, can travel faraway from their *Bura* (village) looking for grazing lands for their herd. Thus, in their way from and back to their home, they would get participated in a number of Dagu rituals. When a person eventually returns to his home, the first thing he would do is to do a Dagu ritual with the family who stayed at home. In this case, the person would sit for Dagu with the family elder and pass on the Dagu news information in a linear fashion. The second phase of the ritual, passing on reportable news information, is only done by the returning man. The other man participating in the ritual can only listen, without interrupting, and proceed to the third phase which only involves the exchange of pleasantries and personal matters. Ali Mohammed, one of my interviewees, claims:

> When a person returns home, he will do the Dagu ritual with one of the family members, in most cases the father or other elder. He will report what he has heard and seen in his entire journey. In this case, the first phase, which is the exchange of names and address, is replaced by greetings for the returning man as he is a family member, a known body. He will report all what he has in the second phase and proceed to the third phase for the conclusion of the ritual. The man who stayed at home won't take a turn to do the Dagu reportage in the second phase for two reasons. One, the returning man is though to be weakened by the journey so that he will report all what he has and go for rest after a brief Dagu ritual. Two, the person who stayed at home could not have much news to report and even if he has some, that might have been heard by the returning man on his way back home. Hence, for these reasons, the Dagu done with a man returning home is brief and the flow of the news information in the second phase is linear.

Thus, when a man returns from a journey to his home, the Dagu ritual is done briefly. The first phase of the ritual involves greetings, not exchange of names and addresses, while the second one involves the linear passing on of information from the returning man to the home-staying. The third phase as usual involves exchange of pleasantries and personal chats. All of my interviewees emphasize that if there is any news at home that was not or could not have been heard by the returning man, that information could only be passed on to him after he took enough rest depending upon the length of the journey.

This brief Dagu ritual is also conducted to a traveler who makes a stop at a *Bura* (an Afar village) as a visitor. In this case, the first phase of the ritual, usually after the visitor is served with the necessary refreshments and hospitality, involves common exchange of names, addresses, whereabouts and other prologue information about the participants. The second phase, the mainstream exchange of news information, then takes place in a linear flow, from the visitor to the host, if only the visitor comes from a distant place and the host thinks he might get his visitor exhausted. Ali Mohammed explains the situation:

> This often happens when the visitor comes from a distant area. We have our own social and cultural values that make as take a visitor or a guest in a highest of regards. We give every respect to our visitor. That is why we only have a brief Dagu ritual with a visitor that comes from a long journey. We only hear what he says/reports to us and leave him for rest.

As explained by Ali, linear flow of news information from the visitor to the host during a Dagu ritual takes place in a situation where the visitor comes from a far place. On the other hand, most of the participants emphasize that the host allows the visitor to linearly make the Dagu reportage not only because the host is sympathetic towards the visitor who arrived from a long journey, but also the host thinks that the information he passes on cannot be grasped well by the tired mind of the traveler or the visitor; and that means it can eventually lead to inaccurate reportage. Assa Ahmed Abdella, a participant of FGI 4, underscores:

> We culturally think that a man from long journey may not be capable of grasping all that has been reported to him. If he can't grasp all what has been reported to him, he can't pass on the information correctly. And if he can't pass on the information correctly, then the whole process of Dagu will be infected with distortion and inaccuracy that will have harsh consequences.

It can, therefore, be noted that such linear flow of news information happens with two purposes which are of personal and communal values. The first purpose is to show the deserving respect to visitors, not at least by getting them more exhausted with an extended exchange of Dagu information after such too long journey. The second purpose, which more expresses the communal value the Afar people attach to the effective communication of Dagu information, is to ensure the correct and complete exchange of Dagu information, not at least by passing on a piece

of Dagu information to a person with a tired mind and body who has every chance of getting it distorted while doing a Dagu reportage.

4.2.2. Interactive Flow

As explained in the preceding section, the interactive flow of information only refers to the exchange of the Dagu news information during a Dagu ritual. As much as the flow of the news information in the ritual can in certain cases happen linearly, this exchange of the news information can also take an interactive shape and be shared interactively. Below are the cases where such interactive flow Dagu information can happen.

When a traveler meets another traveler casually, they sit for a Dagu ritual and exchange any information on their way. Ahmed Ali says:

> If a traveler meets another traveler, he knows that he has something to share to and from the other traveler and sit for Dagu. Travelers usually are good sources of news information as they travel too long. They are the vehicles of news information as they carry it all along their ways. Thus, they sit for a while and do the Dagu interactively. The one who is older usually starts the Dagu, and after he says all what he has, he leaves the turn to the other traveler. After getting exchanged the news information interactively, they proceed to the ritual conclusion.

As Ahmed puts it clearly in the above quotation, the exchange of the news information, which is the second phase in the ritual, is done in an interactive way. When the traveler who takes the priority finishes telling all the information he has, he will invite the other and keep quiet to allow the other traveler to do his turn of reporting. When the first traveler passes on his news, the other listens and then vice versa. It is in this way such an interactive exchange of news information happens between travelers meeting casually on their way.

On the other hand, such an interactive exchange of the news information can happen when travelers do not make a stop at a settlement and when someone gets out from the settlement to get the news from the travelers passing by. Ahmed Mohammed Haidra adds:

> When travelers pass by a certain settlement and they don't make a stop at the settlement, the people in the settlement can go out looking for news from any passing traveler. If any individual Afar sees a traveler around his place, he certainly

> will go out to do the Dagu ritual. He meets the traveler and usually asks for news as the traveler is the richest source of news information. However, the traveler also asks for news from the villager as the villager can receive important information from other travelers too. They pass on the news information to each other interactively and conclude the rituals.

Additionally, when a traveler makes a stop at a settlement, such interactive exchange of information can also happen but only if the traveler comes from a short journey. As opposed to what was stated in the previous section about the linear flow of news information during a Dagu ritual, the traveler not only passes on the news information but also receives from the host if the traveler starts his journey from a nearer place or is thought by the host that he has not got tired. All of my interviewees emphasize that because the traveler who does a visit to a certain settlement has not had long journey and got tired, it is thought by the host that the traveler can do the usual Dagu ritual effectively. Hence, an interactive flow of information, which is a turn by turn exchange of the news information, takes place as usual.

4.3. Dagu: A cultural Regulator

In the entire individual and FGIs, it was highly emphasized that Dagu plays a regulating role in the daily lives of the Afar people. The most important thing to be treated with regard to this is the value they attach to their indigenous communication system and the curiosity and loyalty they show towards it. Ahmed Ali underscores how Dagu is highly regarded by the Afar community:

> Dagu is our .life. Dagu makes up the centerpiece of our culture. We know that everything that comes through Dagu determines the continuity of our life and our community as community. It is thus expected that if you are an Afar, you will give a special place for Dagu and take it in a highest of regards; just for the only reason that as an Afar, you cannot live without it.

This view of Ahmed Ali, one of the participants in the FGI 3, was also shared by Umer Ali Keloita, who claimed that Dagu is the cultural regulator of the Afar people:

> It is indeed the regulator of our lives. The way we do Dagu and the information that comes through it affects every aspect of our life. As pastoralists, we know where we should take our herds to through Dagu. We are kept abreast of latest situations

> in our surroundings and our community through Dagu. The decisions from our traditional leaders, our interactions and conflict with *Issa* and *Kereyoo* and the overall situation of the Afar Bura (village) can only reach us through Dagu. It is, hence, the regulator of our lives.

The ideas all the subjects raised converge on the remark that Dagu is a cultural regulator of their lives. Having this important subjects' view towards Dagu, the next more important point worth discussing revolved around the question; 'how accurate, and as a result reliable, is the information that comes through Dagu?'

4.3.1. Accuracy and Reliability: Culturally Guaranteed?

The issue and concept of accuracy can be approached in two arguably different ways: Accuracy with a strict sense of being precise, and accuracy in its loose sense of being free from or avoiding falsehood. In this regard, it is important to consider these two somewhat illusive points while treating the accuracy and reliability of Dagu.

In the first strict sense of accuracy, many of the participants in the interviews claim that the information that comes through Dagu is highly precise. Mohammed Ahmed, one of the clan elders of the Ahmedin Siraj sub-clan, argues that:

> The information reaches us with a complete precision. If, for instance, camels are stolen by Kereyoo or Issa, the number of stolen camels will be reported precisely, no addition and no reduction. Being forgetful or imprecision is a taboo and is highly despised. You can't thus expect an individual Afar to be imprecise.

On the other hand, one of the participants of FGI 4, did not want to unequivocally claim that there would be no probable imprecision in Dagu:

> The chance of the dissemination of falsehood information, I can say, is almost non-existent. I have never received a lie or falsehood information in my life yet. But I also know the harsh consequences that would follow after disseminating falsehood. However, I can't withdraw the chance of some imprecision in the Dagu reportage. There can rarely be some imprecision like the number of wounds on one's body after a fight with the neighboring tribes. The person could have only received two wounds while the information you had was that he received four wounds on his body. Such imprecision could happen rarely.

As can be noted in the above illustrations, while there could be some imprecision with regard to reporting, especially of numbers, there is almost no chance of disseminating falsehood information. All of my subjects claim that they have never received falsehood information through Dagu while noting that every Afar knows the harsh cultural and physical punishment awaiting after the dissemination of such falsehood information.

Here, it is important to note and discuss the cultural establishments with respect to guaranteeing accuracy and avoidance of falsehood information. There are three cultural establishments involved in guaranteeing the protection of Dagu from inaccuracies and falsehood.

4.3.1.1. Mada'a

Mada'a can literally be taken as a traditional customary law of the Afar. This unwritten customary law, which governs every aspect of the pastoral life of the Afar, has every attribute of the modern law with regard to achieving justice. Ato Yayo Ali Ahmed, one of the Arabta clan leaders, explains:

> This is our law. We bring quarrels into justice and make sure the prevalence of peace in the Afar land through our unwritten customary law. No one can be above the Mada'a, which is given to us from Allah, our God. It is of course not written but we are judged and governed by the sacred utterances of our great elders. It was passed down to us from our forefathers. We punish those found guilty by referring to the Mada'a.

In relation to Dagu, those who are found guilty of disseminating inaccurate or falsehood information receive cultural physical punishments as orally given forth in the Mada'a. The physical punishments, as explained by the elders, can range from a heavy labor work to drowning a person into deep rivers and lakes. The overall establishment and functioning of the Mada'a can be recommended for deeper investigation by scholars in the field of law or legal studies.

4.3.1.2. Malboo

This is a traditional, court-like legal institution of the Afar where trials are done and sentences are given forth. The Afar people regularly sit for Malboo to resolve problems and with a view to

passing verdict on issues of concern in the pastoral life of the Afar. Awol Mohammed, one of the Ahmedin Siraj clan elders, puts it this way:

> Week in week out, we elders sit for Malboo. When we are on Malboo, we try to reconcile differences and strive to get people agreed. We give verdict on issues and make sure justice is done. Any one Afar accepts what is given as a verdict on Malboo, and can't put the verdict in question. Even if one goes for justice in the modern courts and if not treated by Malboo, it will just be in vain because the people of Afar think that justice can only be from God, and that is through Malboo.

Hence, anyone who is convicted of disseminating falsehood or inaccurate information through Dagu will be brought before Malboo and sentenced for cultural punishments. But beyond that, this person, as claimed by all of my interviewees, would be despised all his life with a reputation of a liar or forgetful.

The legal proceedings and overall structure of the Malboo can rather be left for further investigation by people in the law academic stream.

4.3.1.3. Fe'ima

Fe'ima is a group of law-enforcing youngsters equivalent to the word 'police.' Every clan or sub-clan has its own Fe'ima and keep the welfare of its members through these law enforcers. Mahe Ahmed Mahe, one of the members of the Fe'ima of the Arabta clan, claims:

> Members of the Fe'ima always strive to observe if life is going everyday as usual in the Afar community. It is just like a police in the regional or federal state. If there are any wrong deeds in our clan or Bura (village), we follow it up and bring it to justice. After verdict is given forth by the Malboo, we will enforce it and make sure that justice is done. It is as per the decisions of the Malboo that the Fe'ima can perform.

As can be noted in the above quotation, the role of the Fe'ima, especially with regard to the protection of Dagu from falsehood and inaccuracies, can extend from following-up and finding out the guilty to the implementation of the verdict given forth by the Malboo.

It can, therefore, easily be understood that the accuracy, and through that the reliability, of the information disseminated through Dagu is guaranteed by such strong social and cultural establishments. Hence, members of the Afar community are culturally too cautious about the truthfulness and accuracy of the Dagu information, not only being aware of the punishments awaiting but also the worse measure of socially being isolated.

Based on the data gathered from the subjects, the way the Dagu is protected from the dissemination of falsehood and inaccurate information can be graphically presented as follows:

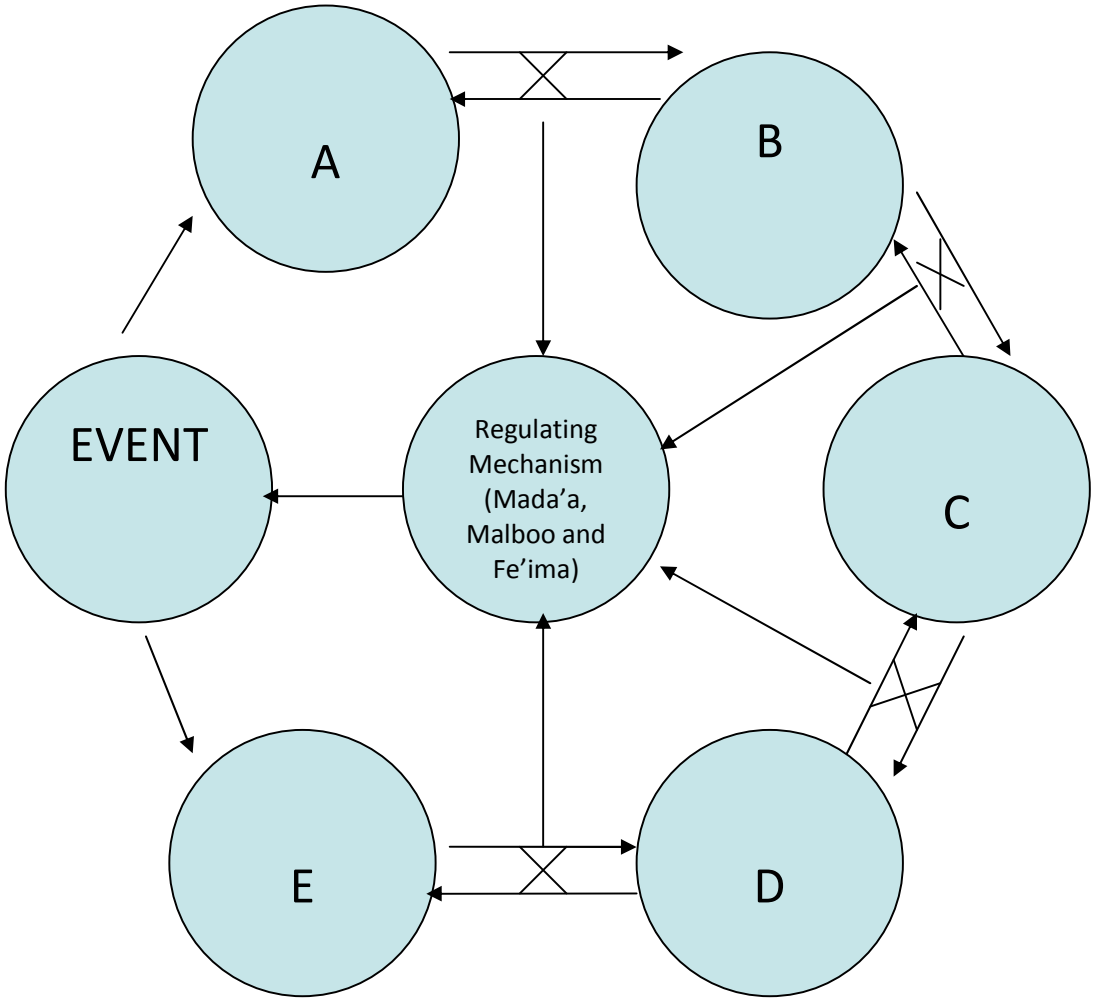

Fig.7. Diagram showing how Dagu is protected from false hood and inaccurate information

As the above graphic presentation attempts to display, Dagu involves the central regulatory mechanism in the course of the reception and transmission of information. An event is reported by and from A through E, where that event is also witnessed and reported back by and from E through A. In this bi-directional cyclic flow of information, the discrepancy in the information reported and received about an event can easily be checked out by each dyad (the two persons involved in the exchange of Dagu information). Where there is discrepancy of information (as the X representas) at each juncture of the reception and transmission of the Dagu information, it will be reported to the central regulating mechanism constituting clan elders and religious leaders with the cultural establishments of Mada'a, Malboo and Fe'ima.

Beyond what is reported to them by members of the community, the clan and religious elders and leaders, as they themselves are participants of the Dagu, can still either see the event themselves or detect the discrepancy during the exchange of information. This way, the disseminator of falsehood or inaccurate information can easily be found out and prosecuted traditionally. But as all my subjects of the study emphasize, with the highest cultural value attached to Dagu, the chance of having a person prosecuted for the dissemination of falsehood or inaccurate information is too much rare. All of them, except one elder, even claim that they are yet to see such a 'disgraceful' person in their life time. Ahmed Seid, an elder from the Beyehaile kebele of Dubti woreda, however claimed that he once witnessed such prosecution of a person who disseminated falsehood information:

> The person deliberately disseminated that the *Issa* (the neighboring Somali tribes who frequently fight with the Afar for grazing land and other historically driven reasons) stole two camels when the camels had actually died of disease. He was afraid of being responsible for the death of the camels and told falsehood. He thought it wouldn't be found out. But soon after the dissemination of the information, it was confirmed that the *Isaa* were never there in the specified time and place. He was prosecuted on Malboo and the Fe'ima served him right with the harsh punishment of drowning him to his head in Awash River.

On the other hand, the highest level of accuracy, in its strict sense of precision, of Dagu can also be related to the nature of oral culture. Olson (1984: 207) claimed that the 'oral tradition, like the literate tradition, is a highly evolved and elaborated technology that id based on ordinary oral language but that is specialized to serve an archival function, the preservation of socially

important information. Ong also underscored the mnemonic devices in the thought process and spoken words, like rhythmic and well-patterned thought and utterances as in proverbs, help a lot as recalling mechanisms in oral culture.

In relation to the above concepts, Morell (2005: 41) gave explanations on how precision is possible in Dagu through patterned poetic recitations:

> It is more than a bush telegraph or village gossip, more than the latest headlines. Instead, in a ceremony of handshakes and hand kisses, the Afar pass along recitations of all they have seen and heard, a poetic litany that can be almost Homeric in its detail and precision.

As Morell puts it well and the other scholars above point out about oral culture, it can be seen that Dagu's poetic recitation technique helps for the precision of information disseminated through it. Even though there is always a natural chance that any person forgets or faces a failure in memory, the patterned and rhythmic recitation during Dagu can certainly help for the recall as well as precision of the information reported through this indigenous channel. And, if such accuracy exists, it is no wonder that the Afar people continue to rely on Dagu; and Dagu continues to be the reliable source of information among the Afar.

4.4. Mannerisms of Dagu

As could have been implied in the previous sections, Dagu as a ritual has its own mannerisms with which it requires for certain way of behaving among its participants. This way of behaving can be expressed before, during and after a Dagu ritual. Some of the mannerisms required before the Dagu ritual is conducted include the ways to find someone to do the Dagu ritual with.

Any Afar, as most of my informants claim, should manifest a manner of being highly keen to do the Dagu ritual. This includes the cultural obligation among the Afar to do the Dagu ritual with a member of the Afar community passing by. Mahe Yayo, one of my interviewees from the outskirt kebeles of the Asaita town, adds the following:

> Any Afar is culturally put into an obligation to do the Dagu ritual with any other Afar fellow passing by. You can't refuse to do the Dagu ritual. Indeed, you should show your eagerness to get involved in the ritual. This can be expressed in terms of

> going way far from your settlement to get the news from travelers crossing, or by interrupting your personal works to do the ritual with fellow Afar. This is an appreciated manner expected to be done by any member of the Afar community. Many people actually compete to show their eagerness and do the Dagu ritual everyday.

As Mahe points it out well, one of the mannerisms expected to be shown by an Afar is the eagerness to do the ritual which can be expressed by the time and energy sacrificed to do it. It is agreed by all of my informants that you can't at all pass by a person (a member of the Afar community) without doing a Dagu ritual no matter how important your work is or how little time you have. They all have underlined that they never have passed by or seen a person passing by another fellow without doing the Dagu ritual. However, if a person passes by without doing Dagu with others around, it, they claim, results in some harsh consequences as it can directly be linked with safety and security issues -This is treated in detail in the next section.

There are some other manners expected to be manifested during a Dagu ritual. When an Afar faces another Afar to do the ritual, there are some physical mannerisms shown between participants of the ritual. It is required that the participants should sit to do the Dagu. Ahmed Tahiro claims:

> You can't see two Afar men doing Dagu standing. It is one of the cultural mannerisms that those who get involved in the Dagu ritual should before starting it. They usually sit in a face-to-face manner with a view to avoiding any physical distraction, and that they can listen to each other. Such physical closeness shows to anybody that they are doing a Dagu ritual.

Moreover, when two Afar men meet for a Dagu ritual, they do a hand-kissing as a cultural greeting and as a way of showing respect to each other. After doing the greeting and the phase one of the ritual, which usually involves the exchange of names and addresses, then comes the second phase which is where the mainstream Dagu information is exchanged. In this phase, the way the participants proceed to decide who should take the priority telling news information is worth discussing. When two Afar men sit for the Dagu ritual, the one who takes the priority of telling the news is the older. Age, thus, is a factor in taking the priority of telling the Dagu news. However, if the two people are of the same age, the one who is the traveler takes the priority over

one who stays in and around a settlement. This is, as all of the subjects of this study emphasize, due to the fact a traveler can have as much Dagu news as the distance he covers.

As proverbs dictate the mannerisms of a certain cultural society (Knapp, Stohl and Reardon, 1981: 33), the following proverb of the Afar dictates who should take the priority of telling the Dagu news:

Xaggi suge num ceelah, dadho yemeete num cellta

(To literally mean: To give Dagu is for the traveler, to receive it is for one who stays around.)

As the above proverb well dictates it, on the occasion of the Dagu ritual, one who is a traveler will have the privilege of starting the Dagu news over the one who has not traveled. But if both of the participants of the Dagu ritual are travelers, one who should have the privilege of telling the Dagu news first will be open for agreement between them, as Yusuf Ali, one of my elder interviewees at the Gebelaito kebele of Dubti woreda, puts it as follows:

> If the participants who sit for Dagu are of the same age and both are travelers, then they will bargain with each other to decide who should take the priority of telling the Dagu news first. There is a common saying usually said when two Afar men invite each other to start telling the Dagu news. The one who feels shouldn't take the priority will say: yali nek yaysie atuu yok taysie, which is to mean 'God is best, but you are better than me.' After exchanging such polite remarks, they will agree and one of them will start passing on the Dagu news.

On the other hand, if another man turns up in the middle of the Dagu ritual, the man can't interrupt, and must wait until the ritual conclusion. When the Dagu ritual is concluded, then the man can sit for Dagu with one of them. But in a situation where a traveler is hosted in a settlement and one of the neighbors turns up part way through the Dagu ritual, the neighbor cannot interrupt the ritual but waits for its conclusion and sit for Dagu, not with the traveler (guest) but with the host who then should show his capacity of correctly reporting what he has received from his guest (the traveler).

The other mannerism, as dictated in one of the Afar proverbs, one should reflect during a Dagu ritual is attentive listening and correct reporting. The proverb reads:

Lo'o gejja nummu gitaak mahoda ehii'e iya nummu diraab mabahaa

(He who travels in the day (light) sees clearly and will not lose his way; he who takes in everything (listens) attentively reports truthfully.)

The above proverb shows the place Dagu gives to accuracy and truthfulness, and dictates them as one of the mannerisms that should be pursued during a Dagu ritual. It also puts that attentive listening is required for truthful reporting.

The other point that should be raised in relation to this is whether women can get involved in a Dagu ritual. Most of my informants claim that women are not usually involved in the formal Dagu ritual. But all of them emphasized that this isn't due to cultural gender-bias but because of the nature of their work and way of life. Fatima Ahmed, one of the participants of the FGI conducted in the rural surroundings of the Asaita town, claims:

> We aren't as highly involved in the Dagu ritual as men. This is because of the fact that we don't travel after herds. In an Afar life, men travel long journeys with herds looking for grazing lands or with caravans. But we don't travel and don't have the exposure to receive or pass on the Dagu news.

As Fatima underscored, and as amplified by other subjects of this study, women's involvement in Dagu is only limited to receiving the Dagu news. Kediga Ali, a resident in the rural kebeles of Dubti town, emphasized that elder women would receive the Dagu news by sitting with elder men, and share it with other young women. She adds:

> Women would share the Dagu news with other women. But this isn't as formal and strong as men do. We don't travel and so we don't have much news to share with each other. Hence, we, elder women, would occasionally sit with elder men, or get it from our husbands; and we, as members of the Afar community, exploit the information for our daily life.

As Kediga puts it well, women do need and have the Dagu information though not in a formal Dagu ritual. However, almost all of my interviewees claim that even though young women cannot do the Dagu ritual with their men counterparts due to religious reasons, elder women would do the ritual with other men and have as all the Dagu information as men have.

4.5. Dagu: Beyond Communication

Dagu, as an indigenous form of communication, can be regarded as a 'medium by the people for the people' as Gulilat Menbere (2006) claimed it in his unpublished thesis. Dagu may deserve this metaphoric expression as it is a native and indigenous communication system of the Afar. However, one can easily be tempted to view Dagu as a mere oral interpersonal communication system. This view arguably undermines the dynamism of the Dagu and the highest value and place it has in the pastoral lives of the Afar. For the subjects of this study, Dagu is beyond communication.

Ali Ahmed challenges treating Dagu as a mere interpersonal, oral communication by claiming:

> Dagu is not just communication for us. It is our way of life; it is what we eat, what we wear, what we drink, where we take shelter in. It is everything of our life. You can't think of life without Dagu if you are an Afar. Dagu is never a question of choice for the Afar; it is just life.

All of my informants claim that it is almost impossible to think of living in the desert lowlands of Afar without Dagu. Besides, they emphasize that through doing Dagu, they express their membership in the Afar community so much so that Dagu is rather an identity for them than a mere interpersonal communication.

On the other hand, as Dagu is highly attached to communal values and purpose, the selectivity processes within communication, as well explained in the literature review section of this paper, such as selective exposure, selective attention, selective perception, selective retention and selective recall cannot at all be considered. Because the Afar people do not do Dagu for only individual benefits, such selection of the information communicated through the Dagu ritual cannot happen. Every Afar does the Dagu ritual with the cultural purpose of passing all the information received on to other members; and thus the mind of Afar is culturally framed to receive and pass on all the Dagu news information, including those irrelevant and insignificant information for the individual receiving and passing on, as opposed to the selectivity concept of communication forwarded by scholars.

Moreover, Dagu is also claimed by the participants of this study as a way of ensuring safety and security. It, for them, not only answers questions with regard to communication but also security. Yusuf Ali emphasizes:

> An Afar always gets involved in the Dagu ritual; you can't get an Afar who doesn't do Dagu with a passer-by Afar. It is almost a sin not to do Dagu with an Afar passing by. If you don't do Dagu or people see that you are not doing Dagu, you will be put in a cultural detention. You can't keep quiet or refuse to do a Dagu. If you refuse to do Dagu, you will be put in a cultural detention and you won't be released until your whereabouts and the clan you belong to are found out and you received the necessary cultural punishments. In this case, Dagu can be taken as a means of ensuring security.

As Yusuf underscored it well, Dagu is also a way of ensuring communal security as it involves the way of finding out the address and any necessary information about a person moving around or passing by an Afar Bura (Village). It can, therefore, be seen that Dagu comprises all the issues with regard to identity, security and communal welfare beyond communication.

4.6. Dagu and Exogenous Information

As well explained in the beginning sections of this chapter, a Dagu ritual comprises three phases where the first one is the ritual prologue and the second phase includes the mainstream Dagu, the exchange of current information, while the third phase winds up the ritual. It is also stated that the information in the first and second phase are reported while anything exchanged in the third phase, pleasantries and personal chats, are not reportable. The third phase, which is the ritual conclusion, is also described to be a phase where extraneous information which are from non-Afar sources can be exchanged.

It can, thus, be claimed that mainstream Dagu exchange of information insulates information from exogenous sources. However, informants of this study underscore that such insulation is the result of the cultural regulation to protect Dagu from inaccurate and falsehood information. Ahmed Mohammed Haidra says:

> We will mainly exchange each and every information with the address of its first witness in the main Dagu phase. We exchange such information because we can attribute it to some reliable source within the community. Information from other sources like the mass media is also treated as references and is not transmitted through Dagu. We can chat about some issues like from radio, but it is just a personal chat that we do depending on the acquaintance you have with the person

> you do Dagu. We never exchange information that originates from radio in the second phase where we do serious Dagu. It is just because information from such sources is referenceless from within Afar and is thought to be unreliable.

Exogenous information, like information from the mass media, are thought to be unreliable because they, as most of my interviewees claim, basically are extraneous for the Afar and lack that indigenous source to attribute the information to. They all claim that they cannot attribute the information radio to the journalist reading it or the clan he belongs to. After all, the journalist has got no address within the Afar community and does not belong to an Afar clan.

On the other hand, Gulilat Menbere (2006) in his graduate thesis submitted for the School of Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University, claimed that Dagu can be synergized with other mass media like radio for HIV/AIDS communication. This is arguably a bold claim as this study found out that the information from such extraneous sources are not at all reportable as they can be exchanged at the third phase of the Dagu ritual where only exchange of pleasantries and personal chat are done but with no intention of reporting it.

Chapter Five: Concluding Remarks

Dagu is a ritualistic exchange of information which requires for distictive ways of cultural discipline in the reception and transmission of communally important information in the Afar community. Dagu, as a ritualistic performance, is found out to be conducted in three phases.

The first phase is the ritual prologue where the introduction of the participants of the ritual is done. In this phase, identifications such as the address and clans the participants belong to are exchanged. Because the Dagu ritual is not done based on acquaintances and should be culturally performed by all the members of the community, the two Afar men who get involved in the ritual should be introduced to each other. However, this introduction is also more important for the attribution purpose which is highly regarded in Dagu. It is also found out that every piece of information exchanged should be attributed to a firsthand source. This attribution to a firsthand source is done all the way through the Dagu channels. Hence, the address of the first person who primarily made the reportage of an even/happening goes all the way through every reportage made afterwards.

The second phase of the ritual offers for the exchange of the mainstream Dagu information (current information) while the third phase involves the ritual conclusion where exchange of blessings, pleasantries and personal chats are done. Anything exchanged in the ritual conclusion, the third phase, remains to be a personal matter and thus cannot be reported. In this regard, it is found out that information which comes from extraneous sources like the mass media can only be exchanged in the third phase and is therefore not reported. Hence, the idea of synergizing Dagu with the modern mass media like radio, as claimed by Gulilat Menbere (2006: 89), is found to be impossible as Dagu insulates exogenous sources of information.

Dagu is also found to be protected from falsehood and inaccurate information through cultural establishments like Mada'a (the traditional customary law of the Afar), Malboo (a court-like traditional establishment constituting clan and religious elders and leaders) and Fe'ima (Police-like law enforcing group of youngsters). Any person that disseminates falsehood or inaccurate information, as can easily be found out through the ritual obligation of attributing every piece of information to a firsthand source, receives harsh cultural and physical punishments. A person found guilty of disseminating falsehood or inaccurate information is prosecuted and punished by these social and cultural establishments, but even more harshly faces social isolation. Therefore,

the chance of receiving falsehood or inaccurate information through Dagu is almost none because of the fact that it involves cultural regulating mechanisms. The cultural establishments of Mada'a, Malboo and Fe'ima are recommended to be studied by scholars in the field of laws.

Travelers, as pastoralist Afar men usually travel after herds and caravans, are the rich and main sources of the mainstream Dagu information. When these travelers meet, they interactively exchange what they have seen or heard all along their way. When a traveler gets back to home however, the information flow takes a linear shape and the traveler only passes on the information for he is believed to be the richest source of Dagu information.

As women are not or cannot be travelers in the Afar community, they are least involved in the Dagu ritual. But elder women are found to be involved mostly in receiving Dagu information from their elder counterparts even though they do not usually transmit the information as they only stay in and around a settlement and don't travel. The younger females, however, cannot be in involved in any Dagu ritual with their male counterparts due to religious reasons.

Dagu as a ritualistic performance is also found to have mannerisms expected from the ritual participants. One of the mannerisms expected from an Afar is an eagerness to get involved in Dagu rituals. This can be shown by traveling longer distances away from a settlement looking for other travelers to do Dagu with. When two Afar men sit for a Dagu, they must do handshakes and hand kisses closely facing each other showing interest and respect between themselves. And if another person turns up while the two are doing the Dagu, the other person cannot interrupt the ritual but waits for the conclusion of the ritual and does the Dagu with the one who traveled less as it is believed that one who traveled longer can get more exhausted by doing another ritual on the spot. Various Afar proverbs also dictate mannerisms of reporting correctly and truthfully as extensively treated in the preceding chapter. Dagu is also found to be related to issues of identity, security and communal welfare beyond communication.

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APPENDIX-I

Interview Questions for Individual and Focus Group Interviews

1. When and where does Dagu take place? Who does the Dagu?
2. Is it a cultural obligation for every Afar to be involved in Dagu? If so, what cultural punishment awaits an Afar who is not involved in Dagu?
3. Is Dagu equivalent to 'news?' Why?
4. How timely or current is the information that comes through Dagu?
5. How is Dagu done?
6. Is there a situation where Dagu cannot be done? Was there any point in history where the Afar people were unable to do Dagu or were forced to love without Dagu? If so, what happened?
7. What do you as an individual loss or gain if you do not or do Dagu?
8. How is accuracy guaranteed in Dagu?
9. How reliable is the Dagu information?
10. Are messages from the modern mass media transmitted through Dagu?

APPENDIX II

Participants of Individual and Focus Group Interviewees

1. Focus Group Interviewees

- **FGI one:**
  - Focus Group Interviews held in Dubti town
  - A total of 5 people: 4 men and an elder man

- **FGI two**
  - Focus Group Interviews held in the rural kebeles of Dubti woreda: Beyehaile, Gebelaito and Detbahri
  - A group of 5 people: 3 men, an elder man and an elder woman

- **FGI three**
  - Focus Group Interviews held in Asaita town
  - A total of 5 people: 4 men and an elder woman

- **FGI four**
  - Focus Group Interviews held in the rural kebeles of Afambo Woreda
  - A group of 5 people: 4 men and an elder man

2. Individual Interviewees

Dubti Woreda:

- Two elder women
- Three clan elders, of which two are sub-clan leaders
- Three government officials but native Afars
- Three men

Afambo Woreda:

- Two clan elders
- A young woman
- Three men

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Declaration

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

Name: Moges Endris

Signature _____

Date of submission: June 24, 2010

Place of submission: Addis Ababa University