

**The Sufi–Salafi Interactions in South Wollo, Ethiopia  
(1991-2017): Competition, Intolerance and Conflict**

**By**

**Mohammed Seid Mohammed**

**A Dissertation Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Addis  
Ababa University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Doctor  
of Philosophy in Peace and Security Studies**

**Addis Ababa University**

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**Institute for Peace and Security Studies**

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2017): Competition, Intolerance and Conflict**

**Principal Supervisor: Dr. Mohammed Dejen**

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**20 July, 2020**

## **Declaration**

I, the undersigned, declare that this PhD Dissertation entitled: *The Sufi-Salafi Interaction in South Wollo, Ethiopia : Competition, Intolerance and Conflict* is my original work, and has not been presented for a degree in any other University or academic institution, and that all source of materials used for the Dissertation are fully acknowledged and properly referenced.

**Mohammed Seid Mohammed**

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# Addis Ababa University

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### Institute for Peace and Security Studies

#### Approval Sheet of the Examining Committee:

This is to certify that the Dissertation prepared by Mohammed Seid Mohammed, entitled: *The Sufi-Salafi Interaction in South Wollo, Ethiopia (1991-2017): Competition, Intolerance and Conflict* and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Peace and Security Studies complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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## Abstract

*This study examines the context, dynamics and predicaments of the Sufi-Salafi interactions in the context of South Wollo of Ethiopia from 1991 to 2017. Nonetheless, it is confined only on some negative aspects of their relations characterized by competition, intolerance and conflict. In doing so, the researcher employed a qualitative research method to gain insight into the Sufi-Salafi interactions as it allows the participants to interpret their social reality. Data generated through this approach are analyzed using discourse analysis, conflict mapping, conflict tree-model and onion-model of conflict analysis. Although agents of Islamic revivalism in the history of South Wollo were different (Sufis as agents of the nineteenth century Islam while Salafists for the contemporary), both utilized revivalism as a tool of maintaining the religious orthodoxy of Islam in subsequent centuries. This would refute the conventional knowledge which associates revivalism as the monopoly of Salafists. The nineteenth century Sufi revivalism was far more radical as it applied Jihad to address the local religious and political grievances while contemporary Salafi revivalism has a peaceful puritanist missionary agenda in South Wollo. Empirical evidences from Sufi-Salafi discourse revealed that the Sufi-Salafi competition is primarily triggered by the need to win converts, control organizational resources and disseminate doctrinal preferences. The absence of cooperation which is expressed in the form of obstruction, misperception, deception and manipulation between Sufis and Salafists hinders peace in the Muslim community of South Wollo. The study also finds that passive tolerance which is expressed in the form of marginalization, xenophobic attitude and emotional attacks using pejorative and derogatory terms impedes peaceful coexistence between Sufis and Salafists in South Wollo. Analysis on the intervention of external actors reveals that the interference of the government and Ahabash complicates the Sufi-Salafi relations through transforming the dormant conflict into active violence in South Wollo. The US government under the pretext of countering terrorism indirectly interfered in the Sufi-Salafi conflict through funding Sufi institutions. Although Islamic NGOs as external actors were allegedly accused of promoting Salafism in South Wollo, it could not be substantiated with evidences. A scrutiny on the causation of the conflict identifies structural, proximate and immediate factors responsible for the Sufi-Salafi conflict. The structural factor is related to actors' distinct interpretation of Islam, the proximate factor evidenced by the imposition of Ahabash as the ideology of mejlis, and the 2012 controversial mejlis election and the killing of a Sufi cleric as the triggering factors for the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo. Although impartial intra-religious dialogue and negotiation was variously suggested as tools of resolution, it had been sabotaged by the government and Ahabash. This is evidenced by the interference of the government in the 2012 mejlis election and the eventual ascendancy of Ahabash leadership to the zonal mejlis. The realist security orientation of the government was also incompatible to resolve identity based intra-religious conflict in South Wollo as it ceded preference for its own state security. The researcher argues that the effectiveness of intra-religious peace and the transformation of the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo should be governed by the principles of non-interference, cooperation and peace building.*

## Glossary

<i>Addis Rae'ye</i>	New Vision
<i>Ahlal Sunna-wal-jema'</i>	Followers of the tradition of the Prophet (Sunnah)
<i>Akerari</i>	Fundamentalist
<i>Alim(pl.ulema)</i>	A Muslim religious scholar
<i>Al-Ahbash</i>	A radical Sufi group founded in Lebanon by a man of Ethiopian descent ( <i>Sheikh</i> Abdulahi of Harar)
<i>Ashebari</i>	Terrorist
<i>Baraka</i>	blessing of religious or communal leaders
<i>Bid'a.</i>	Innovation which is disgraceful in Islam
<i>Caliph</i>	Successor
<i>Chat</i>	A stimulant green leaf which is widely grown and used in Ethiopia
<i>Derg</i>	A military committee which ruled Ethiopia from 1974-1991
<i>Fiqh</i>	Islamic Jurisprudence
<i>Hadith</i>	The saying and practice of the prophet Muhammed
<i>Haram</i>	Unlawful
<i>Hijab</i>	The veil or head covering worn by some Muslim women
<i>Ihsan</i>	An act of doing good
<i>Ijtihad</i>	Exercising of independent judgment
<i>Imam</i>	Leader of congregational praying
<i>Istislāh</i>	Judging on the basis of suitability

<b>Jihad</b>	<b>Striving in the cause of Allah</b>
<b><i>Kebeles</i></b>	<b>The lowest level of government administration</b>
<b><i>Kirestina</i></b>	<b>A ceremony for baptism</b>
<b><i>Mechal</i></b>	<b>Forbearance</b>
<b><i>Mechachal</i></b>	<b>Tolerance</b>
<b><i>Medhab</i></b>	<b>Schools of Islamic Jurisprudence</b>
<b><i>Mejlis</i></b>	<b>All structures of the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council</b>
<b><i>Mujaddid</i></b>	<b>Revivalist</b>
<b><i>Niqab</i></b>	<b>A face cover completely disguises women’s face except the two eyes</b>
<b><i>Qiyas</i></b>	<b>Analogy</b>
<b><i>Salafism</i></b>	<b>The revivalist ethos of Islam</b>
<b><i>Sedeqa</i></b>	<b>Post burial procession among Muslims of Ethiopia</b>
<b><i>Sheikh /Shaykh</i></b>	<b>Religious or communal leader</b>
<b><i>Shirk</i></b>	<b>The sin of associating another deity with Allah</b>
<b><i>Sufism</i></b>	<b>the mysticism of Islam</b>
<b><i>Sultan</i></b>	<b>A title used by Muslim <i>rulers</i></b>
<b><i>Sunnah</i></b>	<b>The tradition of the Prophet</b>
<b><i>Tariqa</i></b>	<b>A Sufi way</b>
<b><i>Tebel</i></b>	<b>A holy water for Orthodox Christians</b>
<b><i>Temben</i></b>	<b>A deducted poem recited by the Sufis during the celebration of <i>Meulid</i> and other religious rituals</b>
<b><i>Tewhid</i></b>	<b>Islamic Monotheism</b>

*Tezkar*

**Post burial procession among Orthodox Christians**

*Tsenfegna*

**Extremists**

*Yemuslimoch Guday*

**Affairs of the Muslims**

*Zakat*

**Giving charity as alms**

## **Acronyms**

<b>EOC</b>	<b>Ethiopian Orthodox Church</b>
<b>EPDRF</b>	<b>Ethiopian People’s Democratic and Revolutionary Front</b>
<b>AUUF</b>	<b>Addis Ababa Ulema Unity Forum</b>
<b>AEUP</b>	<b>All Ethiopian Unity Party</b>
<b>ARS</b>	<b>Amhara Regional State</b>
<b>USA</b>	<b>United States of America</b>
<b>NGO</b>	<b>Non-Governmental Organization</b>
<b>USG</b>	<b>The United States Government</b>
<b>MoFPDA</b>	<b>The Ministry of Federal, Pastoralist and Development Affairs.</b>

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# CHAPTER-ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Conflict is almost an inherent part of human nature which dates back to the early history mankind and will probably continue even in the future. This is because human beings have needs and interests which could not be satisfied due to incompatible goals and scarcity of resources. Human existence on this planet earth depends on how to manage conflict. Violent Conflict can be manifested in the form of personal and societal destruction whereas non-violent conflict is also manifested in the form of competing for different values and scarce resources. The world before 1990s experienced the most destructive form of violence such as inter-state wars which were characterized by high level coercion and violent mode of confrontation between adversaries. Since 1990s, however, this trend of conflict in the world is changed from inter-state into intra-state of which value driven conflicts like religious and ethnic conflicts have become more dominant (Jeong, 2007:3). As part of intra-religious violence, the Sufi<sup>1</sup>-Salafi<sup>2</sup> conflict in Ethiopia is one of these examples which appeared to the scene after pluralist political system was introduced since 1991. The new political orientation in Ethiopia guaranteed religious freedom for diverse religious groups. Following this, however, the Salafi teaching as one of the new revivalist<sup>3</sup> movements has caused a profound impact on the social and political behaviors of Ethiopian Muslims (Displat, 2005:486; Abbink, 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> Sufism is the mysticism of Islam and Sufis are promoters of mystical Islam. In the context of South, the author uses the word Sufi to refer what the government labled *nebar* (indigenous) Muslims of South Wollo as it is provided in a policy document entitled, ““*Ya-efadre Higemengist ena Yahaymanot Bzuhanet Ayayaze*” – literally means, “EPDRF Constitution and Managing Religious Diversity”( MoFPDA, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Salafism is a revivalist movement in Islam and Salafists are advocators of revivalism in the way of the first generations of Islam. In the context of South Wollo, the author uses the word Salafi to refer what the government labeled *akerari* (fundamentalist) Muslims in the policy document(Ibid).Although their detractors identify the group as Wahabbi, they dislike to be identified with this term as it has pejorative and derogatory meaning. As part of the ethical consideration, therefore, the author prefers to use Salafi to identify this group.

<sup>3</sup> For the concepts of Islamic revivalism see the literature review part of this dissertation.

Although religious liberalization with the coming of EPDRF variously commented as positive to accommodate new revivalist religious movements like Salafism, it ended up with religious fragmentation and tension (Ibid). This consequently accelerated intra-religious rivalry and conflict within the same religion as it is manifested in the form of Sufi-Salafi dichotomy within the Muslim community. Salafists cherished by their transnational network and the existing religious freedom, diffused their teachings to the different parts of the country and antagonized the established indigenous Sufi religious beliefs (IAG & MoFA, 2016: 33-35; MoFPDA, 2017:117). This has now appeared as a new religious discourse which attracts the attention of researchers and policy community for various reasons primarily as an input for the global counter terrorism projects. Differently, however, the researcher is motivated to study the Sufi-Salafi interactions in South Wollo using the perspectives of peace and conflict studies aiming at identifying constraints of peace and contribute alternative conflict resolution mechanism to the Muslim community.

The history of the first Sufi-Salafi interaction ever known in Ethiopia is marked by conflict in 1940s in the old city of Harar between two influential Harari Muslim scholars namely *Haji Yusuf Abdal-Rehman* and *Sheikh Abdalla al-Harari*<sup>4</sup>. The former was a renowned businessman and scholar of the Salafi ideology while the latter was representing the local Sufi *ulema* (sing.*alim*). The matter of the dispute between the two figures was centered on the construction of an Islamic school with the Salafi curriculum in the city of Harar. The funding of the construction believed to have been mobilized by *Haji Yusuf* and his associates in Medina. The teaching of the school reported to have enraged the local Sufis notably *Sheikh Abdulahi Harari* as it was supposed to undermine the veneration of Sufi-Shrines in and around the city of Harar. *Sheikh Abdulahi* with the support of the government was able to shut down the new school and got the school representatives arrested. This planted the seed of hostility and religious rivalry between the Sufis and Salafists and has continued to split the people of Harar into two

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<sup>4</sup> See the latter history the *Sheikh* and his association with Islamic Charitable Organization or popularly known as Ahabash in 1980s in Lebanon.

antagonistic groups till this day. Beyond this, contemporary intra-religious conflict in the rest of the Muslim community in Ethiopia by and the large is related with the legacy of this incident (Elrich, 2006; Desplat, 2005: 496).

The other history showing the Sufi –Salafi interaction in Ethiopia related with the Anwar mosque crisis in Addis Ababa on 21 February 1995 where violence was witnessed between reformist Salafists and the Sufis while they were competing for ideological, power and political interests in Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council or popularly known as *mejlis* (Elrich, 2007 ; Dereje, 2013; Abbink, 2014). The Salafists who were considered by the government as ‘extremists’ were heavy handedly suppressed in which nine people were killed, a dozens were injured and hundreds were imprisoned. Although the Anwar Mosque crisis claimed to have been settled through other Islamic channels, the government interfered in the affairs of the Muslims to keep the so-called loyalists or moderate Muslims (Sufis) in power (Dereje, 2013). The conflict dominantly seems to have ideological base as it pulled resources and the intervention of external actors (Ibid). One of the evidences for this argument is provided by Abbink (2007) that the Saudi Salafists reported to have funded Salafi candidates to control *mejlis*. He states, “... in December 2004 two competing candidates reported in the press that Saudi Arabian sources had allocated 4 million riyals (ca. €750,000) to get their candidates voted onto the Muslim councils and thus become the dominant voice of organized Islam in Ethiopia” (Abbink, 2007). Given ethnic federalism is the frame-work of the political discourse in Ethiopia since 1991, power struggle in the *mejlis* has also political dimension as it is informed by ethno-religious interests. In the past, leaders of *mejlis* had been recruited from Harari and Amhara ethnic groups, and Salafists who have strong religious base among the Oromo aspired *mejlis* leadership on ground of demographic claim as the Oromos are supposed to constitute the largest number of Muslims in Ethiopia (Dereje, 2013). Since 1990s the growing influence of Salafism in Ethiopia seems to have worried the government. This is confirmed by the former Prime Minister, Melese Zenawi who ranked Islamic revivalism as the top national security threat to the

country, "... the most significant long-term threat to Ethiopia's security is Islamic fundamentalism" (Shinn, 2002).

The Sufi-Salafi conflict was not confined only in the city of Harar nor did in the capital, Addis Ababa. It began to knock at the door of South Wollo following the 1991 regime change and its subsequent provision of religious freedom. The Salafi preachers emerged as teachers and leaders in different towns and madrasa in South Wollo. The Sufi *mesheikh* in the rural shrines began to be challenged as Salafists taught strict interpretation of Islam in different urban centers (Ibid). According to Abbink (2007) the core of the conflict between Sufis and Salafists in South Wollo centered on the authority of Islam- which sources of Islam should be the ultimate authority that would govern the religious and social behavior of the Muslims? Following this, the first violent Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo was witnessed in the grand mosque of *Shewa-Ber*<sup>5</sup> in 1996/1997 where the local Sufi Imam was replaced by a new Salafi Imam on the ground of promoting *shirk* in the Muslim community. The Salafists gradually were able to control key Islamic institutions like madrasa, *mejlis* and other prominent mosques. Salafism then spread to other urban centers of South Wollo such as Mekaneselam, Aqesta, Wogidi, kombolcha, Hayiq and Degan while Sufism largely remained a rural phenomenon. Salafists were able to attract many young, educated and business communities using rigorous teaching of *tewhid* in a very rationalist approach. Beyond this, effective philanthropic service offered by Salafists convinced many urban poor to join the Salafi creed. The second Sufi-Salafi conflict once again erupted in South Wollo since 2011/12 with greater socio-religious and political repercussions. The radical Sufis (Ahbash)<sup>6</sup> with the support of the government were promoted to *mejlis* leadership at

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<sup>5</sup> Shewa-Ber mosque is one of the mosques in Ethiopia which had been built by the Italians for the service of Wollo Muslims in 1937 (informant, 25 August 2017).

<sup>6</sup> I use the word 'radical Sufi' to refer the Ahbash group as the behavior of the group fulfills the attributes of radicalism defined in the literature. This is because of two reasons. Firstly, Ahbash as a representative of the Sufi community adopted a more radical belief system which had not been seen in the history of the Sufi-Salafi interactions in South Wollo. Ahbash come up with unusual belief system of Islam which transgresses the conventional interpretation of Islam. In reaction to this, a renowned Muslim scholar and president of the world *ulema council*, Professor Yesuf Al-Qerdawe labeled Ahbash as a deviant faction. Beyond this, an academic scholar Timothy Furnish (2013) identified Ahbash as a deviant group with the mixture of Sunni, Sufi and Shia beliefs. Secondly, Ahbash exerted fear, marginalization and facilitated

the expense of Salafi repression. The new *mejlis* suspended the teaching of Salafism in South Wollo and many Salafi Imams were expelled from their jobs. Beyond this, many young Salafists were arrested after they were allegedly been accused of plotting terrorism (IAG & MoFA Report, 2016:35-36). Since the conflict has not been resolved yet and causing immense socio-religious and political implications, the researcher aspires to study the cause, dynamics and predicaments of the Sufi -Salafi conflict aiming at suggesting alternative intervention mechanism.

## **2. Preamble to the Problem**

Following the 9/11 incident, the US and the west in the context of global war on terrorism employed 'hard' and 'soft' strategies concomitantly. The former is represented by military measure on targeted actors (both individuals and states) who are presumed to be masterminds and sponsors of 'terrorism'. The latter is what is called by the policy community as "religious soft power" which is implemented through manipulating internal contradictions of the targeted groups. It is important to discuss the second one as it is relevant with the Sufi-Salafi conflict. "Religious soft approach" has a divisive strategy on targeted community through categorizing actors as 'moderate' or 'friendly' and 'radical' or 'foe'. In the context of fighting Islamic terrorism, Salafism has been scrutinized worldwide for being familiar with 'radical' and 'intolerant' while Sufism portrayed as 'moderate' alternative and a tool of counter terrorism policies in many Muslim majority and beyond (Philippon, 2018). On the contrary, this divisive approach has negative consequences on the unity and intra-religious peace of the Muslim community as the whole operation could not be possible without exploiting internal contradictions existed between Sufis and Salafists. The participation of the Sufis in the counter Salafi movement along with secular governments in the world

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government repressions on the Salafi Muslims in Ethiopia and of South Wollo. Moreover, my own personal observation on the anti-social activities and malpractices of the group on the Muslims of South Wollo is more than enough to label Ahabash group as a radical entity. Information generated during my field work in the summer of 2017 confirmed the destructive role of Ahabash in the Muslim community of South Wollo. These all convinced me to use such labeling. For further information, one can see the deviant behavior Ahabash in chapter four of this dissertation.

undermined the credibility of the Sufi elements as an ally of the Muslim community since many of the Muslims have begun to perceive the Sufis as “government puppets” and “power grabbers” (Muedini, 2010). In the context of Ethiopia, the government similar to their western allies implemented the “religious soft approach” to combat Islamic extremism at home (Abbink, 2014). The former prime Minister of Ethiopia, Melese Zenawi in his last parliamentary speech<sup>7</sup> unequivocally confirmed this very fact in which Salafists are branded as “intolerant and fundamentalist” while Sufis are labeled as “tolerant and moderate” (Melese Zenawi Parliamentary Speech, 17 April 2012).

### **3. Statement of the Problem**

South Wollo has special place in the history of Islamic scholarship in Ethiopia, which is even popularly known as the “*Al-Azhar*” of Ethiopia, equating with one of the classical Islamic teaching centers in Egypt. Islam is reported to have been more accommodative and tolerant in Wollo. This was mainly attributed to Sufism which had dominated the religious and social landscape of the Muslim community of South Wollo for centuries. Looking at this reality, Hussein exclusively reserved the nineteenth century Wollo as the cultural practices of Sufism with no fear of revivalist Salafi ethos, but Wollo is currently been affected by the impulse of Salafism (Abbink, 2007: 63-67; Hussein, 2001:73; Østebø, 2009:463). One of the confidential WikiLeaks cables has identified South Wollo in general and Dessie in particular as one of the hotspots of Sufi-Salafi conflict where the popular Sufi practices reported to have been challenged by the Salafi revivalists through securing support from the transnational Islamic NGOs. This is explicitly stated as follows:

*.... In Dessie, in the Amhara region (northern part of the country), [Salafis] are on the offensive against the practice of celebrating Moulid al-Nebi, the birthday of the Prophet. With support from Kuwaiti religious NGOs, [Salafi] activists actively preach and teach against this practice, which has been a popular custom in the larger*

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<sup>7</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w\\_kb78-XCVA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_kb78-XCVA)

*region for some 200 years.*<sup>8</sup>

Although it is politically loaded, the latest government policy document indicates that Salafists pose a challenge to the indigenous Sufi culture and even they are portrayed as a security threat<sup>9</sup> to the state as they were allegedly infiltrating the security, justice and other governmental sectors (MoFPDA, 2017). In reaction to this, for example, the local government in South Wollo took measure against a dozen of Muslim senior police officers who allegedly sympathized with Salafists in major towns like Dessie and Kombolcha in 2012/2013 by which they were unprecedentedly transferred to remote areas far in the country side under the pretext of demotion (Informants; x-Muslim officers, 2017).

The Salafi revivalist ethos in the last two decades and so, flourished in major towns of Southern Wollo such as Dessie, Akesta, Mekaneselem, Hayiqe and Kombolcha, and undermined the religio-political infrastructure of Sufism through winning more Muslim converts on their side and challenged the legitimacy of the Sufis as the communal leader of the Muslim community of South Wollo (IAG & MoFA Report, 2016:35-36). Although there is little attempt to understand the dynamics of the Salafi movement in Ethiopia—whether it has political repercussion or not, the global terrorist campaigns and Ethiopian narrative on terrorism has colored policy makers to brand Salafism as a major security threat (Ostebo, 2014). Even though there was no any religious based political party in Ethiopia, the government through the Ministry of Federal Affairs stated that the Salafi movement in South Wollo and other areas of the country reported to have been backed by some political organizations without specifying their names. Moreover, the government accused Salafists of working for political ends in collaboration with

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<sup>8</sup> <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/07/09ADDISABABA1674.html>.

<sup>9</sup> The Ministry of Federal Affairs Dr. Shiferaw Tekelemariam in an interview with journalists pointed out why the government labeled the Salafists as a security threat. He stated that the Salafists are major security threat because they are against the constitution, the practicality of equality of religion and peace and development of the country. See for further information, Addis Admas newspaper published on 4 *Tikimit* 2004 E.C.

anonymous political parties as it is captured from Ethiopian Herald in the following excerpt, “... *some political parties which fail to gain a state power through legitimate, democratic and fair elections have been acting to assume the state power in the pretext of religion... those who want to advance their political agenda through religion...as the cheapest gains of politics*” (Herald, 12 July 2013). How far Ethiopian Salafism in general and South Wollo in particular is a source of cross cutting security threat to intra communal and regional peace? This is one of the puzzles to be addressed in this research.

The killing of the local Sufi cleric, *Sheikh Nuru Yimam*<sup>10</sup> on 05 July 2013 was the peak of the Sufi-Salafi conflict, legitimized the government intervention, complicated the Sufi-Salafi relations and jeopardized the peace of the Muslim community in South Wollo. Following this very incident, the *Salafi* Imams who had considerable support from the Muslims of South Wollo were removed from different mosques by the government supported *mejlis* officials and replaced them with Sufi mosque functionaries. Some of the Salafi scholars and young students were deported to major prisons in the country, many flee to other towns and still others managed to escape abroad (Yemuslimoch Guday, 2013). A preliminary research report conducted by a group of scholars from Addis Ababa University in collaboration with the Ministry of Federal and Pastoralist Development Affairs confirmed this fact as follows:

*The religiously motivated problems evolved into inter-faith and intra-faith clashes and a series of protests by the revivalists and extremists. In order to control the situation, the government closed institutions accused of propagating extremist views; detained individuals accused of perpetrating*

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<sup>10</sup> *Sheikh Nuru Yimam*, a prominent Sufi religious figure was shot dead while he was coming from the mosque on the night of 05 July 2013. Who killed *Sheikh Nuru* is still controversial. He was known to have supported the government crackdown against Muslim Protesters. The government accused the Salafists of responsible for the killing while Muslim Protesters accused the government of killing the to blackmail Muslim protest. Nevertheless, the Federal High Court sentenced on 13 Muslims accused of killing *Sheikh Nuru* from two to sixteen years of jail in July 2013(see for example <[News %20A%20court%20in%20Ethiopia%20jails%20thirteen%20Muslims%20accused%20of%20killin g%20prominent%20Sheik%20from%20three%20to%20sixteen%20years%20%20Addis%20Standard.html](#) >)

*violence; and gave protection and support to the Sufis already losing to the revivalists. These actions, which enraged a sizeable Muslim population, drove some extremists underground or abroad( IAG &MoF &PDA Draft Report, 2016).*

Some commentators argue that the growing conflict between Sufis and Salafists attracted the interference of the government in the domains of religion by violating its secular constitution. Although the government defended its intervention was constitutional based on the provision in Article 27(5)<sup>11</sup>, it is reported to have activated the dormant religious conflict between the mainstream Sufis and Salafists into violence. The conflict has taken a political dimension when a Sufi-led *mejlis* invited a Lebanon based radical Sufi group-Ahbash with the support of the government to control *mejlis* in Ethiopia (Desplat, 2005; Furnish, 2013; Ostebo, 2011). Many Muslims argue that the new faction is a heretical group which violates the conventional interpretation of Islam and vehemently opposing the teaching of Salafism. They also believed that Ahbash was brought in Ethiopia mainly to counter the growing influence of Salafism. Consequently, the teaching of Ahbash believed to have exacerbated the conflict and transformed the dormant nature of the intra-religious conflict in the Muslim community of South Wollo into violence.<sup>12</sup>

The Sufi-Salafi confrontation before the arrival of Ahbash was mainly polemical and confined among the *ulema* in the premises of the mosque but now taking the public space. The radical Sufi leaders in *mejlis* channeled anti-Salafi abhorrence through a group anonymous Sufi-radicals (originally they were not from Wollo) who were coached with the doctrine of Ahbash and deployed in different parts of South Wollo. They had been even suspected as agents of the government secret service assigned on the

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<sup>11</sup> Article 27(5) stipulates, “ the government could suspend religious freedom to protect public safety, order, health, education, morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others...”

<sup>12</sup> I had been witnessing during my yearly based visit in South Wollo (Amhara Regional State) from 2011 to 2014.

Muslim community of South Wollo. They used to disseminate anti-Salafi speech in different mosques and public gatherings. Similarly, *mejlis* officials also demonized Salafists in many public gatherings to get the sympathy of government officials and Christian believers in their competition with Salafists. Salafists on their part attempted to counter the activities of the radical Sufis mainly using social media, leaflets, and personal debates at various social occasions of the Muslim community.<sup>13</sup> Generally, external interventions in the name of ‘protecting the law’-as it is claimed by the government and providing ‘doctrinal alternative’ to the Muslim community-as it is argued by Ahbash complicated the relatively better interaction (referring the pre-2011/12) between the mainstream Sufi and the Salafists and undermined peace and tolerance within the Muslim community in the region (Yemuslimoch Guday, 2010; Addis Raiye, 2014; Ostebo, 2014).

Unless there is a mechanism to solve the Sufi-Salafi conflict using peaceful means, the growing government manipulation of the conflict affects their interaction and undermines the social cohesion and trust within the Muslim community. Beyond this, the partial ill-treatment of the Salafists by the government in the long run potentially radicalize the Salafi group and led to feeding extremism through creating a human pool, and at the worst it could be responsible for the birth of Ethiopian *al-Shabab*. The Sufi-Salafi interaction deserves scrutiny for both policy and academic purposes. In this regard, the contribution of peace and conflict study would be invaluable as it is supposed to investigate the context, analyze the dynamics and generate alternative conflict resolution mechanism for the Muslim community of South Wollo.

#### **4. Assumptions of the Research**

1. Competition and intolerance hinder peace and stability among Muslims of South Wollo.
2. External interventions exacerbate the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid

3. Alternative method of intervention will promote peace and stability among Muslims of Southern Wollo.

## **5. Objectives of the Research**

### **5.1 General Objective**

The main objective of this research is to analyze the context, dynamics and predicaments of the Sufi-Salafi peace in South Wollo from 1991 to 2017 but more emphasis has been given to the post 2011/12 crisis of the Muslim community. The issue of the Sufi-Salafi interactions is analyzed using approaches of peace and conflict theories and perspectives;

### **5.2 Specific Objectives**

The following specific objectives are also set to;

- 1) Analyze the context to Sufi-Salafi interactions in South Wollo
- 2) Examine how competition and intolerance jeopardize intra-communal peace in South Wollo.
- 3) Find out the causes of the conflict and actors' interests, needs and positions in the conflict
- 4) Examine the response of the government to Sufi-Salafi Conflict in South Wollo
- 5) Identify the predicaments of the Sufi-Salafi peace and alternative resolution mechanism to the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo.

## **6. Research Questions**

The research on the Sufi-Salafi interactions in South Wollo is guided by the following questions;

- 1) What is the context for the Sufi-Salafi interactions in South Wollo
- 2) How does the Sufi-Salafi competition and intolerance affect the intra-communal peace in South Wollo?
- 3) What are the causes of the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo? To what extent do the needs, interests and positions of actors contribute directly or indirectly to the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo?

- 4) How did the government respond to the Sufi-Salafi interactions in South Wollo?
- 5) What are the predicaments of the Sufi-Salafi peace in South Wollo? How could the Sufi-Salafi interaction be peaceful in South Wollo? What type of conflict resolution mechanism should be implemented to promote peace in South Wollo?

## **7. Significance of the Study**

Many of the studies on Ethiopian Islam are produced by foreign scholars who distanced themselves from the reality on the spot or have little acquaintance on the nature and dynamics of Ethiopian Islam. Some times with the risk of generalization, Ethiopian Islam might be misrepresented as we are dependent on the sources of few foreign scholars such as Tirmingham, Donald Levine, and Haggai Erlich (Mohammed, 2016:27). At the worst, this could be sensitive and counterproductive if we apply them for the research of peace and conflict studies. For example, a research focusing on extremism might be subjected to generalizations, biases and misinterpretation unless there has not been a more balanced approach that could accommodate the views of domestic scholars.

Conflict as part of human nature is inevitable and aspiring to have peace as much needed as possible is crucial to human survival and development. Although religions are supposed to be a source of peaceful coexistence and tranquility, now a days it remains a source of pain, hatred, disunity, discrimination and destruction(Wuye and Ashafa 1999:4). As one of the manifestations of conflict in Ethiopia, the impact of intra-religious conflict is posing a major security threat for peaceful coexistence and now attracting the attention of many researchers. This necessitates the urgency of a peace architecture that could promote intra-religious peace. Thus, the role of peace and conflict research in this regard is tremendous to realize this endeavor.

It is undisputable that intra-religious peace contributed not only for the prevalence of peace and stability directly but also for the economic growth that the country reported

to have scored since the past few years indirectly. In connection to this, therefore, the finding of this study will have a policy implication for intervention on the side of the government. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil societies and other stakeholders who are working on conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peacemaking and good governance are also anticipated as beneficiaries of this study. Beyond this, the study will contribute to the growing body of academic work in this field or else it will serve as a stepping-stone for further researches in the future.

## **8. Methodology**

### **8.1 Research Design**

The researcher employed a qualitative research method to gain insight into the Sufi-Salafi interactions. It is helpful to understand deeply the “*participants’ lived experiences*” as it allows interpreting their social reality (Marshall and Rossman, 1995; Bryman, 1988: 8). The main focus in qualitative research is to understand, explain, explore, discover and clarify; situations, feelings, perceptions, attitudes, values, beliefs and experiences of a group of people. Generally, a qualitative research has “*naturalistic and interpretive approaches*” with understanding the meanings people attach to the phenomena (actions, decisions, beliefs, values etc.) within their social worlds (Snap and Spencer, 2003:16). The researcher prefers this methodology because understanding the Sufi-Salafi interactions has many interpretive tasks in relation to interests, attitudes, ideologies, coexistence and conflict of actors.

Ethnographic research design has been employed as it allowed the researcher to immerse in the social setting for some time in order to observe and listen to views to understand the social practices under study (Willis and Trondman, 2000; Bryman, 2008). In other expression, ethnographic research is utilized as there are cultural-sharing groups (Creswel, 2012:461). In the context of South Wollo, the Sufis and Salafis are cultural sharing groups practicing the same religion with different methods of interpretations. The field work covers major towns of South Wollo such as Dessie, Kombolcha, Mekaneselem and Hayiq towns. They were purposively selected not only

because of their prominence in Islamic religious teaching but also their sensitivity to the problem. The study is presented both in descriptive and explanatory approaches (Bryman, 2008: 23). The specific questions of the study require both description of some of the issues under study and explanations on why some things happen the way they do and how they relate with each other (Ibid).

In the study of this dissertation, I consulted both primary and secondary sources. As part of primary sources, I conducted a field work in 2017 starting from 30 June to 30 December 2017. During the field work, interviews and discussions with prominent actors, government officials and ordinary believers on the interaction between actors have been conducted and newspapers (both Islamic and others) have also been consulted in this study. Beyond these, few texts of actors, various works of Muslim activists, Islamic magazines, government documents (i.e constitution, proclamation and policy documents) and party magazines were also consulted. As part of secondary sources, scholarly literatures mainly books and articles were reviewed. For few inconspicuous issues, some internet sources were also consulted.

Islamic magazines like *al-Islam and yemuslimoch gudaye* (lit. affairs of the Muslims) were important sources of information. They were published once in a month on the religious, social, economic and political issues of the Muslim community. A number of Muslim activists participated on the production of the magazines. These magazines are important to analyze the relation between the Muslims and its *de facto* organization, *mejlis* specifically on the issue of *al-Ahbash* “conspiracy” and the “malpractices of *mejlis*” on Ethiopian Muslims during the period of the Muslim protest in 2011/12. The ruling party magazine, *Addis Raye* (lit. new vision) is cited to show the position of the government on the issues of religious extremism and the strategy of the government on domestic counter extremism. The Islamic newspaper *Salafiyya* was primarily consulted as it had been reporting the weekly activities of the Muslims during the time of the crisis.

Government documents were very important on the issues of extremism, peace and management of religious diversity. Government documents such as a policy document entitled, “*Ya-efadre Higemengist ena Yahaymanot Bzuhanet Ayayaze*” – literally means, “EPDRF Constitution and Managing Religious Diversity”, the incumbent EPDRF constitution and the anti-terrorist proclamation were important inputs for this research. The first (a policy document) document is produced by the Ministry of Federal and Pastoralist Affairs. It is primarily consulted on the government policy related to religious freedom, coexistence and extremism. The incumbent EPDRF constitution was also consulted mainly to analyze the constitutional provision of religious freedom in relation to the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo. Moreover, the constitutional provision of religious freedom was important to contrast with the anti-terrorist proclamation of the government. Last but not least, *Ethiopian Herald*, a governmental newspaper published in English language was also consulted for some information related with the government and *mejlis*.

The youtube sources were also accessed for the audio and visual records on the documentary entitled, “*the conspiracy of Ethiopian government and the Ahbash cult*”, the parliamentary speech on Ethiopian Islam by the former Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Melese Zenawi and the three confidential WIKLEAKS cables on the US strategy on countering the threat of [Salafism] in Ethiopia. The first was prepared in the form of documentary ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-\\_aSvQFmMuc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_aSvQFmMuc)) by Ethiopian Muslim diaspora consisting of two parts. The documentary revealed many secrets that cannot be easily accessed by ordinary believers and it was indeed invaluable for this study. The second was the parliamentary speech of the former Prime Minister Melese Zenawi on Ethiopian Muslims ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w\\_kb78-XCVA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_kb78-XCVA)) which was also important to know the position of the government towards the main actors of the conflict. Last but not least, the three WIKLEAKS confidential cables are consulted for their neutrality and as they disclose the roles of the US embassy on countering the threat of [Salafism] in Ethiopia. They were important to discuss the “soft approach” or what is called by the US Embassy “*countering cultural imperialism through cultural*

*programming*". This denotes that countering Salafi extremism can be realized through reviving the Sufi culture in Ethiopia. Amongst the three places mentioned in the cables, South Wollo was one of the focuses of the embassy's project. The embassy construed the Salafi movement in Ethiopia in general and South Wollo in particular as a threat to peace. The document was very important to analyze the US strategy and roles of actors in the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo.

## **8.2 The Study Area and Target Population**

South Wollo is selected to be the area of this study due to its precedence as the land of prominent Muslim figures and center of Islamic scholarship in the history of Ethiopia (Hussien, 2001). Beyond this, South Wollo takes a centripetal position in the recent religious crisis of the Muslim community in Ethiopia. It is one of the hotspots where intra-religious conflict remains active in Ethiopia since 1990s but emphasis has been given to the crisis from 2012 to 2017.

The principal target populations in this research are the Sufis and the Salafis who are the main actors in the intra-faith conflict of the Muslim community in South Wollo. Indeed, there are other secondary actors who are deemed to participate in the Sufi-Salafi conflict notably the official voice of the government is also represented in this research. A total of 40 individuals participated in this study. To ensure fair representation from the two antagonistic groups, 10 ordinary believers from each group (Sufis and Salafis) basing their socio-economic background (urban vs rural persons; businessmen, farmers, government employee, youth vs aged and male vs women) were participants in the interviews. Four government security officers (two of them are experts of conflict from the zonal administrative and security office, and the remaining two from the zonal police office) and five key religious scholars from each antagonistic groups (i.e Sufis and the Salafis) participated. Four Christians were also part of this interview primarily aiming at understanding the role of Christians in the Sufi-Salafi conflict. They were selected by the snowball sampling technique as they were considered to be knowledgeable on the

topic. Moreover, two independent scholars from Wollo University were part of this interview.

To this effect, multiple sampling techniques have been employed to select participants of the research. Although the question of representativeness is the shortcoming of convenient sampling technique, some informants were selected using this technique simply by the virtue of their accessibility. However, the technique is deemed most fitting where participants are accessible by chances to gather data from a convenience sample in an opportunity is “too good to be lost” (Bryman, 2008:183). A purposive sampling technique has also been used in selecting individuals who were presumed to be knowledgeable on the topic. Experts, academics, religious scholars and government officials are selected purposively since they are key resource informants for the study of Sufi-Salafi interaction in Southern Wollo. These informants were invaluable to trace the context, the dynamics and predicaments of the Sufi-Salafi peace in the area. The remaining few participants of the research were selected using snowball sampling technique. This helps the researcher to select few resourceful individuals and activists who were little acquainted by the researcher as snowball sampling is on the basis of reference from participants who have already been selected by the previous two sampling techniques. While generating data, the interview with informants preceded the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and this could give the opportunity to identify resourceful individuals for the latter. Basing the interviews, the researcher re-selected six resourceful individuals (two security officers, two religious scholars and the remaining two from academics) from the sample population to seat for the FGD held Dessie on 18 December 2017 and the second FGD conducted in the town of Kombolcha on 25 December 2017 consisting of four individuals (one religious scholar from each group, one security officer and the remaining one was government worker). Members in the two FGDs were selected using purposive sampling technique as they were supposed to be knowledgeable on the issue.

### **8.3 Data Gathering Instruments of the Research**

The data collection instruments employed in this research are in-depth interview, participant observation (both covert and overt), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and documentary analysis generally preferred because of their strength of getting large amounts of data quickly (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). In-Depth Interview (IDI) was used mainly with key informants who were deemed to have privileged or extensive knowledge on the issues under research. These key informants were purposively identified from members of the Sufi, Salafi, experts, academic scholars, government officials and security personnel. FGD was also used to enable us to acquire a wide variety of information on the issues of the Sufi-Salafi interaction across a large number of audiences in a short period and to come with the psychologically-oriented advantages of group settings. Life history was asked to serve the purpose of drawing rich and objective data based on life experiences of a few selected respondents (from Sufi and Salafi groups). Documentary Review(DR) was used to analyze both primary and secondary sources such as books, articles, legal and policy documents, official letters, magazines, newspapers, audio- visual documentaries and others documents which are pertinent to the issue of this study. Lastly, author's formal and informal personal observation (PO) on the setting is also part of this research.

#### **8.4 Validity and Reliability**

The question of validity and reliability is central in a qualitative research. The former is dealing with the accuracy of the finding through employing certain procedures while the latter concerns with the consistency of issues across different researchers. Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account (Creswell, 2013). For the greater validity of this research, I employed *triangulation*: this is an approach of ensuring qualitative validity by cross-checking the validity of different data generated through different data gathering instruments. This consequently helps to boost the validity of the themes which are established on the basis of converging sources. Therefore, data generated through IDI,

FGD, PO and DR in this research was triangulated for the purpose of enhancing the validity of the research.

### **8.5 Process of Analysis and Interpretation**

After data is collected through the available instruments, it was thematically categorized. Thematic categorizations are drawn from the major points which are raised in the research questions. This has to pass through four stages. Firstly, the data collected through the available instruments were written in Amharic as the interview was conducted using Amharic language. Secondly, the subscribed data on paper is copied on the computer using Amharic software and translated into English. Thirdly, the data is subjected to integration and analysis.

### **8.6 Ethical Considerations**

Although the field work was scheduled in the summer of 2017 from 1 July to 30 September, almost one solid month elapsed to convince informants that the interview with them would not cause any harm. It was unfortunate, however, I arrived South Wollo in the peak of religious oppression where many Muslims were horrified by the action of the government. Right in the process of the interview many of my informants were not willing to use audio and visual records in fear of any potential harm. Therefore, a bulk of information generated through the interview was taken using note-taking. In due process of building confidence on my informants, the role of friends and relatives was immensely important. Had it not been the support of friends and relatives, the task of gathering data for such sensitive topic would have been impossible. Sometimes I used to interview informants right in the presence of them. Beyond this, many of my Salafi and Sufi informants forced me to drop the protocol of naming and identifying the identity of informants. For the safety of my informants, therefore, I have removed information like name of informants, address, position and status. Moreover, some informants due to their excessive fear of potential manipulation of information, they restricted their openness on some sensitive issues related with the government and al-Ahbash. Due to the securitization of the Salafism in South Wollo, the suspicion and fear

of the Salafists was higher than the Sufis. As part of respecting the ethical principles and enhancing the validity and reliability of the research, the anonymity of many of informants are preferred to protect them from any possible harm.

## **9. Delimitation of the Study**

South Wollo is selected as the area of the study for this research due to the fact that it is the cultural center of Islamic scholarship in Ethiopia. This is because it is the home of seminal Muslim scholars in the history of Sufi revivalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and contemporary Islam in Ethiopia. As it is the focus of Sufi-Salafi conflict in the current intra-religious conflict in Ethiopia, Wollo can give us important specimen in the study of East Africa (Abbink, 2006:65). Surprisingly, it is the home of prominent actors of the two Islamic thoughts (i.e Sufism versus Salafism). Studying the Sufi-Salafi interactions in South Wollo might be part of the solution for intra-religious conflict in Ethiopia. The Sufi-Salafi interaction in South Wollo so far attracts the attention of politicians, policy makers and researchers as it contributes important inputs for the studies of history anthropology and counter terrorism. Therefore, the author in this research mainly aspires to answer some queries related to peace and conflict study.

Although there are many Islamic groups in contemporary South Wollo, the present study is confined only on Sufi-Salafi interactions from 1990s to 2017. The research only focuses on the negative aspects of their interaction and let the positive aspect of their interaction open for research in the future. By no means, I cannot claim that all views and positions of the Sufi and Salafi Muslims are incorporated in South Wollo rather they are represented by the views of prominent actors from the capital, Dessie and other informants were drawn from the zonal towns such as Hayiq, Kombolcha and Mekaneselem.

## **10. Limitation of the Study**

The limitation of this study is mainly related with the behavior of informants. After the crackdown of the Salafists by the government in the year 2012/13, many of the Muslims

in South Wollo during the period of the interview were not comfortable fearing the revenge of the government. They were over suspicious on the consequences of the interview though they had been briefed it had only academic mission. This greatly affected the quantity and quality of information as they extremely restricted their openness. Beyond this, *mejlis* officials and the government security offices had not been willing to make their archives accessible to the researcher. Informal interviews through the mediation of friends and relatives were more successful than the formal interviews and focus group discussions.

## **11. Organization of the Study**

The study is organized into eight chapters. The first chapter of this study provides background informations on the trajectory of the Sufi-Salafi interaction in South Wollo, the basic sources of the Sufi-Salafi conflict, assumptions of the research, problem statement objectives, research questions, significance, delimitation and limitation of the research. This section also discusses the methodology that the researcher uses to study this topic, identify the study area and the target population of the study and the data collection instruments the researcher used to generate data. Last but not least, the ethical issues are seriously taken into consideration during data gathering, analyzing and reporting.

Chapter two of this study is dedicated to the conceptual, theoretical and analytical frame works of the research. This part is completely detached from the literature part as they are perspectives of peace and conflict studies. The theoretical issues such as *frustration to aggression, relative deprivation, social identity and the realist theory of security* are utilized to explain the nature and root of the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo. The conceptual explication of this research also focuses on the issues of competition, tolerance, typologies of conflict, conflict prevention, conflict management, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, radicalization, deradicalization and extremism. Lastly, this section discusses the analytical tools that are employed to analyze data in this research.

Chapter three of this research dedicated to the review of related literatures in which important readings which are relevant to the research topic is thoroughly discussed. This section reviewed the development of Islamic schools of jurisprudence in the history of Islam, Islamic revivalism and its impact in Africa, concepts Sufism and Salafism, actors of revivalism in Ethiopia, manipulation of the Sufi-Salafi conflict for countering extremism in the Horn of Africa and the origin and impact of the Ahbash for the current Sufi-Salafi conflict in Ethiopia.

Chapter four of this study sheds light on the context of Sufi-Salafi interaction in South Wollo. This section has made discussions on the background of the study area, history of Islam and Islamization in South Wollo, trajectory of Islamic revivalism in South Wollo, pattern of the Sufi-Salafi interaction in South Wollo, the social and economic basis of Sufis and Salafists in South Wollo and how to distinguish Sufis and Salafists --by practice and belief.

Chapter five of this study deals with trends of the Sufi-Salafi competition in South Wollo, point out why Sufis and Salafists compete in South Wollo, strategies of competition in South Wollo and manifestation of competitions. This section has also made a thorough discussion on the Sufi-Salafi coexistence; identify the sources of Sufi-Salafi intolerance and manifestation of intolerance in South Wollo.

Chapter six of this study analyzes the the dynamics of the Sufi-Salafi conflict in which the perceptions of principal actors of the conflict are analyzed. It identifies the role and alignment of external actors in this conflict. This section has also analyzed the Sufi-Salafi conflict using conflict mapping in which issues of the conflict and the relationship of actors are plotted. Beyond this, the causes of the Sufi-Salafi conflict has thoroughly been analyzed as structural, proximate and immediate causes. Last but not least, it analyzes the positions, interests and needs of the principal actors of the conflict using *onion-model* analysis.

The last chapter deals with the predicament of the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo. This section focuses on how Muslims in South Wollo attempted to prevent a conflict

before it erupts and identify the challenges of preventing the Sufi-Salafi conflict. It also deals with the attempt of making the Sufi-Salafi conflict less destructive (conflict management). Last but not least, it scrutinizes the predicaments of the Sufi-Salafi conflict resolution in South Wollo.

## CHAPTER-TWO

### THEORETICAL, CONCEPTUAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAME WORKS OF THE STUDY

#### 2. 1 Major Theoretical Frame Works

Although there are many theories that could explain conflict and its causations in the study of conflict and peace building, many of them are drawn from other disciplines of social science such as social-psychology, economics, sociology, political science and so forth. For the purpose of this study, the researcher has selected only four theories which are supposed to explain the Sufi-Salafi interaction in South Wollo. These are *the theory of frustration to aggression, theory of relative deprivation, social identity theory and the realist theory of security*. The author selects four theories which are supposed to explain the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo on the basis behavioral manifestations of actors. The first three theories are deemed to explain the course and causes of the Sufi-Salafi conflict. Moreover, understanding the sources of the conflict most importantly is tantamount of knowing half of a solution to prevent manage and resolve destructive conflict. Beyond this, the realist theory of security is part of the theoretical frame work to analyze the reaction of the government to the perceived threat of Salafism. Let us outline them one by one:

##### 2.1.1 *Frustration to Aggression Theory*

The *theory of frustration to aggression* as one of the theories of conflict is deemed to explain the Sufi-Salafi conflict due to the fact that frustration as a psychological state triggers aggression when an individual/group goal seeking objective is hindered by any potential sources. The theory expounds that the failure to get food, territory, political power and economic recession provoke violent behavior. The nature of frustration might explain the type of goal and methodology available for achieving it. The intensity of aggression might also explain the depth of frustration. The more the intensity of aggression, the deeper frustration is (Jeong, 2008:48-49). Exponents of the theory argue that frustration may be suppressed in the form of withdrawal, avoidance, submission

and even acceptance if the original target of frustration has superior power. Even actors in power position might use aggression on inappropriate targets when they become desperate in their effort to eliminate the sources of frustration. At this point, aggression might be exploited for self-aggrandizement. When frustration is distorted, attacking another group remains a source of enjoyment even without the fear of retaliation (Ibid). Some argue that frustration is a learned behavior based on personal experience while we are interacting with others. Beyond this, influential role models can be a source of aggressive behavior. Moreover, aggressive behavior might be exploited for military purpose especially for the fulfillment of military success (Ibid). Who is frustrated in the Sufi-Salafi conflict in south Wollo? –Sufis or Salafists? How do they aggressively respond to their frustration? These and other queries are expected to be addressed in this dissertation.

### **2.1.2 Relative Deprivation**

Another theory which could explain the sources of Sufi-Salafi conflict rests with the *theory of relative deprivation*. The theory says conflict emerges when the political system consistently fails to meet the social and material expectations of the people. People's expectation is linear even during the time of decreased satisfaction as it is not easily suppressed or contained for a long time. This, however, leads to frustration that could be a background for protest and violence. The imbalance of expectation and reality on the ground trigger dissatisfaction with the outcome of violence (Davis, 1962:8). The other dimension of utilizing the *theory of relative deprivation* is in relation to the gains of rival groups. When the gains of a group decline in reference to others, violence becomes an outlet of frustration. The degree of violence may vary as per the intensity of deprivation. It can be expressed in terms of mild, moderate and intense (Gurr, 1970:257). The social stratification and reward system are also important sources of conflict. This happens when there is frustration as a result of disparity between formal status and the actual achievement (Jeong, 2008:49-51). How could the Sufi-Salafi

conflict be explained from the perspective of relative deprivation theory? This is due to the fact that the Salafists are reported to have been deprived relative to the Sufis.

### **2.1.3 Theory of Social Identity**

Social identity theory was proposed by Tajfel and Turner in 1979 with the assumption that individuals define their own identities with regard to social groups and such identification might work to protect and enhance self-identity. Beyond this, they argue that membership in the group is associated with the appearance of prejudice and discrimination related to such perceived group membership (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).<sup>14</sup> In relation to inter-group conflict, social identity theory expounds that conflict erupts when one group attacks and disparages others, driven by the psychological pressure of improving the relative status and power of one's own group in comparison with the significant others (Bradley, 2008). Bradley succinctly puts the link between identity and conflict. He argues that a stereotyped group with rigid and simplified conception of others might lead to social atomization- a state of identifying oneself as 'victim' and others as perpetrators. Thus, groups might identify each other with stereotyped terms such as hypocritical, untrustworthy, intolerant, uncooperative, negligent, arrogant, manipulative, totalitarian, discriminating, greedy, abusive, egoistic, extremist, and so forth (Bradley, 2008:11).

The process of social identification with the objective of promoting in-group relation at the expense of others might cause different forms of discrimination. This is to mean that to enhance the self-esteem of the in-group, the out-group is victimized to enjoy an inferior status. Desirable social values like trust, admiration and sympathy are given to the in-group and the out-groups are deprived of. This is because the status of the in-group is measured against the internal standards and expectations with the status of those outside the group. Conflict occurs when in-group members perceives out-groups as a threat to their existence, values and goals hereby maintain their social identity.

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<sup>14</sup> It is available at <[https://www.age-of-the-sage.org/psychology/social/social\\_identity\\_theory.html](https://www.age-of-the-sage.org/psychology/social/social_identity_theory.html)>

Although social identity theory provides an adequate frame-work in-group and out-group discrimination, the very process of self-identification would breed conflict. However, this notion is challenged by the fact that the number of identity is higher than the number of conflict prevailed.

When we examine *aggression to frustration, relative deprivation and social identity theories*, it is understood that none of the aforementioned theories could claim exclusivity. Just as much as there can be multiple sources of conflict, human reactions to conflict can have multiple triggers and explanations. Nonetheless, both theories are revolving on the same orbit of dissatisfactions.

#### **2.1.4 The Realist Theory of Security**

Although there are many schools of security that could analyze security threats in the international relations, for the purpose of this study it is better to confine our discussion only on realist school of security which is the most dominant school of security since the last six decades. The *realist school of security* is founded on four pillars. Firstly, realists do believe that the international system is anarchic in which the state is vested with the power of regulating interactions in and out of the state since the international system is in a state of antagonism. Secondly, states are the most important actors than other referent objects. Thirdly, all states are unitary with in the international system tending to pursue its interest. Fourthly, military power is a means of state survival (Donnelly, 2008: 150). This might give the confidence to say that state and power are the orbits of academic discourse in the school of realism. In other expression, all theoretical explanations on the issue of security are the derivatives of state and power. As Stephen Walt, a neo-realist scholar puts it, "*security has to do with the threats, use and control of military force in the context of the specific policies that states adopt in order to prepare for, prevent or engage in war*" (Walt, 1991:212).

The realist school of security identifies the state as the "analytical and normative" referent object in the study of security. This is with the presumption that the state is the main actor in the international relations and assumes a centripetal position on the

relations of referent objects within a given political entity. The basic idea of this paradigm rests with the logic that other referent objects within the state including human beings best defended if precedence is given to the security of the state (Buzan and Hansen, 2009:29). Kolodizeji rationalized the realist state centric security study approach as follows. Firstly, the political supremacy of the state organization for a long time legitimizes its preponderant position. Secondly, the state has a unifying power than people and other referent objects do have. Thirdly, as mentioned above, the international law recognizes the state than other referent objects (kolodizeji, 2005: 128).

Arnold Wolfers defines *“security is the absence of threat to acquired values”* How inclusive are the acquired values to be made secured- is it for instance all the acquired values of the state, including national welfare and national interests? Values are ranked by some security experts- prime value, core values and marginal values. Prime value is seen as prerequisite for the enjoyment of other values (e.g life, food, clothing, shelter)- who makes the judgment and how do you justify it? Value ranking is usually justified from the standpoint of allocating scarce resources. Writing from various perspectives, most experts argue that security is definitionally concerned with ‘freedom’ or ‘emancipation’ from threats to core value for both individuals and groups. Security is valued by individuals, families, communities, state officials, states, regions and so on. Security is highly political and there is also an ideological dimension to security debate (Omeje, 2015).

The contested issues of security are: ‘whose’ security? ; Security for ‘whom’ or for which values (i.e the referent object to be made secure)- the international system ?, nation state?, societies? Individuals?, culture ?; security from what? (the threat object)- protection from enemies? external or internal one?, protection against neighbors?, suppression of individual or community of different color or religion? , and how to provide security are important puzzles which dominate the academic discourse in security studies. The degree of security is also a concern of some scholars- how much

security?- full, absolute, optimum, partial, security and how do we measure it?, are they achievable? By what means do we provide security and at what cost; over what time frame? Neo-realist, Arnold Wolfers claims that these empirical specifications are required in security research. However, most security theorists limit their concern to two: 'whose' security and how to provide security (Omoje, 2015; Waever et.al, 1998:39-60). Therefore, this theory is primarily used to explain the government response in relation to the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo.

## **2.2 Conceptual Frame Work**

### **2.2.1 Sufism and Salafism: Concepts, Major Thoughts, Classifications and Conflict**

#### **2.2.1.1 Sufi Concepts, Ways (*tariqa*) and Classifications**

##### ***2.2.2.1.1 Etymology, Definitions and Origin of Sufism***

The etymologies of Sufism (*t asawuaf*) are many. One of the derivations and perhaps the most dominantly used by the Sufi community attached with the Arabic word *safā* which means "purity". This in turn leads to convey an impression "Sufi is the one who is pure in heart" while the majority of scholars and indeed the most usual explanation associated with an Arabic word *sūf* or "wool" from which the cloth of the first Muslim ascetics believed to have been made. Still others contend that the word is derived from the Arabic word *Suffa*, the verandah or porch of the Prophet's mosque in Madinah where homeless companions of the Prophet reported to have sheltered (Khanam, 2009; Martin et.al, 2004: 684).

There are many definitions in the literatures on the meaning of Sufism yet most of the definitions emphasized on the importance of purifying the heart and an attempt to gain knowledge of the divine reality through following the exemplary model of the Prophet. According to the definition of Abul Hassen al Hussieny, "*Sufism or tasawwuf is an attempt to purify the heart and to observe the inner side of the self in relation to worshipping God*" (Al Hussieny, 1932:52). Anne Marie Schimmel defines Sufism as "*the*

*mystical dimension of Islam.*” Sufism might have relevancy if it is understood as communicating the divine being through intuition and contemplation. Nevertheless, mysticism is no man’s land which has been in existence in the western and eastern civilizations. This explanation of Sufism as a mystical movement has got criticism if it is understood similar to Christian mysticism. The Christian mysticism is different from the Muslim in the sense that it is imbued with the “tyranny of individual subjectivism”. On the contrary, Sufism in Islam is active and has passed through various stages of “spiritual labor” to achieve the highest of the spiritual ladder (Schimmel, 1975: 4; Geoffroy, 2010:2). Although Sufism has many branches of knowledge, Ernst Carl confined Sufism only as the spiritual and ethical faculties exclusively attributed to the generations of prominent Muslim scholars. Carl overlooks saint veneration, one of the components of institutional aspect of Sufism, which sustained Sufism for generations (Ernst, 2006:1). Tirmingham in his subjective definition depicted Sufi as “*any one direct experience of God and who is prepared to go out of his way to put himself in a state where he may be enabled to do this*”. This definition undermined Sufism even as an act of ordinary individual. Beyond this, he implicitly depicted Sufism as a heterodoxical activity contrary to the orthodox principles due to the fact that the individual Sufi way is more important than the way of legalistic Islam (Tirmingham, 1971:1). This is, however, sometimes carried out by being deviant from the scriptural teaching of Islam (Tirmingham, 1971:1). Sufism is the esoteric aspect of Islam, distancing itself from the *zahir* (exoteric) Islam, contrary to the prescription of the Sharia for all fellow Muslims (Burckhardt, 2008:3). This individual search for God using one’s own way begins with the withdrawal of devotee from the worldly life and reflection on religious and social truth (Schimmel, 1975:5). Generally, these definitions indicate the means and agencies through which one can achieve the end. Although the principles on how to purify heart and worship God is less specific, the agencies of purifying and worshipping is clearly been through the teaching of the Prophet or the *Sharia*.

During the time of Prophet Mohammed there had been sincere tendency among *Sahaba*<sup>15</sup> to experience God with direct communication as if they were sensing the presence of God directly plus obeying the outer obligations of Islam such as praying, paying alms, fasting etc. It was through competing one's ego and following strict discipline they were able to feel the greatness of God and the weakness of mankind (Hourani, 1991:152-153)

During the ninth century, different trends of approaching God emerged in which the Sufi way was the most prominent one. The grandson of the Prophet, Ja'afir Asidiqi (d.765) was claimed to have been a prominent Sufi teacher to whom many Sufi elements referred his exemplary as the pious acts of spiritual excellence. Imam Ja'afar argues that the message of Quran cannot equally be understood. He classified four levels of understanding in the Muslim *Umma*; the first expression of Islam is for the common people, the second is the allusion for the elites, the third is the touches of the 'grace' for the saints and the last one is 'realities' for the Prophets. These layers of social structure portrayed as correspondent with hierarchy of knowledge in the Muslim Umma. The highest level of knowledge resides with the last two categories (Prophets and Saints). This classification later remained as one of the principles to erect hierarchical structure of Sufi knowledge and sainthood (Schimmel, 1975:41).

Although Sufism is the most popular concept in the Islamic world, it is difficult to offer a single answer to its origin (Nicholson, 1996). Some believed that Sufism has borrowed alien elements when Islam came into contact with the Eastern and Western Civilizations due to the fact that their ecclesiastical life was mystical in essence having a profound impact on the new converts to Islam in these part of Islamic world and soon rooted itself

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<sup>15</sup> The Sahabas were the close companions of Prophet Mohammed who embraced Islam before the fall of Mecca. Other scholars contend that the Sahabas were all Muslims in the life times of the Prophet. They were the first transmitters of *hadith* as they were eye- and ear-witnesses on the account of the saying and deeds of the Prophet. They are considered as the first generation of Islam followed by *tabi'ins*. The latter were the offspring of the formers. See for further information *the Concise Encyclopedia of the Muslim* (2002) .

in the Islamic realm challenging the position of Islamic orthodoxy(Jaffere, 2000) ; for example, some argue that the esoteric and quietistic tendencies of Sufism is believed to have its origin from Christianity(Martin, 2004). Beyond this, the ‘un-Islamic elements’ of pantheism<sup>16</sup> and the unity of being (*Wahdat al wujud*)<sup>17</sup>are important concepts which are supposed to be alien to Islam (Khanam, 2009). Sufism developed through different stages; on its early period, it was strongly ascetic and was the activities of the few who united themselves spiritually to the divine being. Later on, it was changed into a mass movement where 'saints' both dead and living were sought out miracles, power and various blessings.

As some Sufi scholars articulate, knowledge in Islam is divided into *ilm-e-sina*, ‘knowledge of the heart’ and *ilm-e-safina*, ‘knowledge of the Book’. The derivations seem to have asserted the existence of inner Islam due to the fact that purifying one’s heart is an inside job while the later one is an outward reflection of Islam. Similarly, scholars who are entitled to interpret ‘knowledge of Islam’ dichotomized as Sufis and the *ulama* (sing. alim) (Khanam, 2009). The former is claimed to be familiar with the knowledge of the heart while the *latter* is scholars of the ‘knowledge of the book’ yet one can hardly get scriptural basis for this distinctions.

#### **2.2.2.1.2 The Sufi way (Tariqa)**

According to Sufi scholars anybody can acquire the highest level of knowledge under the supervision of a *Sheikh*, also called a *murshid* or *pir*. A disciple who is under the guidance of a *Sheikh* is known as *salik* (traveller) or *talib* (seeker). Once the *talib* is admitted by his *pir*, he is initiated into a spiritual lineage, *silsila*. It is common to trace this lineage back to Prophet Mohammed. The personality of the *Sheikh* is the focus of a Sufi because both the physical and spiritual life of a *pir* is highly related with him (*talib*).

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<sup>16</sup> Pantheism is the belief that God exists in all natural things. It is a philosophy mostly practiced in the eastern religions especially in the religion of Hinduism.

<sup>17</sup> With regard to the Sufis’ philosophical conception of ‘*Wahdata al Wujud*’, the Syrian Muhammad Nāsir al-Dīn al-Albānī (1914-1999) labeled these group of Sufis as “extremist Sufis” (*ghulāt al-Sūfiyya*) who “do not differentiate between the Creator and the created”. See for further information the work of Joas wagemekers (2017) available at < <https://dspace.library.uu.nl/>>.

For example, the *Sheikh* prescribes the spiritual exercises that are required for the *talib* till he reaches to the level of *al-fana* (annihilation) (Schimmel, 1975; Khanam, 2009).

Sufism as a spiritual journey (*sair illah*) has beginning and end. The first part of this journey started with withdrawal from worldly affairs and having reflection on religious and social truths. Then, reflection is followed by mediation (*muraqaba*) by which Sufis are expected to cultivate important virtues (such as repentance, morality, trust in God and so forth) step by step. The Sufi journey lastly concluded with *al-fana* (annihilation) during which a Sufi is supposed to overcome his ego, erase his will and volition so that he is filled with God's vision, love and will. Even at the final stage Sufis claim union with God. It is at this level that Sufis are supposed to have achieved the highest level of spiritual excellence and ecstasy. This view of the Sufis remains the subject of criticism by non-Sufi Muslim groups as an act of heresy violating the teaching of *tewhid*. This is because Sufis consider themselves as part of God or they associate themselves with God. Beyond this, some of the Sufi teachings and practices such as a life of poverty, ways of submission to God's will, deep devotion, contemplation, nightlong vigils and prayers, nearness to God, divine inspiration and other-worldly visions are claimed to be debatable and incompatible with the deeds of the Prophet as it is recorded in the *hadith* (Woodward et al, 2013).

#### **2.2.2.1.3 Classifications of Sufism**

Sufism has ethical, philosophical and institutional dimensions. Ethical Sufism is the derivation from the concept of *ihsan* which refers to having good qualities in life in general. It is also mentioned as qualities of God and individual believer since God is identified with *al-muhsin*, doer of *ihsan* and loves believers who are doing well. Renouncing individual will and upholding God's mission is central in ethical Sufism. Even at this point the *Wahhabis* of the Salafi variant were gravitated to ethical Sufism. Individuals like Hasan al-Basri(642-728), Rabi'a al-Adawiyya (713-801), Al-Harith ibn Asad Al-Muhasabi (781-857) and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali(C. 1059–1111) were influential in this movement. The second category of Sufism is identified with philosophical Sufism,

a journey to investigate the ultimate truth in which metaphysical speculations and the relationship between the creator and the created are important puzzles of Muslim philosophers. The Sufis teach that there is only one ultimate truth known as *al-Haqq*, which is unidentifiable with ordinary observation although it manifests itself in creation. The Sufi journey justified the cause of philosophical Sufism since it leads to realize this truth (Schimmel, 1975; Khanam, 2009). Although there were many Sufi philosophers, the most influential and widely known Sufi luminary in the west was Ibnu Arabia (1165-1240). He formulated abstract Sufi mystical doctrines in which the creed of *wahdat al-wujud* (Unity of Being), an idea of attaining divine quality of perfection through Sufi mystical excellence was a prominent one. Many of the orthodox scholars including the Salafists are vehemently opposing this view as an act of heresy since it equates human being through Sufi mystical way to attain perfection similar to God. Although Ibn Arabi was identified as deviant in some aspects his religious thought, he emphasized the importance of *Sharia* in some of his works. He even forbade additional prayers which are not prescribed by the sharia. Moreover, he identified the inner and outer approaches of God. The former is performed through searching knowledge on how to perform the fundamentals of Islam as indicated in the *Sharia* while the latter is submitting to God through abstaining from evil deeds and being less concerned for worldly affairs (*zhud*) (Lukmanul, 2008 :65). The last category of Sufism is institutional Sufism which is marked by a hierarchically organized religious order known as *tariqa*. Although it has developed set of doctrinal and devotional practices from ethical and philosophical Sufism, it has myriad of mystical orders named after their founders. The first great Sufi order was the *Qadri tariqa*, founded by Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani (1071-1166). This was followed by the Suhrawardi order of Abu'l Najib Suhrawardi (1098-1168) and the Naqshbandi order of Khwaja Baha' ud din Naqshbandi and others emerged latter (Schimmel, 1975; Khanam, 2009). Saint veneration is central in institutional Sufism in which the saint both alive and dead believed to have extraordinary power to bestow *baraka* and solve the mundane requests of their devotees. This made the Sufi shrines as the focus of pilgrimage and worshipping in many parts of Africa and Southeast Asia.

Saint worshipping is the main bone of contention and currently the source of conflict between Sufis and Salafists in many parts of the Muslim world (Schimmel, 1975; Khanam, 2009; Woodward et.al, 2013). Studying aspects of interaction between Sufis and Salafists in contemporary Wollo where institutional Sufism flourished for centuries and still the identity of rural Muslims and assessing the impact of an urban based Salafi movement on the peace and security of the region is the focus of this research dissertation.

#### **2.2.2.1.4 Sufism in Contemporary World: Myth and Reality**

Although Sufism has millions of followers in different parts of the Muslim world, it has begun to decline following the advent of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to its incompatible instances for western rationalization and increasing consolidation of states. Few of these obsolete traditions which had not been compatible to western rationalization are mysticism and tales of miracles which has been used to support their ideologies regardless of their authenticity. None of these traditions, however, are unpalatable for educated modern mind. This notion has also been captured in one of the famous scholarly article entitled: '*Sufism, 'Popular' Islam and the Encounter with Modernity*' as follows:

*Western observers with some degree of knowledge of classical Sufi literature concurred with the reformers that Sufism was dramatically in decline and that many practices that went by its name were decadent survivals that appealed mainly to the uneducated and were due to disappear once modern education had been spread( Bruinessen, 2009: 126).*

Further for example, the Sufis used to argue that the heart is the seat of emotion and thought but science today has disproved that the heart controls the circulation of blood and ascertained mind to be the center of emotion and thought. This disparity between modern science and Sufi thoughts has made the latter to remain obsolete. However, Sufism had been playing important roles in the previous centuries to Islamic revivalism

and resistance to colonialism where the roles of governmental actors were very weak or non-existence (Weisman 2005; Khanam, 2009).

The anti-Sufi movement in different parts of the Islamic world reported to have been led by the Salafi group who accused the Sufis of being responsible for scholarly stagnation and political quietism in the Muslim world (Ibid). In reaction to this, there is a tendency by some groups to reform and coaching Sufism in a way to be compatible with the modern world through redefining its focus, objective and affiliation. The focus and objective of Sufism on purifying the soul remains less attractive to 'modern individuals' since the latter emphasize more on intellectual aspirations. In terms of participation, Sufism is less attractive to the rich, educated and the privileged. Nonetheless, it is proposed that the Sufi mediation might be relevant in relieving stress and promoting ecstatic experience (Ibid).

#### **2.2.1.2 Salafism: Concepts, Classifications and Major Areas of Confrontations with**

##### **Sufism**

##### ***2.2.1.2.1 Etymology, Definition and Origin of Salafism***

The word Salafi is a normative term commonly used in Islamic literatures whereas in the academic literatures it is dominantly understood as a descriptive label. The verbal meaning (i.e *salafa*) of *salaf* is, "to be overt, to be past" and the verbal noun, *salaf* and *aslaf* is referred as 'predecessor' or 'ancestors'—specifically attached with the first three generations of Islam (Furnish, 2013). However, many scholars argue that the word Salafism is derived from the Arabic expression of *al-Salaf al-Salih* (the pious ancestors). Salafists argue that the literal interpretation of the Quran and the exemplary deeds of Prophet Muhammad as it is recorded in the *hadith* are the ultimate sources of the "correct" religious conduct and reasoning while the Sufis emphasizes on metaphorical Quranic exegesis which is more metaphorical or 'compromising' interpretation. According to the teaching of Salafism any religious and social practices contradicting the Quran and Hadith are considered religiously reprehensible innovation or *bid'a* (Slayton, 2015; Wiktorowicz, 2006).

Scholars interchangeably used Wahhabism or Salafism to refer the current Islamist movement across the globe but they are different in their ideological and religious motivations. It should be noted that all Wahhabis are Salafists but not all Salafists are Wahhabis. Islamism both in its moderate and radical movements is not tantamount to Wahhabism. Although they share a few theological and intellectual doctrines, their difference is far greater than their similarity (Moussalli, 2009). Professor Mussouli argues that there is no conceptual clarification on the use of these terminologies till recent time in which the international community puts them in one basket of terrorism. As the writer puts, the need to be critical on the use of these terminologies:

*...world powers, policymakers, academicians, intellectuals, terrorism experts, journalists, and many others to distinguish between and understand the logic of the radical and the moderate, the active and the inactive, the jihadi and the peaceful, the takfiri and the tolerant, the modern and the traditional, and the rational and irrational (Ibid).*

The root of Salafism traced back to the time of Ibn Hambel in the eighth century, who along with his followers rejected the use of philosophical assumptions to interpret and understand the sources of Islam specifically of the Quran. In this regard, it is worth to note that the history of *Mutazilaites* who aspired to defend the orthodoxy of Islam using reason and metaphorical principles. Ibn Taymiyya was another influential scholar who laid the foundation of the Salafi creed and strengthened the opposition towards rationalists. *Sheikh* Mohammed Abdul Wahab (1703-1792) believed to be the first Salafi who established the doctrine of Wahabbiya, a sub-variant of the Salafi movement. It was started as a theological reform through calling people to *tewhid* and deconstructs traditional disciplines and practices that have developed in the history of Islam such as Sufi practices, theology and Islamic jurisprudence. Like his predecessors, he was against the rationalist interpretation of the sources of Islam. Abdul Wahab produced his book, *kitabul tewhid* in which he referred to the works of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayim al-

Jawziyya as authoritative sources (Wiktorowicz, 2006; Hegghammer, 2011; Moussalli, 2008).

#### **2.2.1.2.2 Classification of Salafism**

Although Salafism has diversified and complicated ideological and religious dimensions, Scholars in the field classified the Salafi communities into three typologies based on their activities. The first groups of the Salafi communities are referred as purists, who are interested on education and missionary activities (focus on personal, social and ritual purity in their own communities), abstain from politics and violence. Purists argue that the primary objective of the movement should be defending the Salafi creed and combating deviant behavior (such as *shirk*, human desire and reasoning). In relation to the latter, one can see contesting issues between Sufis and Salafists over the supposedly deviant behaviors of the former on some theological and ritual issues. Beyond this, the Salafists argue that pre-purification political activism will likely breed injustice and corruption because society is little acquainted with the tenets of the faith. Most importantly Wiktorowicz argues that there is a generational setting in the frame-work of intra Salafi typology in which the senior Salafists are purists whereas the dominant younger generations are in the second and third divisions of the Salafi typology. The second group of the Salafists is the politicos or political Islamists who are politically assertive through supporting a political party behind or form a political party of their own. Their activities mainly confined in certain political entities driven by the local/national political orientations. The politicos argue that they are better acquainted with the complexities of contemporary politics there by applying the Salafi creed to the modern context. There is strong assumption that the Muslim brotherhoods believed to have influenced the politicos to have a strong political stance or “politicized Islam” in 1970s and 1980s. The former argue that the purity of Islam only be maintained if there is real political engagement either through peaceful and non-violent strategies. The last group is Jihadi Salafists who want to change a secular state through the use of violent means. The Afghan-soviet war and the politicization of the Muslim brotherhood believed to have contributed to the emergence of radical or Jihadi Salafists. This group is

best represented by al-Qaida and other affiliated groups. They denounced the religious rulings (*fetwa*) of the purists as the “palace lakeys”, “the corrupt *ulama*” and “the *ulama* who flatter” (Wiktorowicz, 2006; Elischer, 2015). Nonetheless, waging Jihad driven by contemporary political contexts cannot make Muslim groups to fall within the category of radical Salafists because the history of Africa during the colonial period and even of Wollo-Ethiopia proves that Jihadi operations were even the tasks of Sufi scholars against foreign and local oppressors (Woodward et.al, 2013; Hussein, 2001). Generally, what is common for the different constituents of the Salafi groups is their desire to preserve Islamic values and identities.

## **2.2.2 Basic sources of Sufi-Salafi Conflict: Religious Interpretation and Politics**

### **2 .2.2.1 Religious Interpretation**

Sufism and Salafism are religious thoughts in Sunni Islam which have existed for generations. Both agree on the basic source of Islam, Quran<sup>18</sup> and Hadith<sup>19</sup> and the five pillars of Islam. Although Sufis and Salafists aspire to the implementation of the Sharia as the guiding law of the Muslim community, they differ on how to implement it (Mohammed, 2016: 229). The Salafists advocate the literal, strict and puritanical interpretation of Islam. In other words, they aspire to restore Islamic faith and practice to the way they existed at the time of Muhammad and the early generations of his followers (Brown, 2011:3). The Sufis on the other hand promote contextual interpretation of Islam usually through enlightened scholars. This is to mean that the

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<sup>18</sup> Quran is the scripture for Muslims, believed to have been brought to Prophet Muhammad from Allah(God) through the mediation of the archangel Jibril. The Quran believed to be the ultimate sources of Islam and all scriptures in Islam including *hadith* are subordinate to it. The Quran revealed through out the life-time of Prophet Mohammed (with in twenty- three-years time frame)(Newby, 2004:178).

<sup>19</sup> Hadith is a genre of Muslim literature that originated in the early history of Islam. It describes the saying and deeds of Prophet Mohammed. It is an important source of guidance in Islam next to the Quran. The task of collecting hadith has continued since then and even continuing till this time. Every single hadith begins with chains of transmitters called *Isnad*. The first transmitter in the *isnad* is often the collector who is supposed to be a puipe. The level of authenticity of hadith is classified into four classes: (1) *sahih* (sound); (2) *hasan* (fair); (3) *daif* (weak), with some subcategories of this class; and (4) *mawdu*(spurious)(Martin, 2004:285)

interpretation of Islam has to be implemented in context as it allows ‘flexible’ interpretation. Sufism as a mystical movement teaches the cultivation of intuitive knowledge of God as a source of guidance for religious and social behavior. The ritual and social experiences of the Sufi leaders also have wider applications in community and prime importance than legalistic Islam. The Salafi strict interpretation of the Sharia outlaws Sufi practices such as the intercession of the Sufi saints, the celebration of the Prophet’s and saints’ birth-days, over exaggeration in praising the Prophet and recitation of *dikir* (remembrance of God). Beyond these, Salafists prohibit listening to music, drawing human being, praying around the tomb and following a particular *medhab* of Islamic Jurisprudence (Tirmingham, 1971:1; Zajac, 2014:5-6; Dumba, 2009). In contrast to the Salafists, the Sufis are inclusive and accommodating local cultures into the fold of Islam (Mohammed, 2016: 229).

In the context of South Wollo, the Sufi uphold the contextual or ‘flexible’ interpretation of Islam through enlightened Sufi scholars whose religious and social rulings are binding on the Muslim community. This has made Sufis flexible to accommodate classical Sufi practices ( e.g celebrating the Prophet’s birth day-*meulid*, the days of saints, visiting Sufi shrines, chanting religious songs-*menzuma* , intercession of saints and others) and locally drawn ritual practices like using *chat* (local stimulant) as instrument of *du^a*(praying), appeasing evil spirits, celebrating local Saint’s day and time bounded burial procession rituals<sup>20</sup> (*samint*-one week, *hulet samint*-two week, *arba qene*- forty days, *arat wore*- four month and *amet*-one year). The accommodative and pragmatic tolerance of the Sufi in South Wollo is uncommon compared to the Sufis of other parts of Ethiopia and the Muslim world in areas of social (e.g inter-religious marriage) and spiritual practices (e.g cross-religious worshipping). Salafists vehemently reject these Sufi practices and accused them of responsible for such moral and religious laxity of the Wollo Muslims. Purifying the religious practices of Wollo Muslims and defying any form of *bid’a* (innovations) induced by the Sufis is the central teaching of Salafism. As far as

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<sup>20</sup> This has a resemblance with the time bounded burial procession of Christians( e.g *arba*-forty days, *semaniya*- eighty days and so on)

the interpretation and doctrinal beliefs of Salafists in South Wollo, they are not different from other parts of the Muslim world as they are dependent on the resources of the trans-national Salafi network (Abbink, 2007).

#### **2.2.2.2 Political Difference**

In the political history of Islam in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Salafi accused the Sufi scholars of corrupting the Ottoman order. In reaction to this, the Sufi scholars excommunicated the Salafi reformers as agents of evil and apostate. Although the Salafi movement at the beginning was not inherently political, it joined the political wing to resist the influence of institutional Sufism<sup>21</sup> which was widespread during the Ottoman times (Knysch, 2007:504; Zajac, 2014:5-6; Woodward et.al, 2013). The quietist tendency of Sufism in the realm of politics attracts many audiences in contemporary world. Although Sufis are noted for spiritualism and political passivism, the practice was not consistent throughout history. For example, many Sufi leaders<sup>22</sup> west and east Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century waged Jihad against colonizers and their local political rivals. However, the contemporary world where Salafi revivalism appears as an eminent threat to the secular government, the quietest tendency of Sufism is promoted as the antidote of extremism and a reliable partner for the socio-political moderation. In connection to this, Wagemakers makes it clear that, *“political quietism and doctrinal moderation, Sufis appear risk-free partners for [secular] regimes to cooperate with, in order to crack down on radical Islamism”* (wagemakers, 2017). This has greatly reduced the credibility of the Sufis as an ally of the mass and strengthened the notion that Sufis are stooges of corrupt regimes. Thus, the political dissent of Salafists towards the Sufis emanates as the latter were collaborating with government orchestrated anti-Salafi repression (Ibid).

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<sup>21</sup> Institutional Sufism is marked by a hierarchically organized religious order known as *tariqa*. For further information see the conceptual part of this dissertation (Woodward et al, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> century African Sufi leaders like Mohammed Ahmed of Sudan (1844-1885), Mohammed Abdille Hassen of Somalia (1864-1920) and Uthman Danfodio (1754-1817) of Nigeria were prominent figures who fought to defend their respective Muslim communities from colonialism. It is worth to mention prominent Sufi scholars of Wollo like *Sheikh* Mohammed Shafi of Jema Nigus who fought against the Christian influence, and *Sheikh* Tolaha Jaeffar of Qallu who fought against the religious oppression of a Christian Emperor of Ethiopia, Yohannes IV (Onapjo, 2012: 200 ; Abbink , 2007).

In the context of Ethiopia and of South Wollo, the government since 2011/12 promoted Sufis at the expense of Salafi repression. This is because the Sufis were perceived as politically 'risk-free' for the secular government while the Salafists were perceived politically 'dangerous' as they were allegedly accused of working to establish Islamic government. The renewed attempt of the government to dichotomize Islam between "governmental-Islam" (referring the Sufis) and "non-governmental Islam" (referring Salafists) is a clear manifestation to exploit Islam for political ends. In relation to this, the reactions of Sufis and Salafists to the existing political system were different. The Sufis became loyal to the government and worked to preserve the existing political system while the Salafists opposed and strongly challenged the government to respect at least the constitutional provision of religious freedom (Abbink, 2014 ; Ostebo, 2013).

### **2.2.3 Competition versus Cooperation**

According to Deutsch (2006) the concept of competition has two basic components. The first basic idea of the concept rests on the type of goal interdependence among actors of a given situation-what type of goal interdependence exist between actors; positive or negative? The second component concerned with the behavior of individuals in relation to certain conditions of competition and cooperation--what type of behavior actors reflect; peaceful or violent in nature? He further elucidates the concept of goal interdependence by classifying into positive and negative ones. Positive interdependence is referred when the chance of goal attainment of one is positively related with the chance of others while the negative one postulate that the goal attainment endeavors of one adversely affects the probability of goal attainment of others (Deutsch, 2006:23: Johnson, 1999:934). Besides positive and negative goal interdependence, he identified no goal interdependence among actors. This occurs when there is no correlation among individuals' goal achievements; individuals perceive that the chance of achieving one's goals is negatively related to the goal achievement of others. The absence of goal interdependence among actors promotes peace due to the

fact that conflict arises when there is some sort of goal interdependence (Deutsch, 2006:24). It is plausible to infer that the interdependence of goal as positive, negative and no interdependence correspond with the behavior of actors to be violent or peaceful.

Johnson succinctly states the way goals are structured as competitive or cooperative dictates the type of reactions individuals will have in the conflict. Deutsch more specifically categorized individual actions in achieving their goals as “effective action” and “bungling action.” The former implies when actor’s chance of obtaining a goal is improved while the latter entails when actor’s chance of attaining a goal is worsened (Johnson, 1999; Deutsch, 2006:24). Deutsch’s analysis predicts even the process and effects of the various levels of intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup and inter-group relations in the light of the concept of cooperation and competition. He argues cooperation tends to induce and be induced by mutual assistance, exchange of needed resources, and trust while competition tends to induce and be induced by obstruction of each other’s success, tactics of coercion, threat, enhancement of power differences, deceptive communication, and striving to win conflicts (Deutsch, 2006:26-28).

As competition escalates conflict, it alters the behavior and perception of actors in a negative way. It is usually characterized by autistic hostility (isolating oneself from others), negative substitutability (involves active rejection and effort to counteract the effects of another’s activities), self-fulfilling prophecies (holding wrong assumption that others are preparing to harm you) and unwitting commitments (holding rigid and irrational positions). Unlike cooperation, competition not only complicated the nature of conflict but also the process of its resolution. Constructive conflict resolution process is compatible with the process of cooperative way of resolving a problem whereas destructive process of conflict resolution linked with competitive way of resolving a problem (Ibid).

Researchers like Stanne et al (1999) in their focused analysis compared the effects of cooperation and competition on motor performance tasks. They come up with the

conclusion that cooperation not only led to higher levels of group performance but also promotes more favorable *“interpersonal relations, better psychological health, and higher self-esteem than competition”*. Nevertheless, they also pointed out some positives of competition in which they found that competition led to higher level of performance than individual conditions (Ibid). Beyond this, they revealed that the effect of competition relative to cooperation conditioned by two deterministic factors; the nature of interdependence of a task and the way in which competition is structured (Deutsch, 1949, 1962).

Competition can be divided into destructive competition or constructive competition. The former is induced by unfair and unregulated competition while the latter stimulates fair and controlled competition. What makes constructive competition different from destructive one is that both parties would be winners. This would give us a clue that all competitions are not bad if they are designed on the basis of the principle of fairness. Although some scholars express their concern over the counter productiveness of competition, it has instrumental value in selecting those who perform activities better. Ranking and evaluation performance is more compatible with competition (Dusetch, 2006). Competition is individual specific due the fact that it concerns with individual achievers-who achieves best? Whereas cooperation concerns with the cumulative performance-How much is achieved? (Tauer and Harackiewicz, 2004:849).

Another important point which attracts the attention of scholars is the impact of cooperation and competition on intrinsic motivation on performance and the vice versa. Intrinsic motivation refers to *“the desire to participate in an activity for its own sake, and puzzled by how individuals are enjoying a task and develop persistent interest in it”* (Harackiewicz & Sansone, 1991). The concepts of motivation and performance are not antagonistic and have reinforced each other due to the fact that individuals who are spending more time on their activity undoubtedly boost their performance (Harackiewicz & Sansone, 1991; Deci & Ryan, 1985; White, 1959).

According to Simmel as cited in the work of Hall, competition is an “*indirect form of Conflict*” in which both actors want to achieve the same price and avoid loss in their competition. Specific to religion, Hall identified three factors over which religious group compete each other. Firstly, they compete for converts; factions within religion compete to increase the number of their followers because they presume the number of adherents as the power base of a religious faction. Secondly, control over organizational doctrines or resources are another area of competition. The third one is competition for other advantages; for example, religious group might move to win friends and recognition from outside (Hall, 2003: 370-71). Therefore, it is safe to conclude that the discourse of religious competition is characterized by attraction, domination and recognition.

Hall asserted that religious violence out of competition is unusual but there are chances when it is amplified at a larger scale. It can organize broader social boundaries as was the case between Muslim and Christian communities in Nigeria. On the other hand, broader political events might exacerbate religious competition as it was the case between fundamentalists and moderates Palestinians (Ibid). Nonetheless, fundamentalist movements usually restricted within the domain of intra religious competition (Eisenstaedt, 1999: 102).

Hayden in his in-depth analysis on “antagonistic tolerance” correspond coexistence with the issue of competition because the former emanates as a result of intense competition between members of different groups. Looking the issue of religious competition from a political perspective, he concludes that secular politics antagonized competition between religiously defined groups because of its repercussion on electoral politics (Hayden, 2002:206). It seems true that religious divide in a society corresponds with the political groupings. This is because competing religious groups do not have the same political choice; one religious group support a certain political party that could advance its interest and the other opponent might support a rival political party.

The proposed research will exploit these concepts to analyze the nature, dynamics, and effects of the Sufi-Salafi competition in South Wollo. Moreover, it is used to analyze how competition induces conflict and jeopardize cooperation. Beyond this, how would the Sufi-Salafi competition would pose a security threat in South Wollo?

## **2.2.4 Coexistence versus Tolerance: A Project versus Strategy of Peace**

### **2.2.4.1 Definitions, Origin and Typologies of Coexistence**

Coexistence has been defined in a variety of ways. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines coexistence as, *“live or exist together, esp. peacefully, at the same time or in the same place.”*<sup>23</sup> A political scientist Michael Walzer argues, *“Coexistence occurs when groups of people with different histories, cultures, and identities live together in a peaceful way”* (Walzer, 1997:2). We can find a little bit elaborated definition in the work of the former grand Mufti of Syria, *Sheikh Ahmad Muhammad Amin Kuftaro*, stated that coexistence requires *“two or more parties desiring to live together in peace, without dispute, quarrel or conflict.”*<sup>24</sup> We can also get a more comprehensive definition in the work of Khaminwa, defines coexistence as *“a state in which two or more groups are living together while respecting their differences and resolving their conflicts non-violently”* (Khaminwa, 2003).<sup>25</sup> To sum up, one can extract three important things in the above definitions of coexistence. Firstly, at least two groups of people with different views, interests and identity should exist for coexistence to happen. Secondly, coexistence should be defined in time or place. Lastly, non-violent means of managing

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<sup>23</sup> See on line Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed on 25 January 2017

<sup>24</sup> Sheikh Ahmad Muhammad Amin Kuftaro, lecture given at the Muslim Christian Conference (Malta 1987), available at [http://www.kuftaro.org/English/wot/coexistence\\_in\\_mediterranean.htm](http://www.kuftaro.org/English/wot/coexistence_in_mediterranean.htm) , accessed on 25 January 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Angela Nyawira Khaminwa (2003) “Beyond Intractability” available at <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/coexistence> , accessed on 25 January 2017.

and resolving conflict or even tolerance should be portrayed as instrument of coexistence.

Scholars in the field classified coexistence/tolerance into passive and active. Passive coexistence/tolerance occurs when the relationships of parties are characterized by unequal power relationships, little inter-group contact, and little equity while active coexistence /tolerance is characterized by recognition and respect for diversity and an active embrace of difference, equal access to resources and opportunities. In the environment where there is passive coexistence/tolerance, institutions are not designed to support equality; consequently, unjust and oppressive structures can be maintained. These structures often impede community growth, peace processes, and the development of democracy. Whereas, in the environment where there are active coexistence/tolerance institutions foster peace, equality and social cohesion (Khaminwa, 2003).

Although the idea of coexistence is not new, the post WWI witnessed the wider usage of the term mainly in the political fora. The policy of “peaceful coexistence” was widely used in the context of U.S. and U.S.S.R. relations especially during the cold war period. Initially, it was a cover for aggression, but then it was developed as a tool for reframing the relationship between the two powers. In the late 1980s, the policy of peaceful coexistence included principles such as *“non-aggression, respect for sovereignty, national independence, and non-interference in internal affairs”* (Oydysseos, 2007: xiii-xiv). The concept of “peaceful coexistence” was first coined by Lenin of Russia but later it attracted the attention of many philosophers, politicians and academics in the post-cold war period. The British Philosopher, Bertrand Russell correlates survival with coexistence. Looking in the context of nuclear arsenal, he argues human survival largely depends on peaceful coexistence in this age of nuclear annihilation. Reviving Lenin’s “peaceful coexistence”, Nikita Khrushchev (president of the former USSR) as a sign of his faithfulness to Lenin’s policy of peaceful coexistence creatively puts it as a requirement for the progression of socialism (Ibid).

Conflict is inevitable in human life and even sometimes constructive if it is used as a tool of social change. It is also ubiquitous and occurs at the individual, community, institutional, and national levels. Many conflicts are localized and expressed non-violently. However, conflict in recent decades is widespread and expressed violently. This has compelled scholars in the field to reexamine the causes of conflict and analyze the theory and management in greater detail. Although coexistence cannot eradicate conflict, it can stop widespread violence. Coexistence exists before and after violent conflict. However, it is not static. Like all social environments, it fluctuates, depending on the level of social interaction. Coexistence exists in situations where individuals and communities actively accept and embrace diversity (active coexistence) and where individuals and communities merely tolerate other groups (passive coexistence). Communities that are not experiencing violent conflict can be located anywhere within this range (Khaminwa, 2003).

The end of the cold war heralded a new power configuration in the international system characterized by “clash of civilizations”- which is represented by Islam versus the west. In this regard, Huntington’s *“Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order”* has a paramount importance and has been defined in terms of the realist conceptual track though it was subjected to severe criticism. This meant the realist conceptual term “state” is replaced by “civilizations” in the post-cold war era. The following excerpt holds the core of Huntington’s argument, *“today, in the post-Cold War world, the critical distinctions between people are not primarily ideological or economic; they are cultural...”*(Huntington, 1993:1-5). The September 11, 2001 and other terrorist incidents around the globe underlines the need to find *“inter-cultural bonds and arrangements”* between the so-called civilizations. One can see compelling scenarios to revitalize the concept of ‘coexistence’ for macro political agendas in way to ensure reciprocal awareness and mutual respect for the higher end of averting conflict (Tyler, 2008). Scholars argue that a state of coexistence provides *“a psychological and physical condition”* for individuals, organizations and communities to reduce tensions, and ease

the tasks of peace makers to resolve the causes of conflict (Weiner, 1998). Although many of the scholarly works focused mainly on international conflicts, the basic principles of coexistence recognize diversity and non-violence that can be applicable in other contexts. As part of the project of peace building, working on coexistence greatly contributes to manage intra-communal conflict and lead parties towards social cohesion (Deutsch, 1977). To make it relevant to the research project, coexistence can be used as important conceptual tool to understand the Sufi –Salafi interactions and identify its predicament as an element of peace in the context of the Muslim community of South Wollo.

#### **2.2.4.2 Toleration**

As Horton defines, “*toleration is a deliberate decision to refrain from prohibiting, hindering or otherwise coercively interfering with conduct of which one disapproves, although one has power to do so.*” One can deduct important concepts from the definition of toleration. Firstly, toleration is a deliberate action by a tolerating subject to accept what is offending for the sake of positive reasons. Secondly, there is no toleration with the presence of coercion on the side of the tolerating subject. Thirdly, toleration excludes the option of power either on the side of the tolerating subject or the tolerated subject (Horton, 1993:4).

Hayden classified the dictionary definitions of tolerance as positive definition and negative definition. The negative definition encompasses the principles of non-interference while the positive one is attached with the concept of “recognition and respect.” Thus, it is plausible to conclude that toleration which is informed by ‘non-interference’ is not a sufficient condition for peaceful coexistence in a plural society unless it is accompanied by the principles of ‘recognition and respect’ (Hyden, 2002).

The concept of toleration is characterized by conceptual fluidity and paradox. The existence of objection is a precondition for the existence of tolerance. The absence of objection makes the issue a mere affirmation. It is neither indifference nor skepticism. But tolerance can be changed into indifference if there is no sign of disapproval or

skepticism and no judgment on the belief and actions of others. Here lays the paradox, the objection which is supposed to be wrong or bad in the eyes of others is still tolerable since it has positive reasons. Strengthening this, Mendus wonders *“how can toleration be counted as a virtue when it is based on moral disapproval, with the implication that the thing tolerated is wrong and ought not to exist? Why is it good to tolerate?”* Horton on his part succinctly puts the paradox of toleration as, *“permitting morally what is morally wrong”* (Mendus, 1989:18-19; Johnson, 2007: 6-7; Horton, 1993:4). The conceptual difficulty of toleration is also commented by Williams (2001) as *“the difficulty with toleration is that it seems to be at once necessary and impossible”*. It is necessary because there is no alternative for our living together since we do have conflicting moral, political or religious beliefs. It is impossible because we need to tolerate others till things are not difficult to do so or toleration is required only for what seems to be intolerable (ibid).

Sahin identified four components of toleration: the subject of toleration-who is the one tolerating and to be tolerated? The object of tolerance refers to the actions, beliefs and practice which are being tolerated-what are the issues of tolerance? The object of toleration can be qualified by religious, political, ideological, and sexual differences. Attitudinal expression in the form of dislike and /or disapproval on the tolerating object is another aspect of toleration in the classification of Sahin or else it remains a mere acquiescence. The last aspect of tolerance in the analysis of Sahin is almost similar with the third concept of Horton stated above that the tolerating subject has to show a remarkable restraint from taking action against the tolerating object(Sahin,2006:3-5).

There is strong correlation between tolerance and conflict. The two concepts revolve around the notion of differences. Hans Oberdiek argue that the failure of managing religious, ethnic, ideological, cultural and moral differences induce bitter conflict. The existence of bitter conflict in the society is an indication for the absence of tolerance (Oberdiek, 2001:40-41). Thus, it is safe to conclude that conflict and intolerance are directly related or they are complimentary to each other. Nevertheless, it is noted that

toleration has only preventive value of conflict but hardly eradicate conflict and differences. For the most pressing questions such as how can we live together at the midst of our differences? What are the common values that bound together? and how do we acknowledge or accommodate differences in pluralist community – are referred to be resolved through the principle of toleration (Johnson, 2007:1).

Toleration is one of the defining features of liberalism and even takes a centripetal position in the concept of liberalism. This is indicative that liberalism is incomplete without toleration. The definition of liberalism is quite complex that it is subjected to the tyranny of history and politics. Some scholars associated the definition of liberalism with the concept of historic enlightenment which interprets liberalism as “liberation through reason from externally imposed authority”(Galston, 2002:24). Others see liberalism as a political *modus vivendi* which legitimatizes diverse forms of life rather than upholding a single ideal of life (i.e. pluralism) (Gray, 2000:5-6). In liberal democracies, toleration has constitutional basis by which opposition parties are able to get the political space to challenge the government (Galeotti, 2002:2). Judith Shklar reduced liberalism only as “*a political doctrine, not a philosophy of life.*” She advocates personal freedom to be the ultimate goal of liberalism in which everyone has to decide his own fate without fearing external influence (Shklar, 1989:21).

## **2.2.5 Concepts and Typologies of Conflict**

### **2.2.5.1 Definitions and Concepts of Conflict**

Etymologically, the word conflict is derived from a Latin word “*Configere*” which means “to strike together” (Collins Dictionary).<sup>26</sup> We can get detail definition of conflict in the work of Kelechi that, “*conflict is a process of interaction between two or more parties that seek to thwart, injure or destroy their opponent because they perceive they have incompatible goals or interests*” (Kelechi, 2003:19). This definition seems to have

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<sup>26</sup> Collins on line dictionary retrieved on 1 January 2018, accessible at<<<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/conflict>>

emphasized on the violent form of conflict than the non-violent one. Goodhand and Hulme define conflict by putting emphasis on possible causes, *“conflict is a struggle, between individuals or collectives, or even values or claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of the conflicting parties are to assert their values over those of others”* (Goodhand and Hulme 1999:14). Stanger defines conflict as *“a situation by which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being attainable by one of the other but not by both”*(Stanger, 2011:234-236). We can get a more comprehensive and professional definition in the work of Johan Galtung and John Burton in which they define conflict as *“uneasy relationship or struggle prevalent between parties in pursuit of different or incompatible goals.”* Conflict entails actors and goals. Actors are many in which individuals, groups and states might be part of it. They may further be classified as primary/main actors and secondary actors. The former are parties who are directly involved in the conflict while the latter participate in the conflict indirectly driven by certain interests. Goals of conflict can be values (e.g religion and identity), interests, power and scarce resources- all being individual or group aspirations (Burton, 1990; Galtung, 1973). Thus, it is safe to conclude from the definitions above; a) conflict is the relation between two and more actors, b) conflict is a goal-oriented phenomena in which actors’ incompatible interest is central. Conflict is variously identified by key terminologies like disagreement, uneasy relation, struggle, incompatibility and so forth.

The bases of conflict are many; conflict can be based on real, imagined, misperceived, misunderstood, fabricated or exaggerated differences. Conflict occurs at all levels of human relationships and society: marriage, family, community, occupational place, religion, state and levels of government, business, international arena, etc. Most conflicts start from articulation of dissatisfaction or grievance (real or imagined) within the existing system or relationship. If unaddressed or badly managed on the onset, the conflict grows into a normal cycle or set of cycles. Often times, prior to the manifestation or open articulation of conflict, there are some latent conditions or structures underpinning it – e.g. feelings of injustice (Galtung, 1969:6 &1990: 27).

There are two basic debates among scholars on the nature of conflict. The first being whether conflict is inevitable in human society or not, leading scholars tend to make a distinction between conflict and violent conflict. Conflict experts explain about incompatibility or differences in goals, views, methods of goal attainment, etc. Violent conflict is about the use or resort to force to pursue the observed differences. Many experts argue that conflict is inevitable in society but violent conflict is not. Most realists and (neo-) Marxists are of the view that both conflict and violent conflict are inevitable. The second debate lies on the negativity of conflict; many scholars make a distinction between constructive (positive) conflict and destructive (negative) conflict. Constructive conflict, usually defined from the standpoint of the victim, aims at achieving more desirable and just social order – liberty or freedom, justice, human and political rights, collective self-determination, etc. The content and limit of a just social order is itself a major debate that radically divides exponents.

Most neo-liberal scholars limit ‘a just social order’ to one that guarantees liberal democratic rights or duties to citizens, and obligations to states. A major issue of concern in constructive violent conflict is how to ensure proportionality in the application of force to minimize collateral damage. Most leftist scholars define ‘just social order’ as the one that minimizes or aims to eradicate class inequality, guarantees wealth redistribution, human security, etc. Destructive (negative) conflict has a more highly contested definitional space. But it largely includes violent crime, human rights violation, gender-based violence, unjust wars and all sorts of retrogressive conflict. Most Pacifists<sup>27</sup> regard all sorts of violent conflict as negative and therefore destructive. They also believe that all conflicts are resolvable and that resolution can be attained by peaceful means. Many critical theorists also believe in the universal resolvability [arguably, eradicability] of conflicts. Exponents argue that conflict resolution is not only possible in all cases, but significantly desirable for change, emancipation and

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<sup>27</sup> Pacifists are those who are advocating the principles of Pacifism. It is the moral belief & position that all forms of war and violence are unjustifiable & that all disputes can be resolved by peaceful means.

transformation of society. Hence, we simply need to get the right specialists, provide them with sufficient resources and space to apply the right methods for any conflict to be resolved. Most realists/behaviourists dismiss the idea of universal resolvability of conflicts as utopian proponents argue that while some conflicts can be permanently resolved, others are intractable and therefore can only be managed and contained. Easily manageable and resolvable conflicts are usually said to be interest-based disputes [basic needs approach]. Behaviourists like John Burton have propounded a theory of protracted and intractable conflict (Ibid).

#### 2.2.5.2 Typologies of Conflict

Scholars in the field identified three types of conflict on the basis who or what causes conflict & why and how agents, intentions and processes contribute to conflict:

- A. Direct violence** is the application of force and various forms of violation to cause physical, emotional and psychological harm or death (Human agent). Direct violence can be exemplified by children who are murdered in war. It is more concerned with the visible effect of violence (Galtung, 1990:6).
- B. Structural Violence** is mostly understood as *“the systematic constraint on human potential due to economic and political structures”* (Ibid). It is subtle and embedded in the structures of society and state policies which cause human suffering and avoidable gradual death (structural agent). Structural violence can be exemplified by children die of starvation. Structural violence has invisible root and it is the foundation of violence. In a broader sense, it goes beyond the agents and intentions since it is ‘built into’ structures, institutions, ideologies, and histories (Ibid).
- C. Cultural Violence** is cultural norms, practices & traditions that cause discrimination, fear, suffering and injustice. This can be exemplified by a human sacrifices offered to fetish god. We end direct violence by changing conflict behaviour, structural violence by removing structural contradictions and injustices, and cultural violence by changing attitudes (Ibid).

We can get other classifications of violence across literatures such as legitimate versus illegitimate violence, visible versus invisible violence, necessary versus useless violence, sensible versus irrational violence, public versus private violence, constructive versus destructive violence, Interpersonal Conflict versus Intrapersonal, International versus international. One can understand the conceptual difficulty in categorizing violence because many factors believed to have affected the typology of violence. Amongst this subjectivity of categorization, theories advocated by authors, the influence of culture and gender dynamics and others are mentioned (Burton, 1990; Appleby 1997:212).

### **2.2.6. Conflict Prevention**

Although there are many definitions of conflict prevention, the definitions of David Carment and Albrecht (2003) and Michael Lund(2002) are widely used and more inclusive. David Carment and Albrecht Schnabel define conflict prevention as, *“a medium and long-term proactive operational or structural strategy undertaken by a variety of actors, intended to identify and create the enabling conditions for a stable and more predictable international security environment.”* We can also find another wider definition in the work of Michael Lund as follows;

*any structural or intercessory means to keep intrastate or interstate tension and disputes from escalating into significant violence and use of armed forces, to strengthen the capabilities of potential parties to violent conflict for resolving such disputes peacefully , and to progressively reduce the underlying problems that produce these issues and disputes”(as cited in Wallensteen and Moller, 2003:8).*

The first definition confirms that conflict prevention is subjected to a tyranny of time as it is framed into long and short term packages. Beyond this, it underlines that conflict prevention is not carried out only by a handful of actors. However, the two definitions focus on controlling situations before it relapses into violence and both definitions ascertains that creating stable or peaceful condition is the end of conflict prevention.

Scholars in the field classified conflict prevention into direct /operational prevention and structural prevention. The former refers to measures that are aimed at preventing short-term, often imminent, escalation of a potential conflict. These are measures like immediate sending high-level diplomatic missions to mediate between parties, using economic tools such as sanctions, inducements, or collecting weapons and demobilizing fighting units. The latter focuses on more long term measures that address the underlying causes of a potential conflict along with potentially escalating and triggering factors such as dealing with poverty, political repression and uneven distribution of resources (Andrelini and Stanski, n.d).

### **2.2.7 Conflict Management**

According to Tanner conflict management entails, *“the limitation, mitigation and/or containment of a conflict without necessarily solving it”* (Tanner, 2001). This indicates that conflict management is preconditions for conflict resolution. Conflict management does not necessarily imply avoidance or termination of conflict rather it engaged in changing its destructive nature to constructive in the mode of interaction. Although conflict management can not necessarily resolve all conflicts, it would help to deter the odds of non-productive escalations. It involves acquiring skills related to conflict resolution, self-awareness about conflict modes, conflict communication skills and establishing a structure for management of conflict in our environment (The Foundation Coalition, 2012).<sup>28</sup> Scholars in the field identified five modes of conflict management that could be used in our day to day life (Jeong, 2008: 30-34). These are avoidance /withdrawal, competition, accommodation, negotiation and collaboration. Let us see them one by one:

#### **2.2.7.1 Avoidance or withdrawal(leave well enough alone)**

Avoidance mode of conflict management requires one of the actors to remain inaction or an ignorance of unfavorable issues by being unresponsive. In the state of avoidance parties have low assertiveness and low cooperation. As individuals /parties lack

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<sup>28</sup> “Understanding Conflict and Conflict Management” is available at <http://www.foundationcoalition.org/teams>

confidence in managing conflict, they usually avoid conflicts due to fear of engagement. This happens when parties evaluate outcome of the contest is negative in comparison to the cost invested. Avoiding interaction with adversaries results from a decreased commitment to conflict. Avoidance mode of conflict management is appropriated when you have issues of low importance, to reduce tensions, to buy some time, or when you are in a position of lower power. Avoidance mode of conflict management requires skills such as the ability to withdrawal, sidestep issues, the ability to leave things unresolved and sense of timing (Ibid).

#### **2.2.7.2 Competition (Might makes right)**

Competing mode of conflict management is focusing on defeating adversaries through exposing their wrongness. It is characterized by high assertiveness and low cooperation. The failure of one is meant the strength of the other group. Competing mode of conflict management is required when swift actions sought to be taken, when unpleasant decisions ought to be made, when important issues sought to be handled, or when one is advancing self-interests. A type of win-loss approach of a zero-sum game is applied in this type of conflict management in which one would be dominant at the expense of others. In a situation when there is imbalance of power the stronger party might weaken the resistance of the weaker party. Realists argue that competition should be framed in a way to deter aggressive behaviors through infusing fear of retaliation. Skills which are needed at this level are arguing or debating, using rank or influence, asserting opinions, standing on your ground and stating one's position clearly(Ibid).

#### **2.2.7.3 Accommodation (kill your enemies with kindness)**

The accommodating mode of conflict management is needed when parties are promoting shared interests to achieve mutual goals. It is characterized by low assertiveness and high cooperation. In accommodation, maximum efforts are made to satisfy each party through the strategy of negotiation. In other words, parties might put aside their exclusive interest for mutual benefit. Accommodating mode is more preferable to avoid violent conflict as parties neither loss nor wine in their concessions. If a party losses what it deserves, a 'quick fix' solution might be used for the sake of

rectify misses. Accommodating mode is appropriate to show reasonableness, develop performance, create good will, or keep peace. Accommodating mode is sometimes applied when issues are deemed to have little importance. The skills required at this level are forgetting your desires, selflessness, ability to yield and obeying orders (Ibid).

#### **2.2.7.4 Compromise or Negotiation(split the difference)**

Negotiation or compromise is an act of offering one's concessions in exchange for considering other's interest seriously. It is considered as the investment of inducing or convincing others to collaborate without any threat of force and bestows only positive inducements. Appeasement as part of compromise lowers one's own interests, deviating from original demands or goals but it can serve to mitigate or defuse an imminent threat of peace. Compromise is characterized by moderate assertiveness and moderate cooperation. Compromise is appropriate when we are dealing with issues of moderate importance, when you have equal power status, or when you have a strong commitment for resolution. It is also used as a temporary solution when there are time constraints. The skills required for at this level are negotiating, finding a middle ground, assessing value and making concessions (Ibid).

#### **2.2.7.5 Collaboration (two heads are better than one)**

A collaborative mode of conflict management seeks a win-win outcome as it is backed by shared information about their priorities. It is the opposite of competition as the latter promotes a win-loss outcome. Basing common ground and trust in collaboration mode, parties might enjoy mutual satisfaction. Collaboration mode of conflict management is characterized by high assertiveness and high cooperation. The creative solution for the conflict would not be generated by a single individual/group. Although it is regarded as the best conflict management mode to use, it is constrained by the available time and energy. Therefore, the collaborating mode should be used when the conflict allows appropriate time and energy. Skills that are required at this level are non-threatening confrontation, identifying concerns and analyzing input (Ibid).

### **2.2.8 Managing Religious Conflict**

None of the above modes of conflict management are mutually exclusive in the context of intra-religious conflict in South Wollo. Rather actors of the conflict might use in times when situations demand. Avoidance mode of conflict management can be used if there is imbalance of power in the relationship of actors. The balance of power in the context of South Wollo for example was in favor of the Sufis as they were supported by the government structure. Accommodating mode of conflict management seems appropriate to transform intra-religious conflict as it promotes reasonableness, performance and peace initiatives. Drawing antagonist groups to own these values might help to manage religious conflict. Beyond this, peace practitioners should help actors to develop skills of self-restraint and respecting orders (Tanner, 2001). The overall outcome of conflict management through accommodation would help the effort of building genuine civic organization and leadership. In the context of the Sufi-Salafi conflict for example, *mejlis* as a civic organization is allegedly accused of embezzlement and marginalization. Coward and Smith further continue to argue conflict management involves peace enforcement and peacekeeping operations though it is the underutilized role of religious actors (Coward and Smith, 2004:6). Negotiation might be helpful to resolve intra-religious conflict to the extent of moving one step ahead just for the sake of achieving peace or it might provide temporary solution as for example for the conflict between Sufis and Salafists in South Wollo. Collaboration can be used as one of the best mode of conflict management in the Muslim community of South Wollo since it allows all actors to win. If collaboration is based on common ground and high level of trustship, the intra-religious conflict in South Wollo would genuinely be resolved.

### **2.2.9 Conflict Resolution**

What is conflict resolution? Many scholars define conflict resolution differently. How-Jong (2009) defines conflict resolution as, *“the resolution of the underlying incompatibilities in a conflict and mutual acceptance of each party’s existence”*. Almost a similar definition is offered by Wallensteen (1998). He defines conflict resolution as, *“a situation where the conflicting parties enter into an agreement that solves their central incompatibilities, accept each other’s continued existence as parties and cease all violent*

*action against each other*". Still we can get a more detail definition in the work of Scott Appleby who views conflict resolution as an act of *"removing as much as possible of the inequalities between the disputants by means of mediation, negotiation, advocacy and testimony on behalf of one or more parties to a conflict"* (Appleby, 1997:212). One can deduct three important crucial issues in the above definitions. Firstly, the root cause of the conflict has to be addressed in conflict resolution. Secondly, a conflict resolution has to ensure the continued existence of parties in the conflict. Thirdly, a conflict resolution has to cease all forms of violence (HowJong, 2010: 9).

Although there are many conflict resolution approaches, we can get a more inclusive and detailed assessment in the work of Jeong. He identified three approaches of settling conflict. The first is "the right-based approach" in which protection of right is central for the restoration of peace. This might comprise approaches like litigation and arbitration to grievance procedures. Restoring justice to the victims requires confrontational strategies against the perpetrators. This is because the latter could either deny their crimes or re-avenge victims. He also forwards mechanisms of rectifying violations of rights through recognizing *"past abuses, apologies, compensation and restoring the dignity of the victims"*. Nonetheless, he asserted issues like the absence of faire judicial system and imbalance of power between victims and abusers hamper the effectiveness of right-based approach through litigation. The second approach Jeong recommends is the use of "the interest- based approach" which induces a bargaining model palatable for institutional, industrial, matrimonial and other types of disputes. Some say even "interest- based approach" is more suitable for conflicts over the contest of power. Here, negotiation and mediation led actors of the conflict to have a compromise. Beyond this, it is claimed to offer a peaceful environment to actors of the conflict due to the fact that they develop their own rules and guidelines. The last one is "the need-based approaches" in which less tangible issues like self- esteem and respect are central. Respecting identity and human needs for survival and wellbeing plays a centripetal position in maintaining equilibrium and coexistence with the society (Jeong, 2010:132). However, the above three approaches are constrained by the nature and

structure of the conflict in which identifying which approach for what type of conflict remains crucial. Misusing of these approaches might lead the task of conflict resolution unsuccessful.

#### **2.2.10 Peace and Conflict**

The word peace is an elusive term which carries myriad of concepts. This consequently makes the task of defining the term very difficult. Nonetheless, Galtung and others have made important distinction between “positive peace” and “negative peace”. They have made this distinction by taking ‘war’ as a major point of reference. Beyond this, justice, equity and harmony are taken as in puts of this distinction. “Positive peace” is not only the absence of war but also incorporates other desirable variables like harmony, equity and justice while “negative peace” is characterized by the absence of war, pervasive injustice, inequity and personal discord and dissatisfaction. The absence of war is a common denominator for both positive and negative peace. Although not always, peace is the antithesis of war, and a background on which other issues of concern are measured. For example, the presence of robust justice in the society could only be understood if there is peace. Beyond this, peace is a linchpin of economic equity, political stability and social harmony without which they are hardly been tasted. The issue of peace is subjected to continuous peacekeeping and peacemaking efforts coupled with ethical transformation at personal and societal level. Pacifism with non-violent means is one of the mechanisms of promoting peace (Galtung, 2007:5-7).

There are many theories of peace in international relations with diverse interpretations and applications and of which the following three are the most dominant. The first and the most widely applied one is the realist theory of peace. Exponents argue that peace cannot be achievable due to “*inherent defects of human being and institutions*”. This is to mean that there is an evil inclination on the nature of human being and peace is achievable only using force and other controlling mechanisms, and that is why the *realist peace* is referred to us ‘victor’s peace’. The foundation of peace in the world today rooted in WWII because the victors in the war forced others to accept their own

version of peace. In contrast to realist view, idealists argue that peace is part of human nature *“harmony and cooperation are inherent in human nature and society.”* This provides a hint that peace is achievable without necessarily applying force through cultivating the virtues of harmony and cooperation in human relations. The third distinct theory of peace is the Marxist theory in which peace is perceived as the upshot of class antagonism where there is structure that promotes economic and class domination. Although there are contending views on how to achieve peace between Marxist and Post Marxist scholars through either using ‘radical revolution’ or ‘peaceful reformation’ respectively, promoting social and economic justice is the only way of achieving peace ( Richmond, 2008).

The notion of absolute peace remains ideal and cannot be realized at all. As some say it *“is an illusion, or delusion or ghost-like.”* This is due to the existence of pro and anti-peace dichotomy of human natures and cultures. At the individual level, the behavior of human being subjected to internal (covers intra-psycho to hormonal settings of human being) and external (socio- cultural) variables. This is overlapping with the concept of conflict due to the fact that peace is more related with compatible goals. What puzzled scholars of peace and conflict is the source of these goals. The answer rests with nature (as Darwin postulates), culture (as Freud articulates) and structure (as Marx remarks). Darwin argues that the sources of these goals are natural need for survival. Freudian theory argues that the sources of these goals are transmitted values. Still, Marxian theory associated the source with structure driven interests. This might give us a concluding remark that actors’ goals derived from nature as it is expressed in terms of basic human needs, culture as it is represented by a set of values and structure as it is manifested in terms of class interest. This might give us the conclusion that both peace and conflict starts with goal aspirations (Galtung, 2007:16).

### **2.2.11 Peace-Building**

What is peace-building? It is *“a systematic process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the reoccurrence of violence by addressing the root*

*causes and effects of conflict*" (Oberschall, 2007: 187). According to John Paul Lederach, "peace-building is a process that is made up of a multiplicity of interdependent roles, functions, and activities, with the goal to create and sustain transformation, and the movement toward restructured relationships"(Lederach,1997:71). Peace-building involves concepts of conflict prevention, management and transformation, all of which must be undertaken to address comprehensive conflicts that arise in post-conflict settings, but should also aim to transform the conflict system as a whole, preventing violent conflict from arising in the future. Thus, broadly speaking, peace building seeks to help people recover from, prevent, reduce, and transform violence. To be more specific on religious peace building, It describes a range of activities performed by religious actors and institutions for the purpose of resolving and transforming deadly conflict, with the goal of building social and political institutions characterized by an ethos of tolerance and nonviolence (Coward and Smith, 2004:5). People at the grassroots such as "religious human right activists", scholars, theologians and ethicists of the religious communities should cultivate the culture of non-violence through implementing effective conflict management and resolution (Ibid). According to Jeong the effectiveness of peace-building depends upon change on inter-communal relationships, third party support to build cooperation, trust and framing legal and institutional guidelines to rule the behavior of belligerents (Jeong, 2001:191).

Generally, peace-building has descriptive and prescriptive dimensions. Descriptively, peace-building refers to the various dynamics that characterize conflicts in which the patterns, relationships, communication, issues and perceptions that impact or arise from conflicts exacerbated by interfaith differences are included. Prescriptively, peace-building emphasizes on a comprehensive or holistic approach to deal with conflict. It primarily focuses on addressing the underlying causes of violence, the goals and interests of actors involved in the conflict (Lederach, 2002:56).

Peace-building has the power of transforming society into a just and stable society through carrying out a range of activities. As a process, it begins with pre-war

prevention and ended up with post war reconstruction. Across different stages of a conflict, a range of constructive activities can be carried out by actors, institutions and individuals. However, the roles of actors of intervention might be restricted as observer, educator, advocate and intermediary (Steele, 2002:73). The role of observer can be preventing violence through reporting. The role of educators is awareness creation about injustice and misconception, training on conflict intervention, indoctrinates positive values and healing wounds. The role of advocator is promoting non-violent forms using lobbying, demonstration and public statements. The role of intermediary is go between and facilitating communication to improve relationship (Ibid).

### **2.2.12 Approaches of Peace-Building**

We can identify several approaches by which peace-building can be operationalized. Nonetheless, there are two different perspectives which are often served as guides for different peace-building approaches:

#### **2.2.12.1 Programmatic Peace -Building**

Programmatic peace-building refers to specific activities aimed at addressing urgent or imminent risks to a peace process. Examples of programmatic peace building includes conflict resolution training, capacity building, the development of institutional capabilities needed for conflict prevention (e.g peace commission), support for civil society or women's groups to participate in peace-making initiatives, support for national reconciliation initiatives and including aspects of transitional justice. An important pre-requisite for a programmatic peace building to be effective is to understand the risks of the peace process, and the conflict factors that characterize the conflict system. In relation to the context of South Wollo, the research *inter-alia* sets to find out whether Muslim leaders, *mejlis* officials and community leaders take training on how to prevent and resolve a conflict (ACCORD, 2013:16).

#### **2.2.12.2 Systemic Peace-Building**

Systemic peace-building emerges out of the total combined effort of the activities undertaken under the various peace-building dimensions, and thus exists in the form of

a system-wide or holistic process (Ibid). This can be exemplified by an integrated strategic framework such as poverty reduction strategy. This denotes that peace-building at the systemic level requires macro level financial and organizational interventions. For example, the Sufi-Salafi competition to control communal resource might be explained in terms of poverty as *mejlis* officials have allegedly been accused of squandering the meager resources of the Muslim community for their personal development.

### **2.2.13 Conceptualizing of Radicalism and De-radicalism**

Radicalism is a buzz word applied mainly for political and religious issues and the word seems to have embedded an element of persuasion. When radicalism is defined from the perspective of religion, *“it is a process of adopting an extremist belief system and the willingness to use, support or facilitate violence and fear as a method of effecting changes in society.”*<sup>29</sup> This definition has different tone due to the fact that it urges to use violence and fear as instrument to achieve one’s end. De-radicalization is defined as, *“the process of rehabilitating targeted individuals who have already crossed a line and pose a threat”* (Elshimi, 2014). In other expression, it can be understood as an act of helping individuals or organizations to ‘download’ their violent behavior and replace it with more appropriate alternatives. It is almost an act of transforming targeted individuals from “bad” to “good”. This can be applied as the best strategy of countering extremism basically on the logic of *“preventing terrorism is better than curing it”*. Hence, it has a mission of preventing individuals from being extremist. De-radicalization is conceptualized in the literature as a preventive strategy and has cognitive and behavioral dimensions. De-radicalization takes a cognitive dimension if radicals are helped to reorient their “world view” while disengaging them from violence is an act of behavioral shift (Ibid). We can find a broader classification in the work of Ashour in which he identified three categories of de-radicalization. The first being behavioral de-radicalization which is an attempt of abstaining from using violence. The second category is ideological deradicalization which refers the de-legitimization of

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<sup>29</sup> European Commission (2006). Terrorist recruitment: A Commission’s communication addressing the factors contributing to violent radicalization, MEMO/05/329.

violence. The last one is organizational de-radicalization which is carried out through demobilizing targeted members, and it is the last phase of de-radicalization (Ashour, 2009:6).

#### **2.2.14 Transition from Radicalization to Violent Extremism**

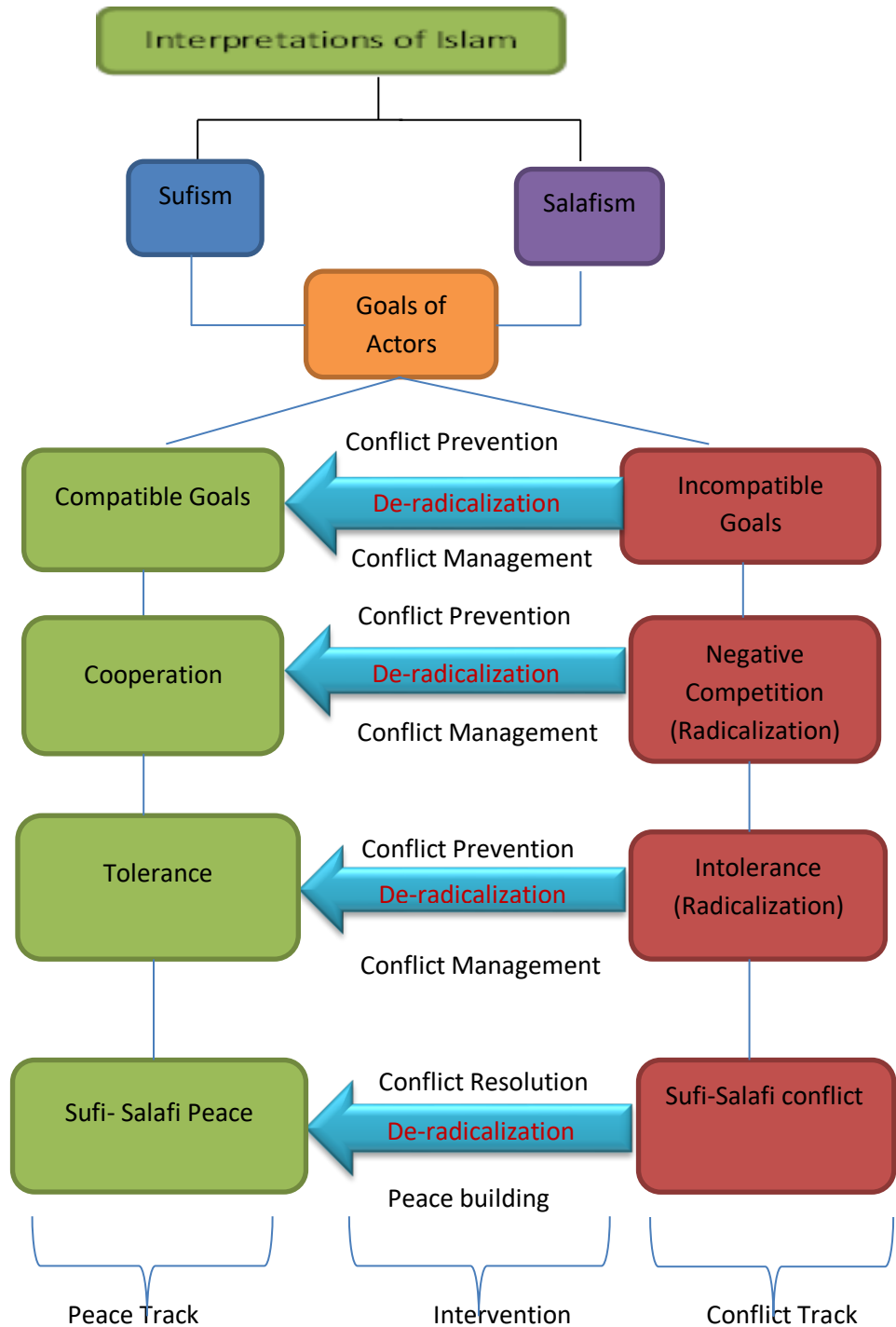
Multiple factors transform individuals or groups to radical and violent movements across the globe. These include alienation, search for identity and dignity, revenge because of loss of a family member, previous mistreatment or imprisonment, the breakdown of communication between authority figures and youth, and through virtual communities on social media. These are carried out by socialization processes that are often facilitated through personal, emotional and psychological factors. Beyond this, they are shown to be important 'incubators' of violent extremism in both developed and developing countries (UNDP, 2016:18-23).

Scholars argue that individuals or groups have to pass through three phases to join violent extremism. The first being initial alienation from the process and institutions that are the bases of identity or authority in a given society and the effort to seek a different identity. The initial alienation phase is almost synonymous to structural causes of a conflict. It emerges out of persistent pattern of exclusions, humiliation, selective mistreatment, and prejudice towards particular groups or individuals by a community, the state and its institutions, or the wider society. Unfair distribution of resource which might be expressed in the form of accessing essential services and the absence of rule of law are crucial in this phase. There is linear relationship between alienation and negative perception as the latter is maintained due to inadequacy at the individual and group level resulting from the inability to deal with widespread or sudden social or demographic change. Individuals and groups at this level are characterized by withdrawal, anomie, grievances and decreasing political or economic participation. The second phase of transformation is identified with radicalization. It is the upshot of frustration and grievances where individuals and groups search for alternative ideology or organization that could accommodate their need. The following important factors

contribute for radicalization to emerge; these include failure to have adequate inter-group dialogue, communication and mediation, social and political marginalization of a particular community, failure to contain provocateurs and radicalizing agents, and the absence of viable alternatives for genuine empowerment in both the personal and the public spheres. Beyond this, the decline of institutions such as family and community undermine social cohesion. The vulnerable alienated groups in the society are subjected to radical recruitment and they are manipulated using their frustration and anger. Non-violent radical behavior is promoters of positive change if we are using them as in puts of reform or innovation. Radical behavior changes into violent extremism as individuals or groups start to use violence as means of expression (Ibid). The last phase is adherence to violence. It is the point of departure from radicalism to violent extremism. The radicals usually prefer to use contestation or advocacy to realize their objectives while violent extremists opt to use violence to impose their world views on others. The instrumental nature of violence gradually changes into symbolic at this phase. This can be exemplified by the ritualized murder of ISIS, the KKK and other terrorist organizations (Ibid). Although these factors are variously mentioned by scholars as drivers of violent extremism, it is imprecise to conclude that there is a single path towards extremism. Beyond this, it is incorrect to conclude that all alienated groups or individuals adopt radical attitudes and ideologies, and nor do all radicals travel to join violent extremism.

## 2.4 Conceptual Model of Sufi-Salafi Interaction

Fig.2: Conceptual frame-work for the Sufi –Salafi Interaction



Source: developed by the author

Although all Muslims are referring to Quran and Hadith as the ultimate sources of Islam, one can see their difference in the way they interpret and practice these sources. Of

course, the difference begins with the interpretations of these sources which eventually lead to Sufi-Salafi dichotomy. They do have divergent views and goals in teaching and practicing Islam. The difference in their orientations in turn affects the way Muslims behave and act. This is due to the fact that both do have distinct ways of interpreting and understanding Islam. For example, Salafists promote the literal interpretation of the divine book, Quran while the Sufis argue that the message of the Holy book should be interpreted through the intervention of enlightened figures (referring Sufi *ulema*).

As can be seen from fig-2 above, we have right and left tracks of the diagram. The right track of the diagram shows how concepts of incompatible goals, negative competition and intolerance ultimately radicalized the Sufi or Salafists and led them to conflict. While the left track of the diagram portrays how Sufi-Salafi peace is achieved through cultivating compatible goals, positive competition /cooperation and tolerance. An indirect form of conflict appears as Sufis and Salafists are developing incompatible goals (i.e religious, political and social issues). Incompatible goals manifested in the form of fierce competitions between the two groups which consequently lead to emotional and behavioral intolerance. As intolerance strengthened between the two groups, eruption of violent conflict will be inevitable. On the contrary, as the goals of the Sufis and Salafists are compatible, it is more likely that the two groups cooperate to work together with higher level of tolerance. And this would consequently results in Sufi-Salafi peace. The two paths of the diagram come to one end of conflict or peace through third party intervention. If the intervention is effective, there is a possibility to change the Sufi-Salafi conflict into peace and harmony. On the contrary, the absence of effective intervention leads the perpetuation of the Sufi-Salafi conflict.

Between the two tracks one can see approaches of interventions through which we can transform the radicalization of the group to normalization. The intervention ranges from simple to more complex; these include conflict prevention, management, resolution and peace building. Across the three corresponding stages, it is preferable to use the tools of prevention and management guided by the principles of de-radicalizations. The conflict

becomes more destructive as it is shown in the last phase, new approaches of conflict resolution and peace building ought to be applied but still both should be guided by the principles of de-radicalizations. It should be noted that de-radicalization is a peaceful approach of achieving peace. Applying de-radicalization using conflict prevention, management, resolution and peace building across all corresponding stages would potentially transform the Sufi-Salafi violence to peace or transform conflict from destructive to constructive one.

## **2.5. Frame-Works of Analysis**

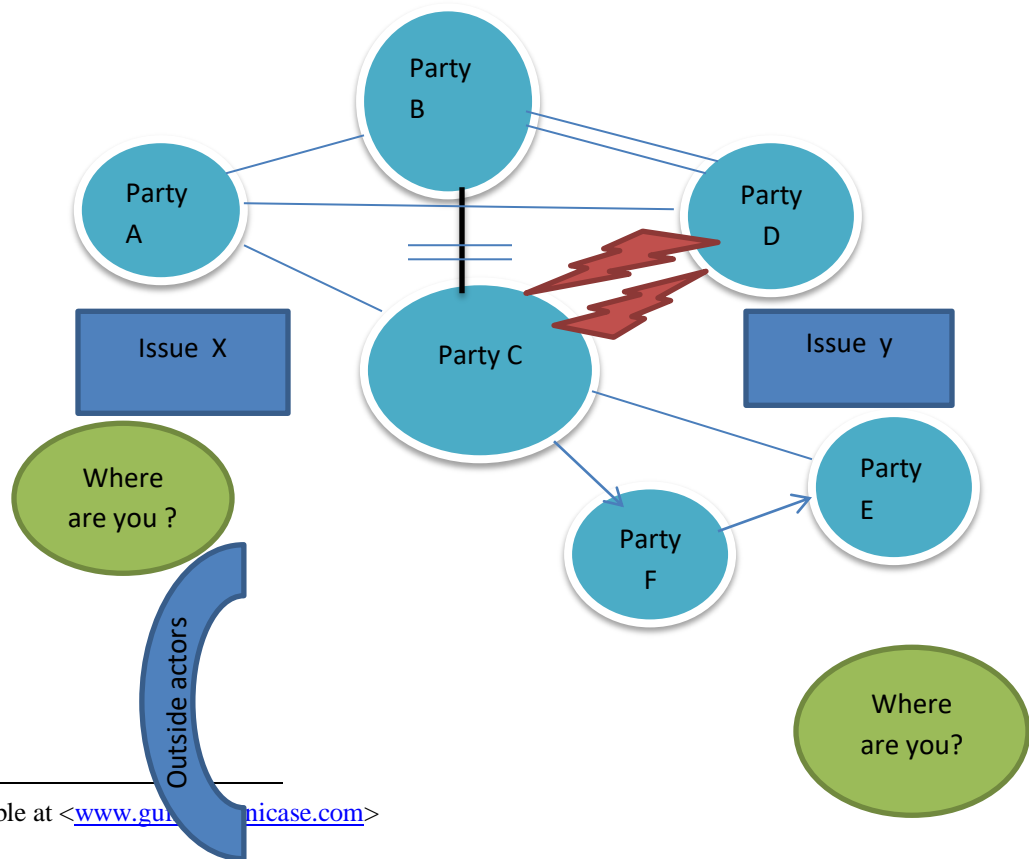
The researcher uses a set of framework of analysis so as to achieve the objectives of the research. These are discourse analysis, conflict mapping, onion-model analysis and conflict–tree model analysis. These frameworks of analysis are used to analyses the views of actors, the dynamics, causes, parties and issues of the Sufi-Salafi conflict. Let us see the purpose and importance of these frame works one by one:

### **2.5.1 Discourse Analysis**

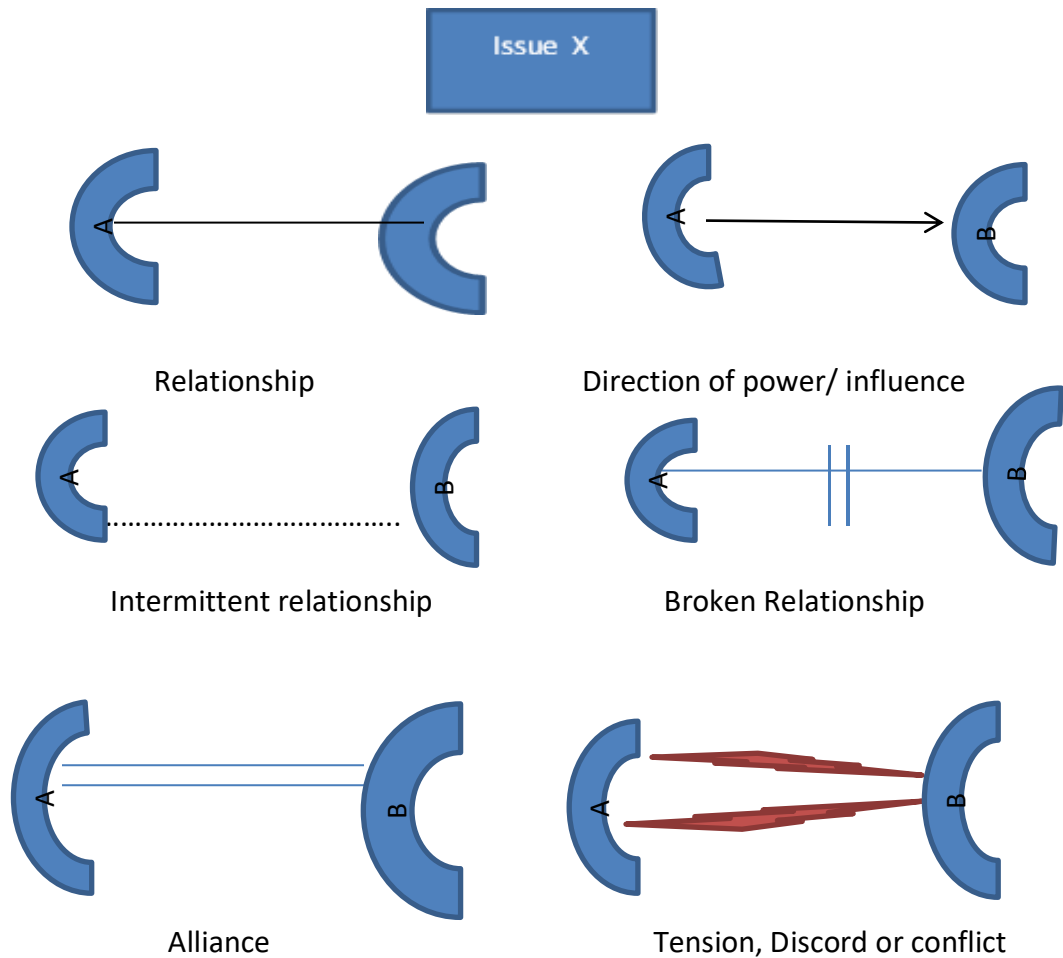
Part of the data collected through interviews, FGDs, participant observation and document review will be analyzed using critical discourse analysis. I employed critical discourse analysis since there are many sources of information such as government policy documents, laws, regulations, polemical debates, documentaries, views of actors in the conflict, internet sources and views of security officials and experts. According to Van Dijk (n.d :1-5) discourse analysis primarily scrutinizes the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. The discourse analysis employed both micro and macro level analysis of social order. The former is represented in language use, discourse, verbal interaction and communication while power, dominance, and inequality between social groups belong to micro level analysis.

### 2.5.2 Conflict Mapping

As mapping simplifies a geographic phenomenon in a summarized way to the extent of reducing it into a single page, conflict mapping simplifies the conflict in a way to visualize actors in the conflict, the relationship of actors in the conflict and the issues or themes of the conflict. According to Fisher et al. conflict mapping helps to represent parties and their relationship (2000:22). The process of mapping might be early along with other frameworks of analysis or it can be implemented at the latter stages after one can get “entry points for actions” (Ibid). The following steps are carried out while we are mapping a conflict: Firstly, deciding on the conflict you want to analyze. Secondly, form groups of two or more people. Thirdly, take a large sheet of paper and draw the actors as circles on the paper as per the size of their power. Fourthly, draw lines between the circles representing the relationship of actors. Lastly, draw boxes of squares write the themes of the conflict<sup>30</sup>



<sup>30</sup> Available at <[www.gunnicase.com](http://www.gunnicase.com)>

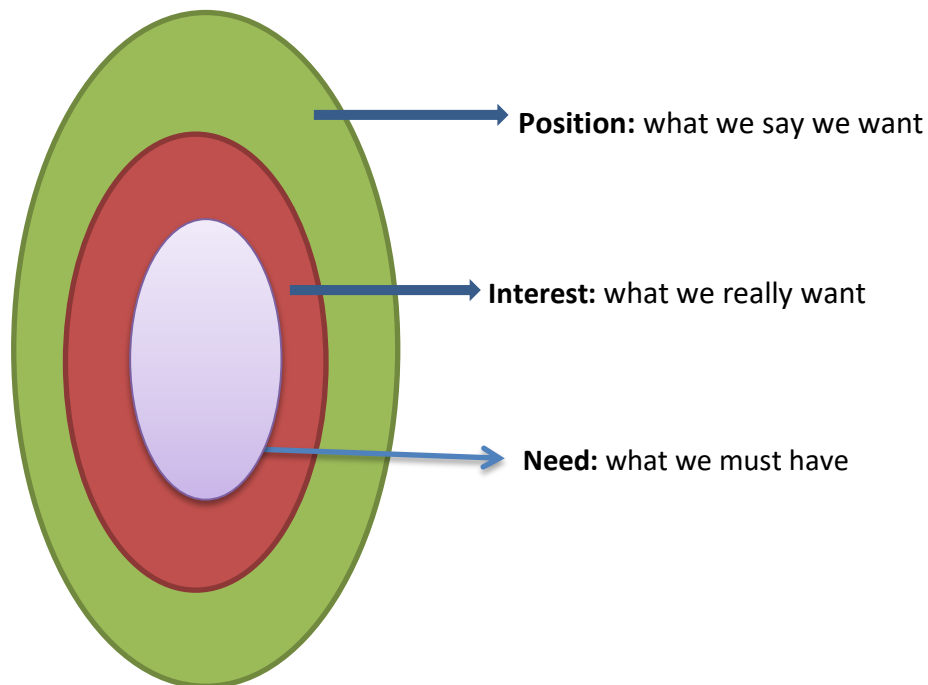


Conflict Mapping (Fisher et al, 2000: as cited in Catherin Morris, 2018:25)

### 2.5.3 Onion Model Analysis

Analyzing the needs, positions and interests of parties in the conflict might be helpful for conflict intervention. Any intervention cannot be successful unless the needs and interests of the parties are carefully analyzed. For this endeavor, Fisher et al argue that (2000: 27) *Onion Model of Analysis* might be useful to understand the underlying factors that could be expressed in terms of parties' needs, positions and interests. The framework is developed on the basis of the analogy of an onion and its layers. To put it differently, actors' positions, needs and interests in the conflict can be explained in layers simulating the layers of an onion. Accordingly, the outer layer is supposed to

indicate the positions of parties/actors that are expressed publically. The underlying layer represents the interest of actors /parties to be achieved from the conflict setting. The core of the layer is supposed to indicate the needs parties aspire to enjoy. The success of the 'onion model' of analysis depends on two determinant factors. Firstly, it works only for each actors involved in the conflict. Secondly, the tool in most cases is fruitful if it is applied in times of stability. This is because parties are supposed to disclose their needs and interests in times when relationships are " good and trust is high". If the relationship of parties is characterized by instability and mistrust, they might possibly hide their needs to avoid vulnerability (ibid).

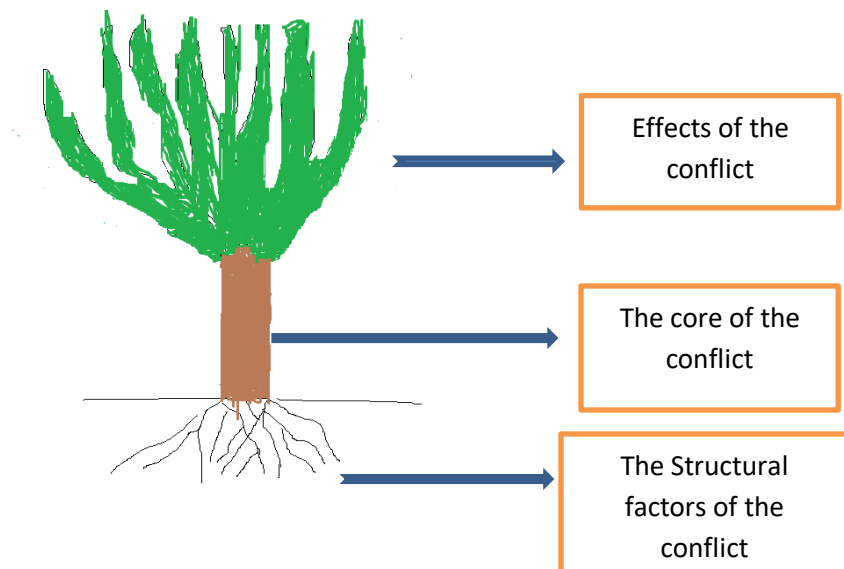


The Onion Model (Source: Fisher et al. 2000:27)

#### 2.5.4 Conflict Tree Analysis

A conflict is symbolized by a tree having three main parts or elements such as the root, trunk and branches. The root of the tree plants uses to transport food and nutrients to other parts of the tree represent the structural cause of the conflict. The roots represent injustice, poverty, economic deprivation, ignorance, ethnic prejudice, intolerance, and corruption, poor governance both at the state or traditional levels. The trunk of a tree is

the largest structure of a tree where the roots are converged. Looking only the trunk, lookers might give information about the tree. However, it is deceptive to give a clue about a conflict just looking at the visible core problem. Although the trunk comprises different dimensions of the conflict, individual analyzers may incline to a specific dimension of the conflict over the other. The branches, leaves and fruits of a tree are symbolized the multitude of smaller conflicts. They are known in conflict as effects of the conflict. Over time the fruits of a tree fall into the fertile soil to germinate and develop a new tree. Similarly, the effects of the conflict might appear as an independent new conflict (Mason and Rychard, 2005).



Conflict Tree (Source: Mason and Rychard, 2005)

## CHAPTER-THREE

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### 3.1 The Sufi-Salafi Interactions in Ethiopia and of South Wollo

Although there is no direct scholarly publication on the Sufi-Salafi interactions from the perspective of peace and conflict studies on Wollo Islam hitherto, one can see passing references here and there on the general study of contemporary religious conflict in the Muslim community of Ethiopia. Many of the studies are historical; a large corpus of Hussein's study is dominantly on the history of Islam notably on Sufism and Sufi institutions in Wollo and of Ethiopia (Hussein, 1994; 1998; 1999; 2001). Hussein seems to have filled the misses in Ethiopian history through exposing bias for positive end. By doing so, he widened the intellectual spectrum of students of Ethiopian history and culture not to be confined solely on Christian paradigm. Beyond this, his contextualized and historicized analysis on the Muslim-Christian relations concludes that the relations were both "consensual and conflictual" which challenges the dominant narrative of peaceful coexistence between the Christian and Muslim communities in Ethiopia. Further, he advises, "*the bitter legacy of the past must not be allowed to impede or influence the desire for an open and genuine dialogue between the two communities...*" (Hussein, 2006). Although Hussein had been the authority on Ethiopian and Wollo Islam for the last two decades, we can hardly find anything about intra-religious tolerance and conflict in his entire academic career. Others are anthropological studies; some of Meron Zeleke's studies on religious syncretism, traditional Islamic conflict resolution mechanisms, some aspects of Muslim political protests and the role of Sufi shrines in conflict management (Meron, 2010; 2012; 2013). Jan Abbink's anthropological studies on contemporary Islam depicted the impact of Salafism on the religio-communal relations in Wollo in the context of the new political change in Ethiopia (Abbink, 2006; 2013; 2014). He emphasized on inter-religious and communal relations in Wollo. Still, Salafism is almost a tenor of Ostebo's religious study in which the growth, change and impact of Salafism on contemporary Ethiopia and of Bale thoroughly treated

(Østebø, 1998; 2007; 2009). Although one of the reports of Dereje is closer to the proposed research and an initial work in religious conflict analysis in Ethiopia, a section is devoted to intra-religious conflict of the Muslim community and still the analysis partly does not seem to meet the models of peace and conflict studies (Dereje, 2013). Mohammed's recent study (2016) on the relation between the government and the Muslim community over the issue of secularism and religious freedom in Ethiopia has passing references on the Sufi-Salafi conflict. He thoroughly identified the distinction between the two religious thoughts and how Sufism is manipulated for countering Salafi religious extremism using national, regional and global experiences. Although the study has invaluable information on issue of secularism and religious freedom in the very recent conflict between the government and the Muslim community, it rarely analyzes the intra-religious conflict in the Muslim community particularly the case in South Wollo. In this regard, however, this research aspires to examine the specific intra-religious interaction between Sufis and Salafists, and the reaction of the government in the context of South Wollo. Although the contributions of these scholarly publications are invaluable as they are, they seem to have little contribution to analyze the dynamics the Sufi- Salafi interactions using peace and conflict theories and perspectives. In other words, scholars have made very little attempt to assess the Sufi-Salafi interactions at the national and local levels. This becomes the rationale of the present researcher to propose this topic as his research dissertation. Beyond this, the researcher is motivated to study this topic thinking that he has been closely observing the intra-religious conflict of the Muslim community in South Wollo.

Therefore, studying the Sufi-Salafi interactions is an entirely new area of study that is open for exploration. Understanding the dynamics of the Sufi-Salafi conflict and its impact to intra communal and regional peace is part of the investigation in this research. The extent to which competition and intolerance affect the Sufi-Salafi interaction in South Wollo is another area of inquiry. Assessing the predicaments of Sufi-Salafi peace and its practical problem is an integral part of this research. Beyond generating an empirically grounded data on the Sufi-Salafi interactions in Southern

Wollo in particular, the study also provides invaluable insights to the growing body of scholarly work in this realm and contributes in filling the gap in research.

### **3.2 Scrutinizing of Revivalist Ethos in South Wollo from the Sufis to the Salafists**

According to Loimeier Islamic revivalist<sup>31</sup> movements in Africa and elsewhere through layers of time have developed three basic characteristic features. Firstly, it has a mission of anti-status quo rhetoric directed against establishments (referring the political and religious entities). Secondly, attempt to ensure ethical and moral transformation through rigorous teaching of Islam. Lastly, the need to reform the teaching of Islamic curriculum mainly directed against the *fiqh* centered Sufi curriculum (Loimeier, 2003: 254). The means and actors of revivalism in the continent of Africa and of the Islamic world were different. The means of achieving Islamic revivalism ranged from coercive to non-violent approaches. The most prominent actors of Islamic revivalism in history of Africa were the Sufis and Salafists (Onapjo, 2012: 200).

According to Hussien the genesis of Islamic revivalist movement in Ethiopia traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Wollo where reformist and militant Sufi scholars laid the foundation (Hussien, 2002). The Sufi revivalist movement in Wollo had shared the first two missions what Loimeier mentioned earlier, and it was carried out through applying both coercive and non-violent means. The first mission of anti-status quo rhetoric of Sufi revivalism in nineteenth century Wollo could be explained in terms of resisting a policy of religious coercion of the Christian monarch through the means of Jihad. In this regard, it is worth to mention the human agents of resistance who challenged the Christian establishment like *Sheikh* Tolaha Jeafer (1853-1936) of Qallu and *Sheikh* Mohammed Shafi of Jema Nigus (1743– 1806/7)(Hussien, 2001. :73-91; 2002). The second mission of moral and ethical revival in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Wollo could be explained by the efforts of Sufi scholars to transform the religious lax and superstitious Muslim community to a relatively higher Islamic religious morality. This was evidenced by the teaching and practices of Wollo Sufi

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<sup>31</sup> See the definition of revivalism in the literature review part of this dissertation.

scholars such as *Sheikh* Mohammed Shafi of Jama Nigus (d.1806/7) and *Sayyid* Bushira Ay Mohammed (d.1863) of Geta who were prominent in teaching of *tewhid* across the rural areas of South Wollo (Ibid). *Sheikh* Mohammed Shafi (d.1806) was the founder the Islamic teaching centers of Jama Nigus, after his death the center was changed into shrine where the annual festivity of the Prophet's birth day (*meulid al-nabi*) started to be celebrated in a large scale for the first time in the history of Ethiopia. The *Sheikh* was a mystic and *mujahid* whose militant behavior was explained in terms of his campaign against non-Islamic beliefs and practices (Ibid). *Sayyid* Bushira (1780-1871) was another prominent Sufi scholar who had attended higher Islamic learning in the neighboring Sudan and established his religious teaching in the present day Qallu district of South Wollo at a place called *Geta*. Similar to contemporary Salafi teaching of *tewhid*, *Sayyid Bushira* reported to have been behaviorally strict towards the observance of the *sharia* and uncompromised instances for all forms of *bid'a* ( Hussein, 2001:89; 2002 ; Mohammed, 2010: 45). For example, he was said to have ascribed *Kufir* (apostasy) for those who did not perform the daily regular prayer, *salat*. This seems to have indicated his exposure for the *Hambeli* rite which ascribed *Kufr* for those who do not perform *salat*. He was also an ardent opponent of rituals at *gobeden* (rituals performed in a pasture land usually under a tree) and *badigez* (rituals usually performed in and around a village) which were widely practiced during his time; in doing so, for example, he instructed his disciples to cut trees which were worshipped around *gobeden* and *badigez*.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, *Sayyid* Bushira Ay Mohammed (d.1863) reported to have condemned chewing and venerating *chat*; during his life time, he did not chew *chat* and had not encouraged others around him to chew as well. The ban on beating drum for ritual ceremonies in Geta shrine was one of the legacies of *Sayyid* Bushira and even his descendants till this day strictly practicing this for any ritual activities in the shrine. Although the *Sheikh* bred enmity from traditional leaders like *abbegars* and *fuqras*, his

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<sup>32</sup>“Geta: A Belief and Religious Center” (Amharic pamphlet) released by the Qallu Woreda Culture and Tourism Office, Kombolcha, 2001 E.C.

respect and protection from the local ruler, Lubo Biru helped him to teach and practice Islamic orthodoxy freely.<sup>33</sup>

Hussien Ahmed further asserted that Wollo Islam in the nineteenth century was free of the Salafi current. He states, *“Ethiopian Islam did not respond to the Wahabbi call...”* (Hussein, 2001:73). This might work for the nineteenth century Wollo but does not mean that Wollo remains defendant of the Salafi impulse forever. Ostebo comments on Hussein’s view that the whole scenario has changed completely after one century that the impulse of Salafism is making a visible impact on contemporary Islam in Ethiopia and of Wollo (Ostebo, 2009:463). Hussein’s usage of reformist and revivalist terminologies does not represent the present aspects of the Salafi movement as most scholars often ascribed them as the Salafi tasks. This is explicitly described in his book, *“... [Sufi scholars] adopted for [their] own purposes the reformist and revivalist zeal of the [Salafi] movement”* (Hussien, 2001: 73). Similarly, Abbink strengthened Hussien’s view that, *“revivalism was native to the country [Wollo], not merely imported from elsewhere”* (Abbink, 2007). Two reasons can be mentioned for the absence of Salafi revivalism in the 19th century Wollo. Firstly, it is difficult to say that Salafism was in existence in the 19th century Wollo because it was even the view of few elites around Nejd in Saudi Arabia and hardly been a transnational phenomenon(Mehran,2005:14). Secondly, the social and political quest of Islam in Hussein’s study dominantly depicts the ideals of Sufism such as dissemination of mystical orders, veneration of saints and resisting the influence of the Christian monarch (Hussein, 2001). In connection to this, however, Hussein seems to have failed to provide us why Sufis were using the seemingly Salafi projects like revivalism and reformation without being influenced by the Salafi orientations. Nor does he indicate the connection between Sufism and the ideals of Salafism in the nineteenth century Wollo.

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<sup>33</sup> Haji Muhidin Ahmed (nd) *‘Ya-Haji Bushira Geta Ya-Hiwot Tarikachew’- literally,“ the life History of Al-Haji Bushira, Geta”* (unpublished Amharic).

Jan Abbink's assessment on the contemporary revivalism reports the long-lived pragmatic tolerance and accommodative communal relations (between Muslims and Christians) in Wollo is at the brink of collapse due to the spread of the Salafi revivalist movement in major towns of Wollo. He even advises all Muslims to use a divisive and tyrant approach of fighting the Salafi currents. Beyond this, he urges the government to take "corrective action" against the Salafi groups fearing the political repercussion (Abbink, 2007: 65). Abbink's conclusion seems irrelevant because of two reasons. Firstly, his modernist paradigm reduced Wollo as a source of anthropological specimen which contributes little for greater peace at large. Beyond this, assimilation and syncretism by their nature are a colonial and modernist paradigm mostly beneficial for oppressive political projects. Secondly, it contradicts identity politics that the country is undertaking since 1991. Ethnic and regional politics, as well as nativist and puritanist religious ethos are within the discourse of anti-syncretism. Thus, fighting the Salafi anti-syncretic stance is irrelevant to the current political project of multiculturalism and post-modernist paradigm in the field of peace study (Shaw and Stewart, 1994: 7; Abbink, 2007: 65). As far as the perceived political repercussion of the Salafi movement in South Wollo is concerned, we can also find a sober assessment in the work of Ostebo on the political rhetoric of Ethiopian Salafism including Wollo. Contrary to Abbink's assertion, Ostebo confirmed that the Salafists are emphasizing on the ritual and religious purification than political activism. As part of intra-religious competition, however, they confronted Sufism and other indigenous elements through their rigorous teaching of *tewhid*. Although Ostebo agrees the ideological link with the transnational network and believes in the sovereignty of the Sharia, he argues Salafists realize the plurality of Ethiopia and aspire to ensure religious equality through the principle of secularism. He further has made it clear that Salafists at large concedes imposing the sharia in Ethiopia is impossible because of religious diversity (Ostebo, 2007; 2013).

The contemporary Salafi movement in South Wollo has qualified the three characteristic missions of revivalism mentioned earlier. The anti-status quo mission of contemporary Salafism directed against Sufi-establishment which is perceived as the mother of

irreprehensible *bid'at*. Although the contemporary Salafi movement is not as militant as the Sufi revivalist movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Wollo, Salafists' opposition against the current oppressive political establishment accomplished through non-violent means. The second mission of moral and ethical revival of contemporary Salafi revivalism of Wollo could be explained by the attempts of Salafists to transform the religiously lax and Sufi-oriented Muslims to the proper social and religious behavior based on the teaching of Quran and the Sunnah. The last mission of revivalism focused on the need to reform the curriculum of Islamic education. This refers the contemporary Salafi movement in Wollo and other parts of Ethiopia as proponents of Salafism striving to change the old *fiqh* based Sufi-curriculum with the new Salafi curriculum in different Islamic learning centers of the country.

Based on the discussions above, we can draw important conclusions on the revivalist movement of Wollo from the Sufis to the Salafists:

- Revivalism is not the monopoly of Salafism though it is often described by many scholars as the tasks of Salafists. Both Sufis and Salafists have qualified many of the attributes of revivalism mentioned above.
- The Sufi revivalist movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was “indigenous” as it had no link with the transnational Islamic revivalist movement. This was because the orthodox interpretation of Islam and Jihadist campaigns of the Sufi clerics in the 19th century Wollo could only be understood in the context of the local political and religious orders, and rarely had transnational network with the Salafi movement.
- The reaction of Sufi revivalists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Wollo to oppressive political system was more militant when it is compared to contemporary Salafi movement in South Wollo.
- The 19<sup>th</sup> century Sufi revivalist *Sayyid* Bushira Ay Mohammed (d.1863) exceptionally seems closer to the teaching of contemporary Salafism. This can be evidenced by his strict application of the sharia and his uncompromised stand for

all forms of bid<sup>^</sup>a. Moreover, his position of ascribing *Kufir* (apostasy) for those who did not perform a regular prayer (Salat) could not be possible unless he was exposed to the *Hambeli* rite(it is supposed to be one of the roots of Salafism).

- The Salafi revivalist movement seems to be more organized and systematic as compared to the Sufis of the 19<sup>th</sup> century since it pulls resources from the global Salafi network.

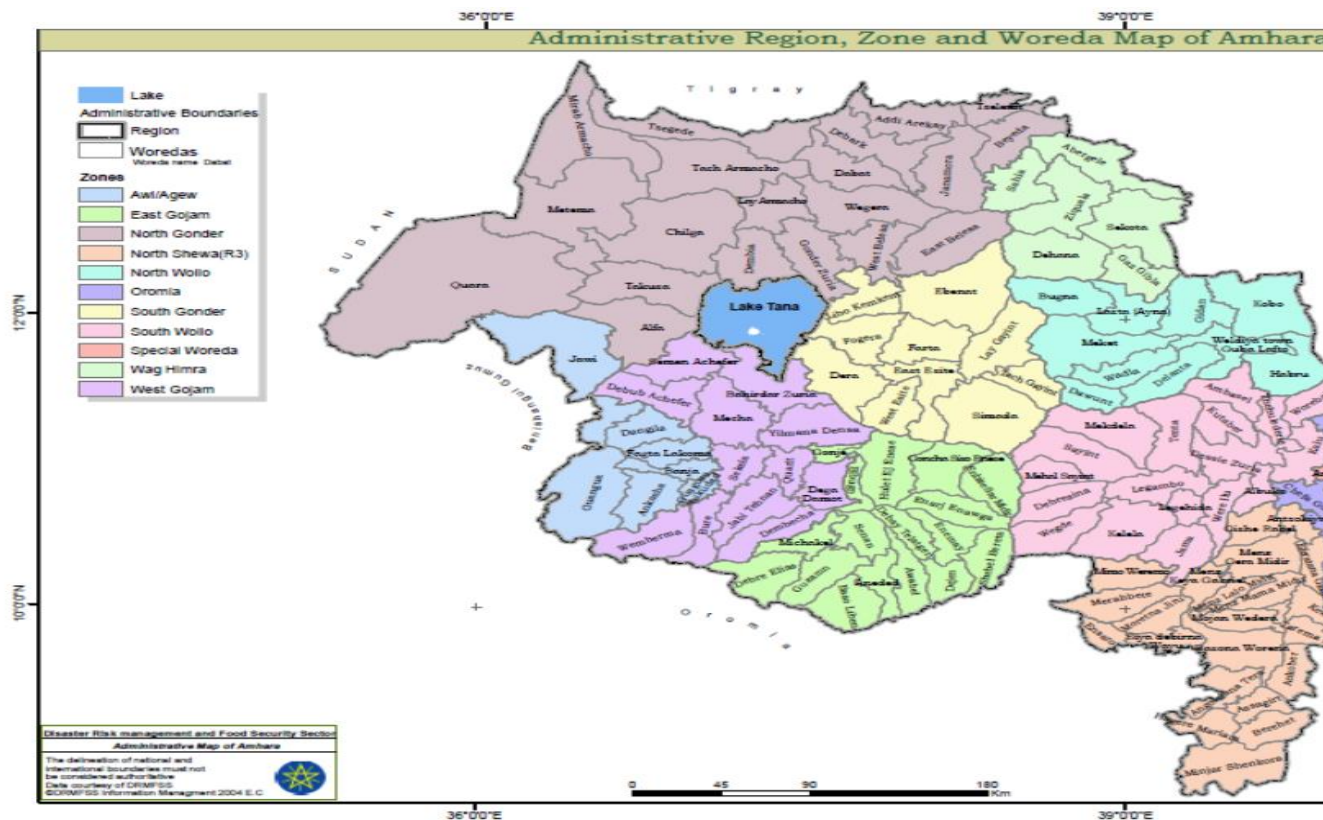
## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4. CONTEXT TO THE SUFI-SALAFI INTERACTIONS IN SOUTH WOLLO

#### 4.1 Background to the Study Area

Modern South Wollo is one of the 10 zones<sup>34</sup> in the Amhara Regional State, situated in the south eastern part of the region. The zone has a total area of 17,067.45 square kilometers and with 2,518,862 population number of whom 1,248,698 are men and 1,270,164 women (CSA, 2007). The zone is bounded in the north by North Wollo Administrative Zone, Afar Regional State in the northeast, South Gondar Administrative

Fig.2: Zonal and Woreda Map of South Wollo



<sup>34</sup> Amhara Regional State consists of ten zones: North Gondar, South Gondar, North Wollo, South Wollo, North Shewa, East Gojjam, West Gojjam, Waghemira, Awi and Oromia Zones. It has also recently established special *woreda* (district) for Argoba people.

Source : [www.dppc.gov.et](http://www.dppc.gov.et)

zone in the northwest, in the south by north Shewa, Oromiya Administrative Zone and Argoba special *woreda* in the south east, in the west by east Gojjam Administrative Zone and in the east by Afar Regional State (Ibid). The Zonal Administration re-divided into seventeen districts (Woreda) namely Dessie Zuria, Woreilu, Kelala, Legambo, Legehida, Kalu, Meqedela, Sayint, Deberesina, Albuko, Jama, Worebabu, Wogedi, Esseye Gola Tehuledera, Kutaber and Tenta.<sup>35</sup> Dessie city<sup>36</sup>, the capital of South Wollo Zone, is found 400 km north of Addis Ababa (the capital of Ethiopia). It is one of the three city administrations (the other two are Bahirdar and Gonder) of Amhara Regional State. Historic South Wollo was geographically extended and ethno-linguistically more diverse as compared to modern South Wollo since it stretched out as far as the Denaklian plain in the south east and Wenchit and Jama River in the north. Currently, however, the former is located in Afar Regional State while the latter two are found in North Shewa Zone of Amhara Regional State (Tirmingham, 1952: 196). Wollo is strategically located as a natural dividing line between the north and south axis of the country, served as a route of military conquest and population movement during the mediaeval and early modern periods. Beyond this, it has been articulated as the cultural 'melting pot' where amalgamation and fusion of diverse cultural elements has been taking place since time of immemorial (Hussein, 2001:1-2).

The residents of South Wollo are urban and rural peoples. The urban residents are economically dependent on commerce, service provisions and government sector jobs while the rural people dominantly dependent on agriculture. On the eastern side, the zone shares a porous border with Oromiya Zone and Afar Regional State stretching as far as Djibouti border. Human trafficking and illicit trade reported to have been common in South Wollo. Rural-urban migration especially from the western part of the zone is

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<sup>35</sup> <<[www.Africa.upenn.edu](http://www.Africa.upenn.edu)>>

<sup>36</sup> The City of Dessie currently subdivided into ten sub-cities Ager-Gizat, Arada, Buambuha, Dawdo, Robit, Hota, Menafesha, Piassa, Salayish and Segno- Gebeya

reported to have caused high unemployment in South Wollo. Although the problem of unemployment is high in the capital, the number of jobs created in the zone is almost insignificant to meet the growing demands for the last many years. Unless there is a mechanism to hold the growing number of unemployment, the area might be used as recruiting ground for religious extremist tendencies in South Wollo (IAG & MoF&PDA Draft Report, 2016).

South Wollo is an abode of diverse ethno-linguistic (Amharas, Argobas and Oromos are residing<sup>37</sup>) and religious<sup>38</sup> (Islam, Christianity and other traditional beliefs) groups in northern Ethiopia. Although many European travelers in the nineteenth century identified Wollo as the land of [Oromos], many did not belong to this ethnic group. Tirmingham in his book *'Islam in Ethiopia'* identified certain areas such as Amhara-Sayint, the massifs of legambo and legehida, and Warra-Illu plateaus were inhabited by Abyssinian<sup>39</sup> Muslims. Nonetheless, Islam was bridging all these ethnic and geographical cracks as one fellow religious group (Tirmingham, 1952). Although it is not many, Oromiffa today is spoken in few areas of south eastern and western parts of the zone. The Argobbas are the other ethno-linguistic group whose language is frequently described as the "dying language", resides as a community at Shonka (eastern Wollo) and Ancharo areas of Qallu district but currently reviving due to the establishment of a new special administrative district reserved for the people of Argoba in South Wollo (Mohammed, 2010:1).

More than any other parts of Ethiopia, religions in Wollo in general and South Wollo in particular staggeringly transformed as cultural phenomena through centuries of

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<sup>37</sup> According to the latest census (2007) the largest ethnic group in the area is Amhara who constitute (99.33%) and the rest made up 0.67% of the population. 98.65% of the people spoke Amharic as their first language and the remaining 1.35% other primary languages.

<sup>38</sup> The same census estimated that the most dominant religion practiced in the area is Islam (70.89%) and orthodox Christianity constitutes 28.8%.

<sup>39</sup> Tirmingham used the term 'Abyssinia' to refer the non-Oromo Muslims who had been living in the area before the Oromo expansion in the sixteenth century. See for details his book, *Islam in Ethiopia* (1952).

interaction with local beliefs and customs, and even degraded by some as indigenous social and cultural phenomena rather than depicting them as purely religious. This long time interactions between the classical and local elements not only changed the very essence of religious creeds but also the pattern of communal relations in south Wollo. One of the enduring impacts of this interaction is echoed on the socio-religious contour, and reduced Wollo as the home of “sociocultural hybridity, pragmatic tolerance, and the accommodation of diversity” (Abbink, 2007; Tirmingham, 1952; Mohammed, 2016). Nonetheless, socio-cultural hybridity hardly reflects monolithic composition and purity as it is the amalgamation of elements from different cultural traditions into a new whole. For the case of Wollo, it is blended with traditional belief, Christianity and Islam. This might show accommodation of diversity but not necessarily tolerance because it is determined by the power relation of social groups in the history of South Wollo. Even though these values have been depicted as a source of peace and stability in the region and a model of pragmatic tolerance, they have currently been challenged by religious revivalism as for example manifested in the form of Sufi-Salafi dichotomy. The Sufis are trying to preserve these syncretic values while the revivalists (referring Salafis) aspire at least to redefine them in a way to be compatible with the scriptures of Islam. This consequently disturbs the social cohesion<sup>40</sup> of the Muslim community with immense implications on intra-communal peace in South Wollo. This is because lack of cohesiveness hinders societal productivity which in turn widens the opportunity for the destructive causes of extremism (Abbink, 2007; Karbo, 2013). In South Wollo, conflict between the two is believed to have sown the seed of mistrust and disunity on the Sufi-Salafi interactions.

Until the demise of the imperial regime in 1974, religions in Ethiopia were not equally treated; one religion was favored at the expense of others. Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity enjoyed a prerogative right over other religions and adopted as a religion of

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<sup>40</sup> According to Karbo Tony social cohesion is the connectedness among individuals of social groups that facilitates collaboration and equitable resource distribution at household, community and state level. For more discussion you can see his article cited in this dissertation.

the state. The coming of a military government following a popular revolution terminated the conviviality between the church and the state. Secularism opted as the philosophy of the new socialist state which consequently divorced the church as an affiliate institution. This is because state neutrality from religious affiliation and respecting religious freedom of worshipping, preaching and observing their religious teachings became one of the principles of secularism in the new socialist regime (Abbink, 2005; Mohammed, 2016).

Although South Wollo has experienced religious and communal transformation following the new political orientation since 1991, gauging other parts of the country using the religious tolerance and moderation of Wollo might mislead the wider audience in general and the policy community in particular because others are constrained by their socio-political history. Religious revivalism is emerging as a global experience showering many parts of the world. Wollo is not an island that could be free from the global order, directly or indirectly influenced by the currents of the transnational religious revivalism. However, the background for the perceived transformation rooted with the growing globalization and local political liberalization (Abbink, 2006: 1). The impact of religious revivalism is not only limited to inter-communal relations and national politics but also has intra-religious dimension within the community too, draws the involvement of external actors who presumed to be affected directly or indirectly by this movement. More specifically Abbink in one of his publications underline the daring position of the Salafi community more than other religious faith "...[Salafis] rant against the mainstream, Sufi-oriented Islam in Ethiopia, thereby advocating a purist and dogmatic form of Islam tending toward hegemonies and intolerance of others" (Abbink, 2011).

## 4.2 A Brief History of Islam and Islamization in South Wollo

The pre-Islamic social and religious life of Wollo is full of prejudice and biases<sup>41</sup> since there is a tendency by the local *ulema* to discredit and disguise its history as worthless. Hussein argues that the absence of accurate information and the identification of the period with stereotyped terms upset not only the broader understanding of contemporary Islam in the region but also the neatness of its chronology (Hussein, 2001: 30-59).

The history of Islam and Islamization in Wollo cannot be separated from the general context in Ethiopia though it had its own regional dynamics and peculiarities. In spite of the difficulty to indicate the exact time of introduction, Islam and Islamization in Wollo has a trifold phases followed by transitory and lasting impact on the socio-political and cultural development of Wollo in general and South Wollo in particular: the first phase of Islam and Islamization in Wollo was a period of introduction to which there are different views over the question of how and by whom Islam introduced into South Wollo and Ifat. The area of western Wollo was then known as the “*Bete-Amhara*” (domain of the Amhara) and was historically a core region of the Christian empire. The first view which is held by the local *ulema* asserted that the introduction of Islam to these areas was through the agency of dissenting Arabs who left Arabia for political reasons and entered through Zeila port into the present day South Wollo (Mohammed, 2010; Abbink, 2007). The second view which is the wide-spread assumption by scholars is that Islam introduced to the present area of South Wollo through the agency of Argobba *Meshiek* (*sing. Sheik*) from Ifat, which is geographically adjacent to the medieval Muslim Sultanate of Ifat. This seems quite convincing due to the fact that the Argobbas have demographic, institutional and cultural bases in the present day South

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<sup>41</sup> According to Hussein the local *ulema* identified the pre-Islamic belief and religious order in Wollo with stereotyped and prejudiced terms as pagan, worshipers of idols, trees, rocks and animals. See for more detail his book, Hussien, Ahmed (2001) *Islam in Nineteenth-century Wallo, Ethiopia: Revival, Reform, and Reaction*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.

Wollo. For example, many of the famous Muslim shrines in South Wollo such as the shrines of Shonka, Geta and Mejite were believed to have been founded by men of Argobba origin (Mohammed, 2010). Still other tradition associated the introduction of Islam in the area with the *Jabartis* who were believed to have been the first Muslim converts belonged to the same racial groups with “Abyssinians” but marginalized as alien. It is believed that the *Jabarti* moved from the east coast to the interior of the highland into Ifat, Wollo and Tigray (Husseini, 2001).

The second phase of Islamization in South Wollo is associated with the campaign of Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim Elgazi (known in Ethiopia as ‘*gragn*’ or ‘the left-handed’) during whom Muslim missionaries actively participated in the crystallization of Islam through peaceful and coercive means. The two prominent places in South Wollo such as Gerado, the South Western outskirts of the town of Dessie and Sheshabir, the North West outskirts of the town of Kombolcha were named after the two prominent preachers of *Sheikh* Garad and *Sheikh* Sabir of Harar respectively. The *gragn* episode consequently led to the demise of the Christian kingdom and converted significant number of Amhara community in the highland areas (Husseini, 1998).

The last phase of Islam and Islamization in South Wollo is linked with the establishment of Sufi institutions in the late eighteenth and the beginning of nineteenth centuries. This indeed provided a new impetus for the pace of Islamization and most importantly, however, the Sufi *tariqa* played significant role in providing the social infrastructure for the intellectual and cultural development of Islam in the area (Hussien, 2001: 69-70). The first and the most dominant Sufi order introduced in Wollo was the Qadiriyya<sup>42</sup> order and others such as *Khatmiyya*, *Sammaniyya*, *Tijaniyya* and *Shadhiliyya* emerged

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<sup>42</sup> The Qadiriyya tariqa was introduced by Fiqih Hashim, a man of Harar origin. He first initiated a mystic and a scholar, Sheik al-Jamal al-Din of Anna (d.1882). The Sammaniyya order was introduced to Southern Wollo by Amir Hussein, a man of Sudanese descent, who initiated sheik Jawhar b. Hayder, a scholar at Shonka. Khatmiyya was believed to have been introduced to Borena, Worehimano and Warra Babbo by a certain sheiks Habib and Bashir. Shadhiliyya linked with a certain mystic scholar from Warahimano named Ibrahim Negash. See for further details the book of Hussein Ahmed, *Islam in the Nineteenth Century Wollo*(2001: 68-71).

later. It was during this period that Islam merged with the emerging Oromo dynasties to resist the influence of the imperial power of the Christian monarch (Ibid).

The expansion of the Oromo to the north in the late sixteenth century temporarily hindered the expansion of Islam in Wollo. In the coming century, however, many of the Oromo converted to the religion of Islam. In due course of Islamization, the conversion of the Oromo chief preceded that of the subjects. There are two assumptions as to why the Oromo of Wollo embraced Islam; firstly, in the course of their movement the Oromo confronted with the Christian Kingdom in the north for territorial conquest. This in turn paved the way for the Muslim *ulema* to be an ally of the Oromo chief and Islam provided ideological framework for the conflict. Secondly, Islam like other Oromo of Ethiopia provided alternative “elaborated material culture” for the growing human and cattle population, and in the process they adopted the agricultural techniques and commerce from indigenous Muslims of Wollo (Braukamber, 2002).

Different Islamic schools of Jurisprudence (*fiqh*) were introduced in Ethiopia and South Wollo through the agency of Muslim scholars who had their religious education in Hijaz, Yemen and Sudan but it is difficult to indicate the exact time of their introduction because of the absence of written sources that would support the oral one (Hussein, 2001). The earliest and the most dominant school of jurisprudence believed to be the *Shafiya medhab* which was founded by Abu Abdullah Muhammed b. Idris al-Shafi in the eight century AD. Muslims of Ifat, Wollo, Harar, Bali and Arsi are dominantly followers of this school (Tirmingham, 1952). Hussein suggests that the dominant position of the school in many parts of Ethiopia was probably because of its precedence than other schools of jurisprudence. The second school of law is the *Hanfiya medhab* which was founded by an Iraqi jurist, Abu Hanafi al-Numan b. Thabit in the eight century AD. The Hanafi School is the second most widely applied school of law in Ethiopia and of Wollo (Tirmingham, 1952; Hussein, 2001).

### **4.3 The Sufi –Salafi Interactions in South Wollo (1990s-2017)**

#### **4.3.1 The early Salafi propagation and the reaction of the Sufis in South Wollo**

Although the first acquaintance with Salafism in South Wollo believed to have been connected with the Italian sponsored Muslim pilgrims <sup>43</sup> from Wollo in 1937, we can be certain that it came to appear to the surface following the 1991 regime change in Ethiopia (Abbink, 2007). The movement was first started by individual scholars in the town of Dessie in the early 1990s from their base at the grand mosque of Arab-Genda and then spread to other small towns of southern Wollo like Wogidi, Kelala, Kutaber and Akesta following the deployment of Salafi preachers and teachers. Although it was natural to see new thoughts or movements could not be easily adopted by the society without being challenged by the already established one, the first operation of the teaching of Salafism might not be easy in South Wollo where Sufism had rooted for centuries (IAG & MoFA Report, 2016: 37). According to key Salafi informants, the reaction of the Sufi leaders to the teaching of Salafism in South Wollo in the early period was negative as they perceived them as troublemakers, and even sometimes they expelled them from mosques. At the worst, there were even cases of report in which individuals with the Salafi identity had been attacked and their property was destructed. In the town of Dessie, for example, a business-man by the name Nasir who was suspected to have affiliation with the teaching of Salafism was attacked and his snack shop was burnt down in 1992/3. These incidents forced Salafists to devise new strategies to spread their own version of teaching to the Muslim community. Accordingly the steady propagation of the Salafi creed focusing on the youth and a humanitarian approach through the provision of philanthropic service were preferred to be the best alternatives that could enable them to reach the ordinary Muslim believers in South Wollo.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Informants of mine failed to report the exact number of Muslim pilgrims who had been financed by the Italians in South Wollo. This pilgrimage, however, believed to have exposed Muslims of South Wollo to have its first contact with the Salafi teaching.

<sup>44</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 9 and 21 September 2017 and kombolcha on 4 October 2017. Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017.

The Salafi movement beginning from the middle of 1990s was more organized, peaceful and purely confined on missionary activities.<sup>45</sup> Many of the preachers appeared with clearer objective of promoting the ideals of Salafism through pulling resources (literatures and finance) from local and global Salafi networks. They gradually won the people through employing three important strategies. Firstly, they approached the youth with appealing behaviors which opened the way to teach them in mosques using persuasive verses from the Quran and Hadith. Secondly, they built close relationship with influential people such as educated people, government officials and respected business people. Thirdly, they engaged in philanthropic services through distributing gifts in the form of money, food, goods and animals. According to informants, some of the beneficiaries of the Salafi charitable services were Sufi teachers and their disciples. For example, during the month of Ramadan meals were distributed in mosques where Muslims including the disciples of the Sufis (*deressa*) reported to have been served. Moreover, during the holiday of *idal-adha* animals were distributed in the form of gifts to great Sufi teachers in urban centers of South Wollo.<sup>46</sup> The new strategies dramatically changed the image of Salafists as 'generous Muslims' who are genuinely working for the benefit of Wollo Muslims. On the contrary, the gradual acceptance of Salafists in the long run undermined the social and spiritual capital of the Sufis in South Wollo (IAG & MoFA Report, 2016:37).

The early Salafi propagation in South Wollo mainly targeted institutional Sufism specifically pilgrimage centers of Sufi shrines. The shrines scattered in different parts of South Wollo were the social and spiritual centers of Wollo Muslims where deceased saints were invoked for intercession, health, fertility and wealth. Amongst these Jama Nigus, Geta and Mejit were the most prominent shrines of South Wollo. These shrines

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<sup>45</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017; Interviews with key Salafi informants in Dessie on 21 September and 2 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October 2017.

<sup>46</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on September 21, 2017 and Kombolcha on 7 August 2017. Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

were prosperous as they were flooded with votive gifts of pilgrims in cash and kind since their foundation in the nineteenth century. As the preaching of Salafism spread in different towns of South Wollo especially after the middle of the 1990s, the number of pilgrims to these shrines began to decline and there by dwindled their economic power. This was because the 'new' Salafi teaching nullified the spiritual legitimacy of pilgrimage on which the economic backbone of Sufi shrines were based and invoking at the tombs of Sufi saints was also proclaimed as one of the greatest sins of Islam.<sup>47</sup> For example, the guardian of Geta shrine, Haji Muhidin asserted that the number of pilgrims to his shrine has dramatically declined as the teaching of Salafism spread in the towns of Southern Wollo. Salafists employed two methods for the attitudinal change of the urban Muslims regarding pilgrimage to Sufi Shrines. Firstly, they used direct preaching to the Muslims in different mosques where they openly taught pilgrimage to Sufi Shrines as an act of *Shirk*. Secondly, teaching parents through their siblings. In doing the so, students along with their Quranic program were taught *tewhid* in which pilgrimage to Sufi shrines, worshipping saints' day, exorcising evil spirit, all forms of sorcery and sacrifices made for evil spirits other than Allah were labeled *as* acts of *shrik*. When students returned back home they began to simmer their families through nullifying the spiritual legitimacy of these practices since they were inconsistent with the guidelines of the teaching of Quran and the Prophet's tradition, *Sunnah*.<sup>48</sup>

According to Key Salafi informants the objective of the Salafi movement in South Wollo from the beginning has been exclusively missionary as it focuses on the purification of Islam from *shirk* and bad cultural practices. The typology of the movement can be categorized under "puritanist Salafi" as it advocates the teaching of personal, social and ritual purity in their own communities and abstain from politics (Wiktorowicz, 2006). They also argue the objective of the movement is consistent with the constitutional provision of religious freedom stipulated in article (27). Article 27(2) states, "*believers*

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Interview held in Kombolcha with Haji Muhidin Ahmed, the guardian of Geta Shrine on 15 December 2017. Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

may organize institutions of religious education and administration in order to propagate and establish their faith.” Unlike contemporary Sufis, one of the spectacular achievements of the Salafi group in Southern Wollo is their rigorous teaching against bad traditional beliefs like sorcery, *badigez*, *gobeden*, and appeasing female spirits like *chilla* and *rahillo*. For centuries, these beliefs were reported to have contributed to interpersonal feud and squandered the meager resources of the community as they were ceremonial based. Salafists reported to have preached Muslims to refrain from these social maladies and the need to practice only the five pillars of Islam.<sup>49</sup>

The growing Salafi influence in South Wollo infuriated the Sufi leaders mainly of the guardian of the Sufi shrines who had been directly targeted by the day to day preaching of Salafists. This forced the Sufis to mobilize their supporters from different parts of South Wollo to join the anti-Salafi conference held in the town of Kombolcha in the middle of the 1990s where Sufi leaders and their followers pledged to defend the “rituals of their fathers” from the ‘newly’ emerged Salafi thought. The free distribution of anti-Salafi literature by a certain *Sheikh* at the conference escalated tension between Sufis and Salafists. The text mainly targeted *Sheikh* Mohammed Abdul Wahhab, the founder of the Salafi creed in which he was described as ‘a Jewish interloper’ and ‘enemy of Prophet Mohammed’ who dedicated for the obliteration of the religion of Islam. This greatly radicalized the followers of Sufi leaders especially in the rural areas where the emerging Salafi figures were socially isolated from the rural community. This in turn accelerated the influx of Salafi scholars and their followers to urban centers where the social base of the Salafi movement was relatively broader. Although it was unsuccessful, the same social isolation had been used by the Sufis in the town of Dessie in the early years of the 1990s as a punishment for their deviance from the mainstream Sufi teaching. Such Sufi radicalization was observed in burial association (*qira*) where Salafists were denied access to burial services. In reaction to the Sufis, they formed their

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<sup>49</sup> Interview held in the town of Dessie on 21 September 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October. Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and kombolcha on 25 December 2017. I personally attended few of the religious preaching against bad practices in the grand mosque of Arab-Genda before 2011/12.

own burial associations which were exclusively been with Muslim identity as criterion of membership. The new Salafi burial associations were intra-religiously inclusive in which every Muslim has the right to join the newly formed associations regardless of their Sufi or Salafi orientations with no or minor entrance fee. This eventually strengthened Salafists in South Wollo through winning new converts into the fold of the Salafi creed. The intra religious conflict in the Muslim community of South Wollo not only affected the interaction of actors but also the configuration of burial associations in major urban centers. Almost all burial associations before the advent of Salafists in south Wollo were mixed where religious identity was not a criterion of membership. This could allow both Muslims and Christians to enjoy membership in the same burial association. In the town of Dessie for example, there were only 32 mixed *qira* until the early years of 1990s. Following the friction between Sufis and Salafists, many new Muslim *qira* began to emerge and right at the time of the interview there were 34 Muslim burial associations in the zonal capital alone. This has happened because many Muslims quit membership from their previous mixed-*qira* and joined the new Muslim burial associations. Two reasons are mentioned for this transformation. Firstly, the preaching of Salafists in the town of Dessie influenced many people to search for their Muslim identity. Secondly, the new burial association on the basis of religious brotherhood attracted Muslim orphans, needy and elders primarily motivated by the Salafi philanthropic service.<sup>50</sup>

The two prominent Salafi teaching centers in South Wollo were the mosque of Arab-Genda in Dessie and *Medresete ahlul-Sunna* in Borena Woreda. The former is believed to have been the head quarter of the Salafi movement in South Wollo while the latter was its western wing. Amongst many mosques in Dessie, Arab-Genda is located at the heart of the town, was the center of religious transformation. The mosque acquired its name as Arba-Genda since it was founded by Arab merchants who had been dwelling

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<sup>50</sup> Interview held in Dessie on 21 September and Kombolcha on 8 October 2017. See also Abbink's *Religio-Communal Transformation in Wollo* (2007).

surrounding the mosque. Owing to the presence of foreign nationals who had made regular contact with the main heartland of the Islamic world, a wind of change might have blown as a resource of revivalist movement in the town. Many students from different parts of South Wollo flocked to these centers for Islamic educations not on the basis of doctrinal orientations rather on the basis of scholars' fame on Islamic knowledge and the availability of resources. Beyond this, these centers were furnished with important modern amenities like class rooms, books and dormitory. The centers reported to have attracted resource from the local businessmen and individual donors from abroad. Well educated teachers who accomplished their education from Saudi Arabia and Sudan were employed to train students. The two centers adopted a well advanced Islamic curriculum basing the curriculum of Medina. The curriculum emphasized on the teaching of *tewhid*, Arabic language, Quran and Hadith contrary to the old *fiqh*- centered Sufi curriculum. Graduates from the two centers reported to have been deployed in major towns of South Wollo such as Kelela, Kutaber, Wogidi, and Aqesta. They were even employed as mosque Imams and teachers in the neighboring Oromiya Zone such as in Kemisa and Bati. Out of the region, they were able to secure job opportunity in the different towns of Afar Regional State and in the capital, Addis Ababa.<sup>51</sup>

#### **4.3.2 The Role of Prominent Salafi Preachers in the Spread of Salafism in South Wollo**

The role of individual Salafi scholars and preachers had immense contribution for the expansion and consolidation of the Salafi creed in post-1991 religious order in South Wollo. The early senior Salafi scholars like *Sheikh* Ahmed Mohamed, *Sheikh* Adem Musa and *Sheikh* Hussien Ali have played decisive role for the introduction of Salafism in South Wollo. *Sheikh* Ahmed Mohammed was widely known for the introduction of his strict teaching of the Salafi brand. He was a man of Kelala (western part of Wollo) who attended his Islamic education in Medina for ten years. He started his teaching in the

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with a senior Salafi scholar in the town of Dessie on 4 September 2017 and Interview held Dessie with men of Borena Origin in October 24, 2017.

grand Arab-Genda (lit. quarter of the Arabs) mosque with few students possibly with the support of *Sheikh* Adem Musa, Imam of the mosque. Soon he got popularity and acceptance from young Muslims. Another influential Salafi Scholar who laid the foundation for the teaching of *tewhid* in South Wollo was *Sheikh* Adem Musa (d.2016). He was the leading Imam in the grand mosque of Arab-Genda in the town of Dessie. He was a man of Chaketa (Borena district) who began Islamic education in his early childhood. He attended his Islamic education at different Islamic teaching centers in South Wollo and moved as far as Jimma for advanced Islamic education. After he returned back from Jimma, he began to teach the translation of the Holy Quran and Islamic geography in the grand Mosque of Arab-Genda. His extraordinary knowledge of Islam and diplomatic approach brought the old Sufi *ulema* (sing. *alim*) and young Salafi scholars to work for Islam without drawing lines of demarcations. He used to teach both Sufis and Salafis without discrimination. He even helped both the Sufi and Salafi *ulema* to create their own circles of teaching at different corners of the grand mosque of Arab-Genda and even there had been cross-group attendance from both sides on certain religious issues especially on the teaching of *fiqh*. As part of teaching intra-religious tolerance, the Imam of the mosque used to attend the religious teaching of the Sufis in the mosque and other Sufi scholars too attended the teaching of *Sheikh* Adem Musa. This seems to have made Arab-Genda mosque more peaceful for the last three decades of his leadership till he was dismissed by the newly elected Ahabash *mejlis* officials in 2012.<sup>52</sup> *Sheikh* Hussien Ali of Hara-Wobello is also noted for his firm stand against non-Islamic beliefs and practices in South Wollo. He was one of the students of Haji Ahmed Mohamed, the former Imam of Arab-Genda mosque. Due to his longtime struggle on the teaching of *tewhid*, he is applauded by his supporters with an appellation, '*mujahid*', a title which is given for Muslims who are presumed to be striving in the cause of Allah. On the contrary, he has been frequently quarreled with local Sufi figures who were identified themselves with syncretic cultural practices. With the objective of combating *shirk* and non-Islamic beliefs, he has published a deducted and a widely circulated

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<sup>52</sup> Interviews held on 9, 21 September 2017 and 4 October 2017.

Amharic poem entitled “*semeretul Ijtihad*” (lit. the fruits of independent reasoning) in which the meaning of *twehid* and the severity of *shirk* is widely articulated.<sup>53</sup>

The early Salafi scholars were succeeded by their young Salafi students to whom the transformation of many Muslims to the Salafi creed in southern Wollo and of the town of Dessie attributed. Amongst these were *Ustaz* Mohammed Ansi, *Ustaz* Seid Himaliya and the late *Ustaz* Abubuker Ahmed. All these preachers applied peaceful and soft methodology in which strict Islamic ethics using rationalist approach were important tools of their attractions. These seem to have been the gaps that the Sufi scholars could not fill for the young and progressive urban Muslims. As a result of their preaching, many young people from all walks of life including individuals who were alcoholic and gangsters behaviorally transformed and began a new life of religiosity.<sup>54</sup> Mohammed Ansi, the son of Yemeni Arab, Ansi Mohammed, almost dedicated much of his time for the teaching of *tewhid* from his base at Arab-Genda mosque. He radiated his missionary work to the different towns of Southern Wollo and other parts of the country such as Gonder, Bahir Dar, Harar, Hawassa, Addis Ababa e.t.c. He is said to have been the first to encourage his female students to wear *hijab* for the first time in the history of South Wollo. He is reported to have amicable relation with great Sufi leaders in different parts of Wollo. He used to visit many poor families and support them financially. As part of discharging his social responsibility, he encouraged his students for marriage through sponsoring their wedding expenses. Although he was reported to have followed a peaceful approach and abstained from any form of violence, he was deported to his father land, Yemen after he was allegedly been accused of conspiring a terrorist plot in 2008.<sup>55</sup> Another influential figure who had been one of the students of *Sheikh* Adem Musa and had considerable contribution to the Salafi movement in Southern Wollo was

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<sup>53</sup> Interviews with *Sheikh* Hussein Ali (*Mujahid*) on 24 August 2017. I am greatly indebted to him to let me read his book.

<sup>54</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017.

<sup>55</sup> Interview held with one of the friends of Mohammed Ansi on 21 September 2017.

Ustaz Seid Himaliya. He still was from his base at Arab-Genda mosque. Because of his powerful and impressive preaching, *Ustaz* Seid was able to attract many young merchants and educated Muslims to join his Salafi *Jem'a*. By and the large, he was the spokesman of the Salafi *Ulema* in South Wollo. Another influential young preacher who is noted for the consolidation of the Salafi creed is Ustaz Abubeker Ahmed.<sup>56</sup> He is a descendant of Afar and Argoba origin but he was born and grew up in the town of Dessie. He was the son of a successful Muslim merchant family who owned business in the town. He began Islamic and modern education in the town of Dessie specifically in Arab-Genda mosque. As a pious Muslim, his father endeavored to make his son grow up with Islamic manner. When Abubeker became mature enough, he succeeded his father to run the day to day business activities of his family. This did not make him busy from attending his modern and Islamic educations. He lastly inclined to be a renowned preacher of Islam and business man in South Wollo. He even served as head of Islamic propagation in the *mejlis* of South Wollo from 2004 to 2008. Abubeker lastly shifted his center from South Wollo to Addis Ababa to expand his family business and strengthen his religious preaching. He soon has emerged as a successful businessman and a famous national Islamic figure in Ethiopia. Following the Muslim protest in 2012/13, he was appointed as the chairman of the Muslim Arbitration Committee for the crisis in Awoliya which eventually cost him years of imprisonment following the government crackdown of Muslim Protesters of Awoliya in between 19 and 21 July 2012 (FANA TV, September, 2018).<sup>57</sup>

#### **4.3.3 The first violent incidents**

A counter Salafi movement was organized in the neighboring mosque of Shewa-Ber against *Sheikh* Ahmed Mohammed, *Ustaz* Seid Himaliya and Imam of Arab-Genda mosque. Young followers from the two mosques regularly quarreled over the issues of *chat*, *temben* (a deducted poem authored in Morocco), celebrating *meulid* and group

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid

<sup>57</sup> Fana Broad Cast Corporation presented Ustaz Abubeker Ahmed as a special guest for the ceremony of Muslims' holiday- *Idal Adha* in September 2018.

*du'a* after *salat*. The Imam of Shewa-Ber mosque, *Sheikh* Mohammed Jamma reported to have excommunicated young Salafi Muslims who attended their education in Arab-Genda mosque. These had exacerbated tension between the two mosques and invited external intervention from Addis Ababa and the zonal *mejlis*. A group of Wollo Muslim scholars and zonal *mejlis* officials arranged a public debate in the compound of Shewa-Ber mosque where the Salafists were confronted with their Sufi counter-parts. Representing Salafists, *Ustaz* Seid Himalia began to defend questions related with *Chat* as instrument of *du'a*, *temben* recited in place of *selwate-al-nabi* (lit. saluting the Prophet), celebrating *meulid* and group *du'a* after praying as mere *bid'a*. At the moment he was answering the second question a group of Sufi –oriented young Muslims began to throw stones on the speaker and few Muslims from both sides injured but the discussion resumed with the help of the police force. The organizers of the debate decided the reappearance of *Ustaz* Seid Himalia to the stage. He kept on challenging Sufi scholars to provide evidence from the Quran and the hadith of the Prophet but no one dared to pick up single evidence to refute his argument. This dramatically changed the attitude of Sufi-oriented young Muslims in favor of the Salafists. Finally, the zonal *mejlis* permitted *Ustaz* Seid Himalia to teach *tewhid* in the Sufi–dominated mosque of Shewa-Ber once in a week. Although this decision disappointed many Sufis leaders, it paved the way for many young Muslims to join the teaching of the Salafi creed.<sup>58</sup>

Although Salafi preachers had secured license from the zonal *mejlis* to preach their own version of Islam in the grand mosque of Shewaber, the conflict continued with the Sufi leaders till they were expelled through violence in 1996/1997. The Salafists through their relentless preaching of *tewhid* were able to win the young Muslims and the business community in and around the mosque. At the midst of this, violence erupted between the Imam of the mosque and the young Muslims following the alleged accusation of the former in a certain superstitious activity which was supposed to be outlawed by legalistic Islam. The incident happened when young Salafi students reported to

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<sup>58</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017. Interviews held in Dessie with eyewitnesses on, 9, 21 September 2017 and 4 October 2017.

have red-handed *Sheikh* Mohammed Jamma, a Sufi Imam of Shewa-Ber mosque while he was offering animal sacrifices (*dem-madimat*) to appease evil spirits. This finally disappointed the young Salafists and they refused to pray behind the Imam. They also went further to organize a separate congregation in the same mosque. Worried by the split of the *Jem'a* into two congregations, the zonal *mejlis* passed a decision of removing *Sheikh* Mohammed Jamma and replaced him with *Sheikh* Yaqute---a new Salafi Imam.<sup>59</sup> There are two controversial views from both sides over the decision of *mejlis*. Key Sufi informants argued that decision makers in the hierarchy of the zonal *mejlis* were Salafists and had amicable relation with government officials.<sup>60</sup> On the other side, the Salafists argued that it was an independent decision by *mejlis* without government intervention because none of the two thoughts were securitized by the state.<sup>61</sup> Although it was unsuccessful, the x-Imam and his main supporter *Sheikh* Nuru Yimam began to organize their followers through attracting influential figures of the government to reverse the decision of *mejlis*. This planted the seed of the second Sufi-Salafi (i.e 2012/2013) conflict in Southern Wollo and disappointed the Sufis figures whom expressed their dissent at various occasions to governmental and non-governmental gatherings. As part of his grievance with the government, a prominent Sufi cleric, *Sheikh* Nuru Yimam joined membership in Coalition for Unity and Democracy Party (CUDP) where he used to air his dissent against the government.<sup>62</sup> It is reported that the Salafi movement was very strong in the town of Dessie after the middle of 1990s. They were even reported to have controlled many of the grand mosques in the town such as Arab-Genda, Shewa-Ber and Arado mosques. The Sufi-Salafi competition to control mosque administration was intense but concluded with the victory of the reformists. One of the reasons for the success of the Salafists was their strong support

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<sup>59</sup> Interview held in Dessie with an eyewitness on 4 October 2017.

<sup>60</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with chairman and secretary of the zonal *mejlis* on 10 October 2017.

<sup>61</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with eyewitnesses on, 9, 21 September 2017 and 4 October 2017.

<sup>62</sup> Interview held in Dessie on 21 September 2017.

from the young Muslims and business people.<sup>63</sup> In due course of time, the Sufi *Sheikhs* and mosque functionaries were removed and attacked as promoters of *bid'a*. Although the Sufis reported to have warned the government at the beginning to stop the advance of the Salafi's influence in the Muslim community and its looming socio-political repercussions, they gave them a deaf ear and even acknowledged the Salafi movement as part of exercising religious freedom enshrined in the constitution (IAG & MoFA Report, 2016:37).

After the early anti-Salafi conference in the town of Kombolcha discussed earlier, Sufis of Kombolcha decided once again to defend their mosques from the emerging Salafi preachers. In doing so, they denied access to the Salafi preachers in all mosques of the town and even banned individuals with Salafi orientation from praying in the Sufi mosques. However, this did not immunize the town from the Salafi influence following the arrival of new Muslim graduates who were employed at the different sectors of the government in the town and a wave of Salafi preaching from the zonal capital. Thus, Salafists began to pray their daily *Salat* in rented houses till they constructed their own. The movement in the town of Kombolcha steadily overwhelmed the Sufi influence following the arrival of many business people from the neighboring Afar region. As the Afar based Muslims came to the area, they understood the need to construct a mosque and madrasa. They joined to the local Salafists and organized a committee of fund raising. Shortly after, they were able to lease land for the construction of Teqiwa mosque, the oldest Salafi mosque in the town of Kombolcha. No sooner had Salafists constructed the mosque than they began to attract youngsters to join the Salafi creed through showing Islamic films in the newly constructed *madrasa* in the vicinity of the mosque. Beyond this, their effective philanthropic service to the poor also convinced many people to support the Salafi cause. Salafists also noted for their sincerity for Islamic values as it is shown in their dressing codes and growing beards. They are also free from any form of addictions as opposed to many Sufi figures who are blamed for their excessive *chat* addiction. The two prominent Salafi figures who were credited for

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<sup>63</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017.

the movement in the town of Kombolcha were Seid Aqida and Seid Destaw. They were noted for their attractive preaching and inexorable effort to organize the Muslim community around the Salafi cause. Although Salafists attempted to win more supporters in the town of Kombolcha, they could not attract many of the Muslims as they were successful in other parts of South Wollo. No where the Sufis are strong in Southern Wollo as they are in Kombolcha. Comparatively, the Sufis in the town has been the most intolerant to the Salafists than other Sufis of South Wollo. This is probably because of the presence of many Sufi institutions in and around the town of Kombolcha (eg. the Shrines of Geta, mejit and Jema Nigus)<sup>64</sup>.

The Sufis did not stop countering the Salafi influence in the town of kombolcha. They came up with new strategies of countering Salafists through winning the support of the Christians. In doing so, they devised a derogatory rhetoric of “Pentecostals of Kombolcha.”--- a metaphor referring Salafi Muslims and Protestant Christians. ‘Pentecostal of Islam’ stands for the Salafists while ‘Pentecostal of Christianity’ designated for evangelical Christians. This helped them to create a common platform for Orthodox Christians to join the counter Salafi movement as they were fighting protestant Christians on their side. The counter ‘Pentecostals of Kombolcha’ had been informed by the notion of ‘indigenous’ versus ‘exotic’ mental setting. Salafism in Islam and Protestant in Christianity considered as ‘exotic’ while Sufism in Islam and Orthodox in Christianity are considered as ‘indigenous’ to South Wollo. Although it was unsuccessful, countering ‘Pentecostals of Kombolcha’----Salafists for Islam and Protestants for Orthodox Christians had been used as a means of mobilization for countering the so-called ‘religious extremism’ in their respective religious domains.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Kombolcha on 25 December 2017; Interview held with key informants held in Kombolch on 7 August and 4 October 2017.

<sup>65</sup>FGD (ibid); Interview held with key informants held in Kombolch on 7 August 2017, 18 September 2017 and 3 December 2017.

#### 4.3.4 The second violent incidents (2011-17)

The second Sufi-Salafi conflict began in South Wollo in 2011 when the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC) with the support of the government attempted to impose the doctrine of Ahbash on the Muslims of South Wollo through organizing a country wide training. The training targeted mosque Imams, university students, *mejlis* officials and mosque administrators where participants were urged to adopt the teaching of Ahbash through masking its doctrinal heresies. The trainees were also explicitly told to support a moderate, non-radical and government preferred form of Islam (Abbink, 2014:7-8). However, Salafi participants from the beginning opposed as they were aware of the religious doctrine of Ahbash and its heretical beliefs while many ordinary Muslims and the Sufis were confused by the new terminology. When Sufi trainees were asked about the origin and meaning of Ahbash, they defined Ahbash as *habesha* (i.e the old name of Ethiopia) for the reason it was founded by Abdullahi Harari, a man of *habesh* or Ethiopian origin. For a couple of months, the word Ahbash filled the air in the towns of South Wollo.<sup>66</sup> At the midst of this, a documentary was released by Ethiopian Muslim diaspora entitled “*Ahbash and the Conspiracy of Ethiopian Government on Ethiopian Muslims*” and disclosed the secrets through tracing the networks of the conspiracy. This simmered Salafists and their supporters and led them to discuss on how to ward off the problem of Ahbash in their mosques and began to communicate with the counter Ahbash movement in the capital city, Addis Ababa.<sup>67</sup> As part of countering the spread of Ahbash, Salafists of South Wollo decided to disseminate copies of this documentary to their supporters from Dessie to other towns of the zone through DVD and mobile phone cell. Offended by the documentary, Muslims in Harbu and Degan towns protested against *mejlis* where government security killed two

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<sup>66</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 24 August, 18 September and 16 October 2017 and kombolcha on 7 August 2017.

<sup>67</sup> Audio-V-visual material released by Ethiopian Diaspora part(I)I available < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aSvQFmMuc>> and part(II) available at < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mfw42dtgQB4>> and Interviews held in Dessie 21 September 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October 2017

individuals and arrested many demonstrators (Salafiyya, 2011).<sup>68</sup> At the midst of this, one of the Sufi leaders in Kombolch, *Sheikh* Umer proclaimed himself as “Ahbash” (who later promoted as the vice president of Mejlis) which in turn exerted tension between Sufis and Salafists in South Wollo. He mobilized Sufis of kombolcha around him and issued a divisive *fetwa* that could endanger the social cohesion of the Muslim community in South Wollo. In response to this, Salafists of South Wollo in collaboration with moderate Sufis and the counter Ahbash coalition from Addis Ababa organized a conference known as “*Yandenet-ena Yasedeqa* program”—literally, ‘unity and charity program’ in the towns of Dessie and Kombolcha. The objective of the conference was to restore solidarity between the mainstream Sufis and Salafi Muslims through isolating the radical Ahbash. The conference hosted two famous Islamic preachers like *Ustaz* Abubeker Ahmed and *Ustaz* Yasin Nuru where they delivered motivating speeches on Islamic unity and brotherhood. For the ceremony bulls were slaughtered and banquet was prepared for both Muslims and Christian participants. They seem to have invited Christians to partake in the forum seeking the latter’s support in their counter Ahbash campaign. Participants of the conference issued statement of position in which they condemned Ahbash and requested the withdrawal of the government from the religious affairs of the Muslim community.<sup>69</sup>

The confrontation between Sufis and Salafists in South Wollo once again fueled when the EIASC issued a country wide *mejlis* election in October 2012(Abbink, 2014). In implementing the decision of EIASC, electoral committee was organized to facilitate the electoral process of *mejlis*. The committee passed extraordinary decision to conduct *mejlis* election in government building. This consequently forced Salafists to raise the question of impartiality and interference as they perceived the potential sabotage of Ahbash and the government to manipulate the outcome of the election and prevent the candidacy of Salafists from *mejlis* election. Sharing the view of Salafists, the global

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<sup>68</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 21 September 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October 2017.

<sup>69</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017. Interviews held in Dessie in September 21, 2017 and Kombolca 4, October 2017.

center on cooperative security report (2016) confirms this very fact as follows, “the EPDRF did allow new elections for the EIASC but stipulated the state-run election structures rather than Muslim institutions must administer them.”<sup>70</sup> As was expected, the result of the election totally marginalized the Salafists and brought the radical Sufis to *mejlis* leadership. No sooner had the radicals taken the zonal *mejlis* offices than they engaged in the dismissal of Salafi Imams and mosque functionaries in the different towns of South Wollo.<sup>71</sup> As this juncture, Salafists seem to have been relatively deprived<sup>72</sup> by the government in relation to the 2012 *mejlis* election. This was because the government promoted the Sufis at the expense of Salafists and facilitated the ascendancy of Ahabash to control all Islamic Institutions in South Wollo through conducting a ‘state-run’ election. The imbalance of expectation on what is stipulated in the constitution (referring none government interference) and the reality on the ground forced Salafists to use a non-violent street protest through chanting slogans, “*respect the constitution, stop interference on issues of religion...*” and “*Down! Down! With Ahabash!*”<sup>73</sup> The dismissal of Salafists from *mejlis* and Islamic institutions in South Wollo by the new Ahabash leaders frustrated the former and forced them to embark two important measures. Firstly, they began to protest regularly in every Friday for the return of Salafi Imams and mosque administrators. One of the biggest demonstrations held in Arab-Genda mosque of Dessie in August 2012 where police used teargas and beat up protesters outside the compound of the mosque. Secondly, they mobilized the business people to cease their financial contributions to mosques which failed under the control of radical Sufis. The reaction of Salafists against Ahabash and the government was

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<sup>70</sup> See Kessels .E et al (2016) “ Violent Extremism and Instability in the Greater Horn of Africa : An Examinations of Drivers and Responses ” in *Global Center on Cooperative Security Report*. Available at <<w.w.globalcenter.org>>

<sup>71</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017. Interviews held in Dessie on 21 September and 17 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October 2017.

<sup>72</sup> See the theoretical explications of relative deprivation theory in the literature part of this dissertation.

<sup>73</sup> I have seen one of their demonstrations on 26 October 2012 on the day of *Idal-Adha* while I was visiting my parents in Dessie.

moderate as it did not cause human and material destruction though the responses of the latter were relatively disproportionate<sup>74</sup>.

The Sufi-Salafi conflict reached its peak when *Sheikh* Nuru Yimam, a prominent Sufi religious figure was shot dead while he was coming from the mosque on the night of 05 July 2013. The government and the radical Sufis accused the Salafists of plotting the massacre and the state television confirmed this through showing the assassin. However, Salafists rejected the event as a 'drama' of the government to blackmail Muslim protest. Taking this incident as the pretext, the government took security measures on the Salafists by which many were arrested, tortured and others were forced to exile in the country and abroad.<sup>75</sup> In addition, the Federal High Court sentenced on 13 Salafi Muslims who were allegedly been accused of killing *Sheikh* Nuru from two to sixteen years of jail in July 2013(Addis Standard, 2017).<sup>76</sup> Who killed *Sheikh* Nuru is still controversial.

After assessing the imbalance of power to initiate further confrontation with their rivals in 2014 probably fearing more bloodshed, Salafists applied avoidance mode of conflict management strategy which reduced the Salafi resistance to an underground current and eventually mitigated the destructiveness of the Sufi-Salafi conflict. Although the government mistreated and imprisoned Salafists following the killing of *Sheikh* Nuru, they were not behaviorally transformed into extremism<sup>77</sup> as it had been observed in other parts of the world. This does not mean that they have not passed through at least the first two pushing factors of extremism. Firstly, they were excluded from Islamic institutions and their ideology was securitized. Beyond this, the local government and *mejlis* reported to have despised the Salafists as promoters of extremism. Secondly, the

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<sup>74</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017. Interview held in Dessie on 21 September and 16 October 2017.

<sup>75</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Kombolcha on 25 December 2017. Interviews held in Dessie on 18 September and Kombolcha on 8 October 2017

<sup>76</sup> A famous newspaper in Ethiopia which posted this news on 26 January 2017, available at << <http://addisstandard.com/news-court-ethiopia-jails-thirteen-muslims-accused-killing-prominent-sheik-three-sixteen-years/>>>

<sup>77</sup> See the conceptual explication of radicalism and extremism in chapter two of this dissertation.

Salafists fled to other parts of the country and abroad where there was less/ no influence and avoid inter-group communication. As part of Salafi radicalization, they began to channel their grievance through social media in which they challenged the government and Ahabash. This was evidenced by an internet based weekly radio-program, *dimas^achen-Yesema (lit.let our voice heard!)* which alerted the Salafi community throughout the country to resist the 'wrong doings' of the government and Ahabash.<sup>78</sup>

Although the conflict between the Sufis and Salafists in the town of Kombolcha has been strong than other parts of South Wollo, it was more intensified following the arrival of Ahabash. Many times, the conflict was polemical and remained at emotional level. The Salafists is said to have invited the Sufis for intra-religious peace through dialogue and negotiation but the Sufis reported to have been unwilling. The ascendancy of *Sheikh Umer* as vice president of *mejlis* and the coming of Ahabash to Kombolcha were concomitant. He facilitated the arrival Ahabash teachers from Lebanon to teach their ideology in Kombolcha by which the town has become one of the training centers of Ahabash in Amhara Regional State (Yemuslimoch Guday, 2012). The advent of Ahabash in Kombolcha consequently radicalized the youth and leading them to extremism. The following evidences might explain such radicalizations:

- a) *Sheikh Umer* as a leader of Ahabash independently issued *fetwa* which affect the social interactions of Muslims in South Wollo. He is reported to have issued the futility of *nikah* (marriage contract) with the Salafi Muslims. He instructed his followers not to give their daughters to Salafi Muslims and even to terminate *nikah* of Muslim couples if one of them is found to be Salafi.<sup>79</sup> During my field

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<sup>78</sup> Interview held in Dessie on 9 & 21 September and Kombolcha 4 October 2017. Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017.

<sup>79</sup>Information generated through FGD held in Kombolcha on 25 December 2017. Interviews held in Kombolcha on 7 August 2017, 4 October 2017 and 8 October 2017

work, I have interviewed two individuals who were victims of wrecked marriage as a result of this *fetwa*.<sup>80</sup>

- b) Following the coming of Ahabash, the radicalized youth began to prohibit Salafi Muslims to pray in the Sufi-led mosques though all mosques are supposed to be the 'house of Allah'. Despite their difference in their religious creeds, both could pray in mosques they preferred for the last many years. The radicalized young Sufis reported to have banned Muslims of long beard and those who shortened their trousers above their ankle from entering mosques under their control. The worst happened when the newly elected radical Sufi *mejlis* officials (i.e 2012 election) in collaboration with the government forced Salafists to surrender Teqiwa Mosque, the oldest Salafi mosque in the town of Kombolcha. The *madrassa* with in the vicinity of the mosque transferred to the newly arriving Lebanon teachers as one of the regional training centers of Ahabash. The school admitted hundreds of students from different parts of Amhara and Tigray Regional States. Students were recruited cautiously and systematically by Ahabash figures on the basis family background; many of them were sons of great Sufi leaders notably custodians of shrines and traditional leaders. This is believed to have been with the assumption that people from this background are inherently intolerant towards Salafists.<sup>81</sup>
- c) The arrival of Ahabash in kombolcha affected the behavior of the mainstream Sufis and has now become a source of abhorrence and intolerance between the Salafists and the Sufis. Sufis with the orientation of Ahabash has now begun to ascribe *kufir* (apostasy) to the Salafists which had not been heard for the last two decades. Although it is not the behavior of all mainstream Sufis to ascribe *Kufir* in Kombolcha, now it is becoming the habit of the majority of the radicalized Ahabash youth. This seems to have ascertained Ahabash's policy of *tekfirization*

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<sup>80</sup> Interview held in Kombolcha on 4 October 2017. I have been witnessing this by interviewing couples of wrecked marriage

<sup>81</sup> Interviews held in Kombolcha on 4 October 2017 and 6 December 2017. Information generated through FGD held in Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>82</sup>widely discussed in the audio-visual documentary circulated in the internet. Although Ahbash is noted for its moderation, its followers are more intolerant to the Salafists than the non-Muslims. The radicalization of the local Sufis seems to have made Kombolcha one of the strong holds of the Lebanon Ahbash in Ethiopia.<sup>83</sup>

The counter Salafi movement in the western part of South wollo is a little bit weaker than other parts of the area. Key informants listed two reasons for the absence of strong counter Salafi movement in this part of Wollo. The first one is the absence of strong Sufi institutions that could lead and coordinate the movement. The second one is the presence of strong Salafi scholars who had their religious education in Saudi Arabia and the neighboring Sudan. The arrival of these scholars from abroad in Borena district led to the establishment of a modern Islamic school of *Ahlul-Sunna Waljamma Madrassa* in 1999 with in a vast land approximately 20,000 meter squares. The role of prominent Salafi scholars like *Sheikh* Abdulkarim and the late *Sheikh* Zubair (the first principal of the School) were prominent for the establishment of the center and were the founding fathers of *Ahlul-Sunna Waljamma Madrassa*. The school started its training with fifty students recruited from Wollo and the neighboring regions such as Tigray, Benishangul and Afar Regional States. The center taught Quran *hifz* (memorizing Quran) and the teaching of Hadith. The school admitted students within the age range of ten to fifty years old. The school continued to operate for twelve years till it was shut down by the government in 2012/13. Since the teaching of Salafism was strong, Salafists reported to have dominated the spiritual space of Islam in this area.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> FGD(ibid). *Tekfirization* is an act of ascribing *kufir* (apostesy) on the believers.

<sup>83</sup> Interviews held in Kombolcha in 4 October 2017 and see DVD released by Ethiopian Diaspora part(I) available<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aSvQFmMuc>>and part(II) available at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mfw42dtgQB4>>

<sup>84</sup> Interview held Dessie with graduate of *Ahlul-Sunna Waljamma Madrassa* on 9 September 2017.

#### 4.4 The social and economic basis of Sufis and Salafists in South Wollo

The young generation as the yoke of the society and the tool of societal transformation are always exposed to new ideas and are often promoters of change. The young Muslim generation in South Wollo in the last two decades and so experienced internal and external migrations due to extreme poverty and drought. These factors forced them to migrate to the different parts of the zone and other parts of Ethiopia such as Jimma, Kaffa, Addis Ababa and so forth. Moreover, they migrated to the Middle East mainly in Saudi Arabia in search of jobs and eventually exposed them to different ideas like Salafi revivalism. When Muslims who migrated to the different parts of Ethiopia and abroad returned back home, they began to teach their families and relatives, and through time Salafism became one of the contenders in the religious space of Islam in South Wollo. The economic liberalization following 1991 regime change in Ethiopia also encouraged local traders to engage in national and transnational trades. The frequency of Merchants to move and communicate with people of different ideas has also increased and eventually exposed them to revivalist tendencies.<sup>85</sup> Merchants have compared the merits and demerits of the two thoughts in South Wollo as follows, “...while we were with Sufism we squander our time and resource for communal praying (*waddaja*) which is not in the scripture, exposed to excessive chat addiction which is not allowed in Islam .... Now, thanks to Allah ... the teaching of *tewhid* saves our time, money and health...”<sup>86</sup> Salafism seems to have been alternative to merchants in South Wollo as Sufism was unresponsive for the concept of time and money in this competitive world. The Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo might be explained by Marxian theory of religious conflict. This is because Sufism is portrayed by the urban merchants as obstacle to progress and prosperity. On the contrary, Salafism is perceived as a progressive religious ideology as it considers the economic aspirations of the merchant class. As Marx argues, religious conflict to some extent is an expression of the underlying struggle between progressive

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<sup>85</sup> Interviews held on Kombolcha in October 4, 2017 and Dessie in September 21, 2017. Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolch on 25 December 2017.

<sup>86</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with local merchants on 3 August 2017 and Kombolcha on 13 October 2017. FGD(ibid).

and retrogressive forces in the wider economic system of the community (Furseth, 2006:26-31). The Salafi movement in South Wollo has not been carried out only by the *ulema* alone. The young generation and the merchant class reported to have immensely contributed for the Salafi revivalism in South Wollo. As one Key informant best summarized, “...the *ulema* were teaching the creed, merchants financed it and the young enforced it...”<sup>87</sup> Therefore, the Salafi *ulema* along with these two social groups played pivotal role on the religious transformation of the Muslim community in South Wollo. Urban elders and many of the rural communities reported to have been the main supporters of the Sufis in South Wollo. These categories of people are still loyal to their Sufi *meshiekh* (sing.*Sheikh*) and shrines. They no longer become Salafist whatever they have been preached by the the revivalists. It is of course a common trend among aged people and the rural community to resist change and looks it with suspicion as they usually have a tendency of conservatism. They often prefer to continue with the status-quo. One of their reasons for this is that they still believe the Sufi *meshiekh* and their shrines are sources of rain, good harvest, health and wealth. The other reason related with the rural people is that all Sufi shrines are found in the rural part of South Wollo and their attachment with the rural community is strong. Although the Sufis in the rural areas have many supporters, they are believed to be extremely traditional and backward to meet the need of progressive urban Muslim community.<sup>88</sup>

#### **4.5 Practices and beliefs of Sufis and Salafists in South Wollo**

Sufism is an Islamic branch of knowledge that focused on spirituality while Salafism is focusing towards the purification of creed. Both are the followers of Sunni Islam and believe in the five pillars of the religion. Both can pray in one mosque. In addition, both creeds are the followers of Schools of Islamic Jurisprudence. Many of the Sufis are the followers of Shafiyya and Hanafiyya rites while the teaching of Salafism rooted with the

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<sup>87</sup> Interview held in Dessie on 15 October 2017.

<sup>88</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017. Interviews held in Dessie on 24 August 2017 and Kombolcha on 7 August 2017.

Hambeli rite.<sup>89</sup> All Muslims in South Wollo are Sunni Muslims and followers of Islamic schools of Jurisprudence. The Sufis dominantly are followers of the Shafiyya *medhab* and the Salafists indiscriminately accept all schools of law but they are more attracted to the Hambeli rite (Hussein, 2001).

Sufism as a system of belief and practice has its own unique characteristics subjected to various classical and local dynamics in Southern Wollo. As part of the characteristic features of classical Sufism, pilgrimage to Sufi shrines, celebrating the anniversary of the Prophet's birth day (*meulid*), celebrating saints' birth day, denial of worldly life (*zuhd*) and preserving the spiritual lineage (*tariqa*) are some of the common practices in Southern Wollo.<sup>90</sup> The local aspects of Sufism are characterized by veneration of chat, appeasing evil spirits, rituals on post burial procession (*sedeqa*), performing communal prayer (*wodajja*) and excessive devotion to panegyrics (*menzuma*).<sup>91</sup> Sufism in South Wollo is unique due to the fact that it combines both the local and classical elements and provided the infrastructure for syncretic (i.e. classical and local) cultural practices. Although the syncretic practices of Sufism is widely articulated as assets of religious tolerance in the area, currently it remains a source of doctrinal dispute with revivalists notably with the Salafi Muslims. The former is trying to vindicate both the classical and local belief systems as part of Islam while the later contend that all these beliefs and practices cannot be authenticated in the basic sources of Islam. Thus, it is possible to argue that Sufism in South Wollo is based on the belief system of classical Sufism

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<sup>89</sup> <https://www.quora.com/...ism-Sufism-and-Salafism>.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Sufi Oriented informants held in Dessie 14 September 2017 and Kombolcha on 11 October and 15 December 2017. I personally attended the monthly ritual in the Shrine of Geta on 15 December 2017 and the rituals performed in the houses of interviewees for the honor of saints of Islam like Abdulkadir Jilane (an Iraqi jurist and founder of the Qadiriyya order) and Seyyidina Kedir, an imaginary figure narrated in the Holy Quran.

<sup>91</sup> I personally witnessed the local elements of Sufism through visiting houses of Sufi oriented Muslims especially in the town of Kombolcha while preparing *sedeqa* rituals for their diseased relatives, performing *wodaja* (communal praying) in individual houses seeking good health and wealth. Beyond this, it is common to hear *ajem*(local or non-Arabic) *menzuma* in different parts of Wollo.

(representing global Sufi culture) and locally drawn cultural practices.<sup>92</sup> The Salafists are identified with certain religious practices such as obsession with monotheistic teaching, fighting innovations (*bida*), scriptural literacy, defying the spiritual authority of the Sufis, denying the intercession power of Sufi Saints, defying non-Islamic rituals such as *wodaja*, the use of addictive/intoxicating substances (e.g., drinking alcohol and chewing chat). The other difference of the Salafists from the Sufis is their refusal to celebrate the birthday of Prophet Mohammed and the practice of collective praying (*du'a*) after the regular prayer. The doctrinal teaching of Salafism in South Wollo is similar to the mainstream global Salafism. Both engaged on the purification of the creed and the revitalization of Islamic morality.<sup>93</sup>

I have not seen any physical manifestation to distinguish Sufis and Salafists in South Wollo. Rather both religious thoughts are behaviorally oriented activities. Although many ordinary followers even do not know the meaning of Sufism or Salafism especially in the rural area, they participated in practices which they prefer to. We should not forget here that membership may not necessarily knowing the essence of these terminologies (i.e Sufism or Salafism) since the core of membership is sharing common ideas and practices. What is interesting here is each group preaches in the name of Islam not in the name of their respective group they stand for. Both try to quote evidence from the scripture to legitimize their beliefs and practices. Definitely, the *ulema* from both sides are active and others are anthropology. The practices of Sufism in South Wollo have both classical and local dynamics. This might help us to classify practices of Sufism in South Wollo based on the above discussion as para Sufi practices and classical Sufi practices. The para Sufi practices are more affiliated with syncretic practices of which many of them are even locally drawn; they are more dominant in the rural areas while classical Sufi practices are similar to the mainstream Sufi practices in the rest of the Islamic world; they are more dominant in the urban areas. Although

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<sup>92</sup>. Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017. Interviews held in Dessie on 25 August 2017 and Kombolcha on 7 August 2017.

<sup>93</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 21 September 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October 2017

many of the Sufi practices the Salafists oppose are locally drawn, there are also even practices which are found in the classical discourse as well like celebrating *meulid*, pilgrimage to a Sufi shrine, intercession of Sufi saints and some other minor rituals.<sup>94</sup>

### **Concluding Remarks**

Islamization of Wollo had occurred in layers of time through the agency of different actors, employed a nexus of revivalist strategies ranging from Jihadist campaign to a more organized Sufi movement. Revivalism as a tool of religious reform in the Muslim community had been started through the agency of Sufi scholars in the nineteenth century Wollo. Revivalisms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Sufis and contemporary Salafists in South Wollo have similarities and differences. To put similarities, both have anti-establishment and moral reform missions. The difference lies on the means (coercive vs peaceful) and origin of revivalism (indigenous vs exotic). The objective of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Sufi-revivalist movement had been purifying Islam from any alien cultural practices though it was unsuccessful. This was evidenced by the eventual transformation of Sufism from religious purification to accommodation of non-Islamic cultural practices. The reason might be associated with the growing influence of the Christian monarch on the perpetuation of Sufi revivalism and its subsequent securitization in the modern history of Ethiopia. However, there were some tips for the development of Islam in the same period. Although the incumbent constitution guarantees unprecedented religious freedom, it ushered inter-religious and intra-religious tension and conflict. In the context of South Wollo for example, new Islamic actors like Salafists came to the scene and emerged as a powerful religious actors who challenged the established Sufi tradition. The syncretic cultural practice where Sufis are part of it has continued to be a source of conflict between Muslims in South Wollo.

The early Sufi reaction towards the Salafi movement was characterized by personal attack and social isolation from various centers of social practices such as expelling from

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<sup>94</sup> Interviews with Key Sufi informants held in Dessie on 25 August 2012 and Kombolcha on 7 August 2012. Author's long time observation on the practice of Sufism in South Wollo. Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

mosques and burial associations. This was followed by lobbying government officials and Orthodox Christians to marginalize the Salafi movement from the religious space in South Wollo. Nonetheless, Salafists changed the strategy from confrontation to peaceful indoctrination of the youth, the educated urban elites and the business community. This eventually led to the victory of Salafists in the zonal capital and western part of South Wollo where grand mosques failed under their control. Beyond this, the philanthropic service of Salafists to the urban poor Muslims dramatically changed the attitude of the Muslims in favor of the revivalists cause. In this regard, the role of successive Salafi preachers changed the religious landscape of Islam in major urban centers in favor of revivalists through their relentless propagation of the Salafi creed. This eventually paved the way for the ascendancy of the Salafi figures to control the zonal *mejlis* and the grand mosques of the zonal capital through the mediation of officials from the federal *mejlis*. The presence of strong Sufi institutions for centuries has made the reaction of the Sufis strong in the town of Kombolcha than any other place in South Wollo.

The second Sufi-Salafi violence was much more complicated as it attracted external actors. The government in collaboration with *mejlis* officials imported a radical Sufi group, Ahabsh to organize the disgruntled mainstream Sufi in Ethiopia and South Wollo. A series of trainings had been organized in Ethiopia to introduce the teaching of Ahabsh which was widely known by their extreme abhorrence against the Salafi movement. The participants of the conference were urged to adopt the teaching of Ahabsh through masking its doctrinal heresies. The Salafists reacted violently in different parts of Ethiopia and of South Wollo ranging from exposing the conspiracy of Ahabsh and Ethiopian government to an open protest in different mosques of South Wollo with different mottoes. As *mejlis* lost legitimacy, the so-called council of *ulema* called for the election of *mejlis* in August 2012 but voting was arranged in government buildings with the objective of disenfranchising the Salafi community from the process of the election. This relatively deprived Salafists as it paved the way for the exclusive ascendancy of Ahabsh leaders to control all positions of Islamic institutions in South Wollo. No sooner had they controlled *mejlis* than they removed the Salafi Imams from different mosques

and banned the Salafi movement in South Wollo. This frustrated the Salafists to aggression as they lost their former status as leaders of *mejlis* and Islamic institutions in South Wollo. Salafists aggressively reacted through protest and financial boycotting of Ahbash leadership.

## CHAPTER-FIVE

### THE SUFI-SALAFI COMPETITION AND COEXISTENCE IN SOUTH WOLLO

#### 5.1 Introduction: Beginning of the Sufi-Salafi Competition in Islam

The Sufi-Salafi competition in the history of Islam began right in the era of the Abbasid dynasty.<sup>95</sup> The interaction of Islam with the western civilization especially the translation of the classical Greek philosophical works into Arabic laid the foundation for the emergence of Sufi-Salafi dichotomy. As some Muslim scholars read the classical works of the Greeks, they began to use dialectical rationality as the principal tool to understand Islam (Armstrong, 2002:56-58). Others contend that understanding Islam should only be through authoritative sources (Quran and Hadith). For example, the debate between *mue'tzilites* and people of *hadith* in the early history of Islam on attributes of God is one of the manifestations of methodological competition to understand the concepts of Islam. Both groups attempted to convince their audiences as the best methodological tools to understand Islam (Ibid). Sometimes scholars on both sides could attract the attentions of Caliphs. Leaders in Islamic history also adopted either of these methodologies as an official tool of interpreting Islam. For example, the successor of Umer Abdul Aziz, al-Ma'Mun reported to have adopted a *mu'taziliet* doctrine which eventually led to the decline of his Caliphate (Abul A'la Maududi, 1963:45-63). This is because the people of *hadith* as a rival group revolted against the Caliph to cease the philosophical assumptions of *mu'tazilites*.<sup>96</sup> The philosophical principle of the school of

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<sup>95</sup> The Abbasid dynasty was a Sunni dynasty that ruled from 133/ 750 to 657/1258, succeeding the 'Umayyad dynasty. The hereditary caliphs of this dynasty claimed legitimacy through descent from Abbas, the uncle of Prophet Muhammad, making them part of the family of the Prophet (*ahlal-bayt*). See for further information *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* by Gordon Newby (2002).

<sup>96</sup> Mu'tazilah is a theological movement started during the Abbasid period that focused on speculative dogmatic theology particularly on the philosophy of anthropomorphism. The theological speculative of Mu'tazilah influenced many theological movements of Islam in the later periods and even revived today by some religious circles like the Ahbash movement in Lebanon(Ibid).

*mu'tazila* was founded by Abu al-Hassan-Asheari (d.936). *Asha'risim* then became the bedrock of Sufism while the people of *hadith* remained the root of Salafism.<sup>97</sup> This might prove Hall's assertion that competition potentially changed into violence if there is macro level political involvement (Hall, 2003: 370-71).

## 5.2 Trends of the Sufi-Salafi Competition in South Wollo

Although the Sufis and Salafists use similar texts, symbols and history as source of their inspirations in the Muslim community, they have been competing for communal and spiritual leadership and resource control. For example, leaders from both sides competing on the methodology of teaching Islam, disrespecting each other's ideas, opening forums of debate on sensitive Islamic issues and containing and counter-containing the ideas and influence of their rivals through winning supporters. For example, the Sufis in Ethiopia and Southern Wollo often obstruct the inroads of the Salafists to *mejlis* leadership through winning the support of the government officials. One of the strategies of the Sufis to contain the influence of Salafists is through accusing the latter as part of the global terrorist network while Salafists portray the Sufis as inefficient to advance the cause of the Muslim community and conspiring with non-Muslim actors.<sup>98</sup> The Sufis reaction against Salafists reported to have been highly informed by self-fulfilling prophecy that the Salafi reforms would terminate their social and religious leadership in the Muslim community of South Wollo. Although the difference could have been resolved based on the direction of the Holy Scriptures<sup>99</sup>, the unwitting commitments (holding rigid and irrational positions) of the radical Sufis against the Salafists undermined the effort of peace in South Wollo.<sup>100</sup> This is

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<sup>97</sup> Interview held in Dessie with a great Muslim Scholar on the beginning of doctrinal competition in Islam on 4 October 2017.

<sup>98</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 24 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October 2017. See the work of Morton Deustsch, "Competition and Cooperation" in *Hand Book of Conflict Resolution* (2006), p. 24.

<sup>99</sup> As for example, the Holy Quran as the highest authority of Islam explicitly puts, " *Oh ! You who believe! , obey Allah and his messenger and peoples of authorities amongst you. If you are in dispute, return to Allah (referring Quran) and his messenger (referring Hadith) (Quran, 4: 59)*".

<sup>100</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

substantiated by the irrational view of the zonal mejlis leaders as follows, “we do not want to compromise with enemies [referring salafists] of the Prophet...”<sup>101</sup> On the contrary, the Salafists and some moderate Sufi Muslims relentlessly attempted to restore the unity of the Muslims through organizing “unity and charity forums” regardless of their religious orientations as being Sufis and Salafists. The need to cooperate with the Sufis could have the potential to resolve the conflict had it not been overwhelmed by negative competition.<sup>102</sup> The Sufis’ reaction to the Salafists is partly explained by the *theory of frustration to aggression*<sup>103</sup> since it is informed by their historical experience and goal seeking objectives. Historically, they did believe that they were marginalized by the Salafists for one decade and plus years (i.e 1997-2012). At any cost they aspired to monopolize the religious and communal leadership of the Muslim community in South Wollo. Objectively, they frustrated by the movement of the Salafists as they were competing to restore their positions in the zonal Islamic institutions since 2012/13. Such divergent interests seem to have changed the behavior of the Sufis to strengthen their strategic alliance with the government to hinder the advance of Salafists to *mejlis* leadership through manipulating the rhetoric of Salafi extremism. The level of Sufi frustration towards the Salafists is directly or indirectly explained by their methodology to marginalize the latter from the religious space of Islam in South Wollo. This might give a clue that Sufis frustration was so deepened since they were not willing to restrain and resolve their conflict using intra-religious forum. Rather they aligned themselves with the government in the name of combating religious extremism.<sup>104</sup>

It is obvious that there is negative goal interdependence between Sufis and Salafists from global to local levels on the teaching of Islam. Although both parties aspire to get

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<sup>101</sup> Interviews held at the Zonal mejlis office in Dessie with the chairman, *Sheikh* Umer Mohammed and secretary, *Sheikh* Kedir Hussien on 10 October 2017.

<sup>102</sup> Informations generated through FGD held at Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017. I have been witnessing the arguments of the two while they were arguing in the FGD and even in the informal interviews of the two.

<sup>103</sup> See the theoretical explication of frustration to aggression in chapter two of this dissertation.

<sup>104</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Kombolcha on 25 December 2017 and my longtime observation over the issues.

the love of Allah through preaching and teaching of Islam, they differ on what and how to teach Islam- related with the type of curriculum and methodology each group deemed to be appropriate. The Sufis usually prefer human intuition to understand the essence of Islam while scriptural literacy is the best way of understanding Islam amongst the Salafists. Nonetheless, these divergent approaches followed by each group trigger intense competition between the two groups or indirectly leading them into conflict. The Sufi-Salafi competition in Southern Wollo negatively colored the attitude of the two towards each other. For example, the Sufis perceive the Salafists are playing obstructive role against the goals of the former and the vice versa is true for the Salafists. The Sufis seem to obstruct the goal of the Salafists fearing that they would lose the prestige of leading the Muslim community. The Salafists on their part seem to have perceived the Sufis as obstacles for the spread of *tewhid* and Islamic awakening. Both also use different deceptive techniques as means of struggle to misrepresent the image of their rivals to the wider audience in which the Sufis portray the Salafists as extremists while the Salafists depict the Sufis as promoters of *bid'a*.<sup>105</sup> The competition has structural dimension too since it is embedded within the system of religious interpretations. This consequently jeopardizes cooperation and intra-communal peace through galvanizing inter-group hatred. Although Sufis and Salafists have common goals of working for Islam, there is negative goal interdependence as the probability of goal attainment of Salafists has been negatively correlated with the goal attainment of Sufis. Both are goal-oriented groups who aspire to achieve exclusive right over religious leadership. Hating each other, unwilling to share resource and unable to overcome anti-Islamic problems together are some of the manifestations of negative goal interdependence between Sufis and Salafists.<sup>106</sup> The response of Salafists to the Sufi leadership is informed by problems of attitude and negative substitutability.<sup>107</sup> The attitudinal problem can be

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 21 September and 17 October and kombolcha on 7 August 2017.

<sup>107</sup> According to Deutsch the type of goal interdependence affect the socio- psychological process of attitudes and substitutability. For further information see the theory of competition related with attitude and substitutability in the work of Morton Deutsch, "Competition and Cooperation" in *Hand Book of Conflict Resolution* (2006).

seen from the point of view of Salafists' predisposition to reject any actions of the Sufis as negative. The substitutability problem of Salafists emanates from the very perception that the activities of the Sufis cannot satisfy the need of Salafists.<sup>108</sup> This is because the latter had zero tolerance for alien Islamic practices Sufis are supposed to overlook. Of course, there are possibilities to work for positive goal interdependence through sharing agenda over which they agree and there by the goal attainment chance of Salafists is positively correlated with the goal attainment possibility of the Sufis. For example, sharing of power in the *mejlis* on the basis of the results of democratic election and working together on developmental issues like mosque constructions, environmental protection, philanthropic services, health services and so forth might be taken as examples of creating positive goal interdependence yet it has not been implemented so far.<sup>109</sup>

The Sufi-Salafi competition is also expressed in the form of counter rival manipulation. Both Sufis and Salafists played obstructive role over the success of one against the other to control positions of *mejlis* leadership, the position of being a mosque Imam and administrator of madrassa and mosque. Towards the end of 1990s, Salafists reported to have used counter Sufi manipulations through mobilizing the young Muslims and their supporters in the government offices. In due process, the Salafists controlled prominent positions in the *mejlis* and mosque administrations (as for example the two grand mosques in Dessie such as Arab-Genda and Shewa-Ber failed in the hands of the Salafists) in the town of Dessie. Following the 2012/13 Muslim uprising, Salafists were totally losing their positions as Imam in the mosque, *mejlis* leadership and teaching in

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<sup>108</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with the Zonal *mejlis* officials on October 10, 2017 and with Salafi scholars in September 9 & 21, 2017.

<sup>109</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

*madrassa* to their Sufi rivals. This was made possible through counter Salafi manipulations in collaboration with the government security.<sup>110</sup>

The Sufi goals in their competition with the Salafists reported to have been dictated by the policy of the government in South Wollo. The perpetuation of the existing socio-political and cultural order is the prime goal of the Sufis. Socially, the Sufi community urges the preservation of the preexisting social order and maintains their social position as the leader of the Muslim community and Islamic institutions. This can be seen in areas of *mejlis* leadership, *madrassa* and mosque administrations. The Sufis justified their need to be the leader of the Muslim community in terms of the 'terror narratives' in which they defend their interest for communal leadership under the pretext of saving the young generation from perceived threat of extremism. Although the Sufi community in the area have been politically passive and had little political participation for many years, the perceived threat of Salafists and the counter extremist operation of the government forced them to take a political stand. Currently, they seem to have inclined in supporting the existing counter Salafi policies of the government to deter the advance of their salafi rivals in intrareligious competitions. Culturally, the Sufis wanted to preserve the status quo- the perpetuation of the existing cultural order regardless of its compatibility with the authoritative scriptures of Islam. Many of the cultural practices in South Wollo are amalgamations of different belief systems notably from traditional beliefs, Islam and Christianity. The controversy on preserving or redefining syncretic cultural practices is part of Sufi-Salafi competition. The Salafists aspire either to abandon or redefine cultural practices in their social relations while the Sufis need to maintain them.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Interviews with key Salafi Scholars held in Dessie on 1 & 9 September 2017 and Kombolcha with a senior Sufi Scholar on 7 August 2017. I have closely followed up the competition between the two groups at least for the last two decades.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid

Although the Salafists have not any radical Islamic political goals in South Wollo, they strive to protect their citizenship political rights based on the constitutional provision. All key Salafi informants confirmed that they did not have interest to form Islamic political party nor did they dedicate for the establishment of Islamic government in the region. They cited the existing religious diversity and the ban to form political party on the basis of religious identity as one of rationales for such disposition. However, key Salafi informants fear that this notion might be manipulated by some radical politicians to disenfranchise the Salafi Muslims from any political process of the country. They further articulate that it does not mean Salafi Muslims cannot exercise their political right as candidates in any national and regional parties they affiliate to and as citizens to elect their favorites in the electoral process. As Salafists understand the role of social positions to bring religious transformation in the Muslim community, they aspire to replace the position of Sufi scholars as leader of the Muslim community in South Wollo.<sup>112</sup> This is because they strongly believe that the religious practice of the Muslim community in South Wollo is highly adulterated due to the interactions of Islam with alien cultural practices. They even argue to the extent that religious boundaries are indiscernible in some social occasions. For example, it is common to see Muslims attending Christian ceremonies such as *tebel*, *kirestina* and *tezkar*, and Christians also attend *sedeqa* of the Muslims which are supposed to be incompatible with the Salafi teaching. Salafists strongly criticize the Sufi Muslim leaders as responsible for all pollutions in Islam. Therefore, they underscore the need to redefine the existing social fabric in a way to be compatible with the scriptures of Islam. Culturally, Salafists argue that every culture should be subordinate to legalistic Islam. They also explicate that any cultural practice which is contrary to the scripture deemed to be abandoned. In the early years of 1990s, Salafists reported to have faced stiff resistance in the towns and rural areas of Wollo on issues such as pilgrimage to shrine, the ban on alcoholic drinks and certain rituals related to funeral processions. It was almost taken as part of Wollo culture to visit Sufi shrines, use alcoholic drinks and getting spritual funeral service

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<sup>112</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 9 & 21 September 2017 and kombolcha on 4 October 2017.

without attending regular prayer. All these have been banned with the spread of the Salafi revivalist movement in South Wollo.<sup>113</sup> Generally, the Sufi-Salafi competition in South Wollo was destructive as it had been unfair and unregulated. This was unfair because Sufis were made winners to control zonal Islamic institutions through fake *mejlis* election while Salafists were reduced to be losers through government securitization. The competition between the two actors was unregulated as the spiritual space was totally shutdown to the Salafists following the 2012/13 government crackdown.<sup>114</sup>

### **5.3 Why do Sufis and Salafists Compete in South Wollo?**

As has been discussed in the literature part in chapter two, there are three driving factors which contribute for religious groups to compete. The rationales of the Sufi-Salafi competition in South Wollo can be seen within this framework. The first one is explained from the perspective of winning converts. The number of adherents believed to have decided the power of a religious faction as there is linear relationship between the power of influence and the number of adherents. Although it is difficult to express in quantitative terms, Salafists have won many active members of the Muslim community notably in major towns of South Wollo while the dominant rural people are adherents of Sufism. Based on my observation prior to the 2012 *mejlis* election in the towns of Dessie and Kombolcha, the congregations of the Sufis were dominated by aged people. The sizes of their congregations were by far smaller to the Salafists. In any of their regular prayers, I witnessed the congregations of the Sufis were not more than the first two *sufes* (parades) except Friday praying. On the contrary, the congregations of the Salafists were full of young and adult populations. Although it is difficult to express in quantitative terms, the sizes of the congregations of the Salafists were by far larger than the Sufis. In any regular prayer, the congregations of the Salafists were almost full of

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<sup>113</sup>Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and kombolcha on 25 December 2017. Interviews held in Dessie with Salafi Scholars on 9, 21 September and 2 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October 2017.

<sup>114</sup>Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

individuals. This enabled them to dominate the religious life of South Wollo at least for the last one decade and plus years.<sup>115</sup> The second driving factor that led to Sufi-Salafi competition related with the motive to control organizational doctrine and resource. The issue of doctrine is central in the Sufi-Salafi competition. The Salafists criticize the Sufi doctrine obsolete and inefficient to advance the religious interest of the Muslim community and urged the imposition of the Salafi creed as the bases of religious practices and the ideology of Muslim institutions. Beyond this, Salafists accused the Sufis of inefficient and corrupt who squandered the meager resources of the Muslim community. The inefficiency of the Sufis also explained from the point of view of generating resources for the developmental activities of the Muslim community.<sup>116</sup> The Sufis discredited the Salafists' view as useless and perceive it as their lust for power.<sup>117</sup> The last driving factor of the Sufi-Salafi competition related with social and economic advantages. Sometimes both groups move to win friends outside the domain of Islam especially of government officials and recognition from the wider Muslim community in South Wollo. Although the economic interest is subtle as religious figures, the grinding poverty on the side of the *ulema* of both sides seems to have forced them to secure this advantage. This is because their livelihood in the form of salary or donation depends on the recognition from the Muslim community and Islamic institutions.<sup>118</sup>

#### **5.4 Actors' Strategies in Intra-Religious Competitions in the Muslim Community of South Wollo**

In the process of intra-religious competition for spiritual space in the Muslim community of South Wollo, both Sufis and Salafists devised their own strategies deemed to be appropriate to win converts and preserve the prestige of leading the Muslim

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<sup>115</sup> FGD (ibid); the author's informal observation.

<sup>116</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with a Salafi scholar on September 21, 2017 and with a Sufi scholar held in Kombolcha on 7 August 2017. It is the author's informal observation in the different mosques of South Wollo.

<sup>117</sup> Interview held in Dessie with Mejlis officials on 10 October 2017.

<sup>118</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on October 2, 2017 and Kombolcha on August 25, 2017.

community. The strategies ranged from extreme political loyalty (representing Sufis) to an open protest to the government (representing Salafists).

#### 5.4.1 Sufis' Strategies for Competition

- a) *Winning the support of government*: The Sufis seem to have understood that they are incapable to defend their creed and social position as they lost the support of the young Muslims and the economic class of the urban Muslim society. To this effect, they are reported to have depended on the protection and support of the government as they had no alternative to win the competition. It should be noted that the Sufis in South Wollo regained the zonal *mejlis* from the hands of the Salafists and pro-Salafi Sufis what they had lost at least fifteen years ago. Although the government supported Sufis for its own political objective, it temporarily enabled the latter to control Islamic institutions in South Wollo.<sup>119</sup> Some key Salafi informants criticized the Sufi *mejlis* officials were squandering much of their time in government organized meetings rather than serving the Muslim community in their offices. Even informants went to say “...it is better to call them government cadres than agents of the Muslim community...”<sup>120</sup> Government officials in many public occasions praised the Sufis as ‘ambassadors’ of peace and tolerance while Salafists are identified with disgraceful derogatory terminologies such as *akerari*, *tsenfegna* and *ashebari*<sup>121</sup>
- b) *Winning the support of Orthodox Christians*: Although it is not confirmed by key Sufi informants, many Salafists articulate that few radical Sufis went to the extent of winning the support of Orthodox Christians in their competition with the Salafists. This is with the assumption that many of the local government officials are followers of Orthodox Christianity. Few radical Sufis is said to have portrayed

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<sup>119</sup> Interview held in Dessie with key Salafi scholar on 2 October 2017.

<sup>120</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 9 & 21 September 2017 and 2 October 2017 and kombolcha on 4 October 2017.

<sup>121</sup> Interview held in Dessie with Mr. Eshetu Yesuf, head of the Zonal Administrative and Security Office on 23 October 2017.

their struggle with the Salafists as synonymous as the Orthodox Christians have had with Pentecostals /evangelical Christians due to the fact that the Salafists were branded by this group as “*yeslame pentha*” or “evangelical Muslims”.<sup>122</sup> The Sufis seem to have created a platform to bring the Orthodox on their side through forging ‘indigenous’ versus ‘exotic’ metal setting. The Sufis and Orthodox Christians reported to have felt indigenous sentiment and portrayed the Salafists and evangelical Christians as ‘exotic’.<sup>123</sup> The Orthodox Christians seem to have backed the Sufis as they are influenced by the media and the anti-Salafi government propoganda.

- c) *Playing with the terrorist card*: occasionally the Sufis reported to have used the terrorist card against Salafists. They usually associate the global anti-terrorist groups such as al-Qayida and al-Shabab with Salafists of South Wollo. The Sufis’ accusation was also partially supported by Prime Minister Melese Zenawi in his parliamentary speech on 17 April 2012. Sufis articulated this accusation in governmental and public meetings where they branded Salafists as “intolerant and anti-peace”. As the Salafists could not get the chance to defend, they usually channeled their dissent using the cyber space. A clandestine internet-based radio-program popularly called *dimsach^en yesema* (lit. let our voice be heard!) was a case in point. Moreover, it was also common to see anti-Sufi polemical works in the facebook and YouTube channels in which they challenged and criticized Sufism notably of Ahbash leadership.<sup>124</sup>

#### **5.4.2 Salafists’ Strategies of Competition**

As it has been discussed in other parts of this thesis, the central teaching of the Salafists in Southern Wollo concentrates on Islamic monotheism and purification of ritual and

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<sup>122</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017. Interviews held in Kombolcha on 8 October 2017 and Dessie on 21 September 2017.

<sup>123</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on October 10, 2017 and Kombolcha on August 7, 2017.

<sup>124</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25; Interviews held in Dessie on October 23, 2017 and kombolcha on September 9, 2017.

religious practices. They employed two main strategies to win the Muslim community in their competition with the Sufis.

- a) *Excessive indoctrination of tawhid*: is one of the strategies of the Salafists to increase the number of their followers. The Salafists' rational persuasion by referring directly the ultimate sources of Islam often attracts elites of the Muslim community notably the educated, business men and young Muslims. According to the Salafists many elders are resistant of the teaching of *tawhid* and they have been hardly convinced. Weak rationalization and retrogressive outlook seem to have made the Sufis less persuasive towards the most active part of the Muslim community such as the youth, educated Muslims and the urban business community in South Wollo. Before the 2012/13 Muslim protest, Salafists reported to have amicable relations with government officials especially with the Muslims and many of whom were persuaded about the peaceful mission of the Salafi movement. This is reported to have made the Salafists dominant in the zonal *mejlis* till they were removed by the 2012 *mejlis* election.
- b) *Participating in Charitable works*: this was the most effective approach of the Salafists' strategy to get in the Muslim community economically through some philanthropic services. The charitable service was more intensified during the two holidays of Islam (i.e *Id-al-fatir* and *Id-al-Adha*) during which orphans and the needy were provided with alms in the form of money, animals and food. In this regard, it is worth to mention a local Islamic NGO, *Ihsan* identified with charitable works in the town of Dessie and other areas of southern Wollo. It mainly worked on the distribution of food during Ramadan, slaughtering animals for holidays, rural water supply and supplying educational materials for orphans and needy families. Beyond this, many young Muslims effectively organized by *Ihsan* to provide volunteer services during the month of Ramadan on the occasion of food distributions and repairing the house of poor elders in the town of Dessie. Although the immediate purpose was humanitarian and protecting the Muslims from evangelical Christians, converting target groups such as orphans

and needy to the Salafi creed seems to have been its end. In relation to this, it is important to mention a philanthropic service rendered by an individual donor, Ansi Mohammed whose service radiated from his base at Dessie to other parts of South Wollo. Initiated by Ansi and largely by local funds, a Muslim community school has also been opened to the level of high school in the town of Dessie. Unlike his father, Mohammed Ansi was emphasizing more on the expansion of the Salafi ideology than philanthropic services. Beyond this, Salafi businessmen who provide charity in the form of *zakat* in the different parts of South Wollo particularly in the town of Dessie significantly altered the image of Salafists as “generous Muslims”.<sup>125</sup>

### **5.5 Some Manifestations of the Sufi-Salafi Competition**

The existing competition between Sufis and Salafists is characterized by in group-mobilization and out-group discrimination, obstruction, deception and institutional control. These adversely affected the overall relation and cooperation between the two. As one of the key Salafi informants puts it, “*they (Sufis) do not trust us...we also do not trust them...*”<sup>126</sup> On the contrary, a Sufi *alim* utters, “*We have been very cautious for the creed of individuals who participated in the election of mosque administration and mejlis leadership on fearing that they [Salafists] would dominate us...*”<sup>127</sup> The level of mistrust seems to have entrenched in their day to day activities and consequently hinders cooperation between the two groups. Beyond this, the Sufi-Salafi competition seems to have been explained by *theory of social identification*<sup>128</sup> as both employed in-group mobilization at the expense of out-group discrimination. Both Sufis and Salafists enhanced their respective self-esteem, admiration and sympathy through in-group mobilization. The Salafists indoctrinate their followers to strengthen in group unity and resist the out-group Sufi influence notably of Ahbash. The Sufis also reported to have

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<sup>125</sup> Interviews held in Dessie in 21 September and October 2, 2017.

<sup>126</sup> Interview held in Dessie on 21 September 2017

<sup>127</sup> Interview held in Kombolcha on 7 August 2017.

<sup>128</sup> See the theoretical explication of the *social identification theory* in chapter two of this dissertation.

coached their followers to dismiss any kind of communication (out-group discrimination) as they fear possible conversion to the Salafi creed.<sup>129</sup> Both groups identify each other as deviant, irresponsible and untrustworthy.<sup>130</sup> The Sufis' accusation of Salafists as irresponsible, hasty and agents of external actors is best captured in the view of Sufi informants as follows, *"we[Sufis] believe that they are going astray... they are immature youngsters who cannot understand the context they are living in..., manipulated by external powers, shallow religious knowledge and threatening the very existence of the Muslim community..."*<sup>131</sup> On the contrary, the Salafists on their part criticize the Sufis as the one who are inefficient and passive to address the rights of equality and justice the Muslim community are deemed to enjoy in the constitution, *"the Sufi way by no means helps Muslims to enjoy equality and justice... they are too submissive to and dependent on the existing socio-political order..."*<sup>132</sup> Competition between the two broke out if either of the groups considered the actions of their rivals as a threat of existence and the perceived intervention of external actors. Respondents argue that there is linear relationship between external intervention and escalation of Sufi-Salafi competition. As external intervention increases, the Sufi-Salafi competition has also increased since it is subjected to interpretation. In the context of South Wollo, external intervention meant the intervention of Ahabash and the government.<sup>133</sup> For example, Salafists interpret the cooperation of Sufis with the government as 'an act of cooperating with enemies of Islam' and exploited for in-group mobilization to resist any possible influence from outside. Participants of FGD continue to argue that the Sufi-

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<sup>129</sup>Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and kombolcha on 25 December 2017. Interviews held in Dessie on 10 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 8 October 2017.

<sup>130</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>131</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and kombolcha on 25 December 2017. Interviews held in Dessie on 25 August 2017 and Kombolcha on 7 August 2017.

<sup>132</sup> FGD (ibid); Interviews held in Dessie on 24 August and 21 September 2017 Kombolcha on 4 October 2017.

<sup>133</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

Salafi interactions for the last two decades and more have been dominated by competition than an open violence between the two groups.<sup>134</sup> Nonetheless, I have witnessed only two violent incidents throughout this period. The first one was during the introduction of the Salafi creed in the early 1990s and the second one was during the 2011/12 Muslim protest.<sup>135</sup> To put it differently, there has been relative Sufi-Salafi peace in South Wollo for the last two decades as it was more of competition. Two reasons are mentioned for the prevalence of relative peace in the pre-Ahbash South Wollo. The first reason might be explained from the point of cross-cutting social identity. Sufis and Salafists sometimes are members of a family, relatives, and neighbors praying in the same mosque and belong to the same ethnic group. These webs of relationship between or multiple representations of Sufis and Salafists at different stratas of the society seem to have mitigated the outbreak of destructive conflict in the Muslim community of South Wollo. Secondly, the absence of Ahbash in the Sufi community in South Wollo believed to have immuned them from extremism.<sup>136</sup>

Sufis and Salafists in South Wollo reported to have played obstructive and deceptive roles to prevent the progress of one against the other. Prior to the 2012 *mejlis* election, Salafists reported to have expanded their creeds through denouncing and undermining the Sufi creed. In doing so, they exposed the teaching of Sufism to public criticism and discouraged the teaching of Sufism through controlling key Islamic institutions like the zonal *mejlis*, grand mosques and Islamic schools (*medressa*). Although it was not successful, the Sufis from the beginning reacted against the progress of the Salafi creed through social isolation, lobbying Christian supporters and manipulating the terrorist card. At the worst, the fall of *mejlis* under the control of the radical Sufis (Ahbash) in 2012 totally banned the teaching of Salafism in all mosques of South Wollo and the teaching of *Ahbash* replaced all teachings of Islamic institutions.<sup>137</sup> Both Sufis and

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid

<sup>135</sup> As the native of the area I have been following the movement from 1990s to 2017.

<sup>136</sup> Interviews held in Dessie in October 2, 2017 and August 25, 2017.

<sup>137</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

Salafists employed deceptive techniques in their competitions too. Damaging the image and reputation of one's rival was the most widely practiced activities in South Wollo.<sup>138</sup> For example, many young radical Sufi preachers reported to have demonized Salafists every Friday after *Juma'a* payers in different mosques of South Wollo in which they used to misquote from the texts of the Salafists and cursed many of their historical figures. Similarly, right before the ascendance of Ahbash to the zonal *mejlis* leadership in 2012, young Salafi Muslims reported to have mobilized anti-Ahbash campaigns in every Friday in kombolcha and Dessie towns.<sup>139</sup> When the Salafi movement was securitized in South Wollo in 2013, they expressed their dissent through undergroundly produced audio-visual materials (see for example the conspiracy of Ahbash and Ethiopian government)<sup>140</sup> and social media channels in which they were able to undermine the image of the Sufis in general and the Ahbash group in particular.

Institutional control is one of the manifestations of the Sufi-Salafi competition in South Wollo. Amongst these, controlling mosque, *madrassa* and *mejlis* administrations were important area of competition between the two. Both groups aspired to control mosque administration as it was nearer to the Muslim community. Both groups understood that controlling mosque administration could enable groups to control the resource and doctrinal creed of the Muslim community. Before the 2012/13 Muslim uprising, many of the grand mosques were controlled by the Salafists and enabled them to expand their doctrinal creed. The post uprising was in favor of the Sufis and almost all mosques of South Wollo were under their leadership. *Madrassas* were also other areas of competition between Sufi and Salafists. Both were competing to control the administration of *madrassa* and its staff. *Madrassas* in South Wollo can be classified as

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<sup>138</sup> Interviews held in Dessie in September 21, 2017 and Kombolcha in October 4, 2017. I personally witnessed this incident in the mosques of Taif and Dawdo in the summer of 2017.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid

<sup>140</sup> Audio-V-visual material released by Ethiopian Diaspora part(I)I available at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aSvQFmMuc>> and part(II) available at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mfw42dtgQB4>>

modern and traditional. The former are modern Islamic schools where both academic and religious courses have been provided side by side while the latter are providing religious courses often located within the vicinity of mosques. The other area of Sufi-Salafi competition directed towards the zonal *mejlis* which is the supreme Islamic institution followed by the *Woreda* (district) *mejlis* in South Wollo. Power hierarchically devolves from the highest Zonal *mejlis* down to the lowest mosque administration. Although numerically inferior to the Sufis, salafists controlled important posts of Zonal and *Woreda mejlis* prior to the 2012 *mejlis* election but currently they lost all these positions to their Sufi antagonists.<sup>141</sup>

## **5.6 Sufi-Salafi Coexistence in South Wollo: Intolerance as a malady of Coexistence**

Sufism and Salafism are thoughts in Sunni Islam, they are not sects. Both do have more in common as they have difference as well. It should be noted that both followers agree on Quran and Hadith<sup>142</sup> as the ultimate sources of Islam, five pillars<sup>143</sup> of Islam, the six pillars of *Iman*<sup>144</sup> (faith) and other relevant scriptures. Moreover, they agree on the works of *Sahaba* (companions of Prophet Muhammed), the *Tabi'un* (the generation of Muslims born after the death of the Prophet Muhammad but they were contemporaries of the *Sahaba*), the *Tabi' al-Tabi'un* (the generation after the *Tabi'un*), and the four Sunni schools of law or the *mazhab* (i.e, Maliki, Hanafi, Shafi'i and Hanbali).<sup>145</sup> The

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<sup>141</sup> Interviews held in Dessie in September 21, 2017 and October 10, 2017.

<sup>142</sup> The Quran and Hadith are the ultimate sources of Islam that govern all aspects of the Muslims. In the absence of clear evidences from the two sources, scholars tend to use interpretations of ancient theologians who were responsible for the formation of four Islamic schools of thought (Hanbali, Hanafi, Maliki and Shafi).

<sup>143</sup> The five pillars of Islam include: *Shahada* (lit. bear witness, procession of faith), *Salat* (Five times ritual prayer in a day), *Zakat* (giving of charity as alms from the surplus of one's wealth to the needy), and *Sawm* (fasting during the month of Ramadan) and the last one *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca).

<sup>144</sup> The six pillars of Islamic faith are belief in Allah, belief in the angels, belief in the revealed books (the holy scriptures), belief in the commissioned Messengers (the Prophets), belief in the resurrection (the last day, the day of judgment), and belief in *Al-Qadar* (predestination of all things).

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*

difference between the two lays on the interpretations of the scriptures, (e.g., on the state of Allah on the Arsh or throne), while most others have to do with the conceptions of certain practices as *bid'a* and *shirk*. Some of the differences between the Sufis and revivalists relate to the celebration of *meuwlid* (the birthday of Prophet Muhammad), saint veneration (or praising deceased *sheikhs*) through grave worships, the performance of non-Islamic rituals such as *wodaja*, collective *dua*(praying) after *Salat*, the use of addictive/intoxicating substances (e.g., chewing chat and alcoholic drink), and religious decree of *riba'*( usury). In spite of all these differences, Sufis and Salafists in Southern Wollo pray in the same mosque and carry out social interactions during 'bad' and 'good' occasions. They are country men, neighbors, relatives and families living together and interact on daily basis for praying, commerce and other social events. Although they understood the need to implement peaceful coexistence for this social setting, conflict remains inevitable between the two groups. Many key Salafi respondents asserted that there has been passive coexistence between the two groups in Southern Wollo since 2012/2013.<sup>146</sup> Although the basic principles of coexistence are recognizing diversity and non-violence, the existing political system in collaboration with Ahbash reported to have corrupted the institution of *mejlis* in a way to be tyrant to support equality and justice which consequently impedes peaceful coexistence. This is because the relations between Sufis and Salafists reported to have been unjust and unequal as the Sufis have exclusively dominated all structures from zonal *mejlis* to mosque administrations.<sup>147</sup> The relation between the two in the previous *mejlis* reported to have been characterized by active coexistence in which there was significant number of Sufis represented in many *Woreda mejlis* posts. Although Salafists knew Sufis were offending the teaching of Salafism, they did not take coercive measure to marginalize Sufis in the zonal *mejlis*. They rather gave recognition and respect to the Sufis as representative of the Muslim community.<sup>148</sup> As one x-*mejlis* official gave his

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<sup>146</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 10 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October 2017.

<sup>147</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 25 December 2017

<sup>148</sup> Ibid; see the conceptual explication of coexistence in chapter two of this dissertation.

testimony, “for every important decisions [referring the previous *mejlis*] a kind of direct democracy was applied in which both Sufis and Salafists used to vote over the issues...”<sup>149</sup> Nonetheless, radical Sufi *mejlis* officials disagreed on the prevalence of active coexistence between the two groups as they perceived unjust decisions had been made by few Salafists and pro-Salafi *mejlis* officials at the zonal level to replace few Sufi Imams with Salafists as for example in the grand mosque of *Shewa-Ber*.<sup>150</sup>

Following the 2012 *mejlis* election in South Wollo, it was evident that all Salafists in the *mejlis* and mosque administrators were removed from their positions. Ahabash as a tolerating subject denied the core values of toleration such as recognition and respect to their Salafi contenders. Although the Salafists and their teachings as a religious group constitutionally guaranteed<sup>151</sup>, issues of toleration such as the right to teach the Salafi creed and the right to elect and to be elected in *mejlis* and mosque leadership were suspended in South Wollo. According to some local scholars, the 2012 *mejlis* election was the most corrupted and politicized election in the history of *mejlis* in the area. The election reported to have been proactively designed to marginalize the Salafists through the help of government security forces. The outcome of the election had immediate impact on the religious life of the Salafi Muslims.<sup>152</sup> This is indignantly stated by one of the victims of Salafi scholars “...we know our exclusion from *mejlis* and mosque administrations when the election was decided to be held in the Kebele halls, and how could the election be democratic with 100 % Sufi representation?”<sup>153</sup> Although there is no direct violence or as Galtung describes the presence of ‘negative peace’ between the

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<sup>149</sup> Interview held in Dessie on 21 September, 2017.

<sup>150</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 10 October 2017.

<sup>151</sup> Article 27(1) stipulates, “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include the freedom to hold or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and the freedom, either individually or in fellowship with others, in public and private, to religion worship, observance and teaching.” This indicates that the Salafists have undeniable right to have a religion of their choice and preach in public and private. Article 27(2) has also supported Salafists to establish their own institutions which enable them to propagate and establish their own faith.

<sup>152</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on August 24, 2017 and October 2, 2017.

<sup>153</sup> Interview held in Dessie on October 2, 2017.

followers of the two Islamic thoughts, the marginalization of Salafists from Islamic institutions could potentially radicalize them.

Many Scholars utilized the concept of tolerance for inter-religious interaction in South Wollo. This is variously expressed by many scholars that South Wollo was a land of 'pragmatic tolerance' between Christians and Muslims (Abbink, 2006). This is because literatures indicate that tolerance is more appropriate to analyze morally distinct religious and ideological entities (Mendus, 1989:18-19). However, it does not mean that we are unable to use tolerance for intra-religious analysis. Based on outward behavioral orientations of the Muslims, many scholars branded Salafism as 'intolerant' and Sufism as 'peaceful'. In South Wollo, for example, reacting to certain local cultural values is the basis of categorizing individuals as 'tolerant' and 'extremist'. Salafists who refused to congratulate Christians during their holidays and requesting more religious freedom in South Wollo reported to have been labeled as 'extremists.'<sup>154</sup> On the contrary, Sufi Muslims who congratulate Christians during their holidays and showing a tendency of political passivism are branded as 'tolerant' and 'peaceful'.<sup>155</sup> Moreover, the rejection to and adoption of Ethiopian calendar is also the basis of labelling as 'tolerant' and 'extremist'. Radical Sufi *mejlis* officials allegedly accused Salafists of intolerance in South Wollo because of their rejection to use Ethiopian calendar. This can best be exemplified by the celebration of Ethiopian New Year (*qidis yohannes*). Although it has Christian origin, the Sufis in this regard adopted and tolerated the New Year celebration. While the Salafists argue that any form of resemblance in action and outlook other than the teaching of Islam is religiously disgraceful. Since Salafists are reported to have fond of practicing Islamic calendar, they are perceived as 'extremists' by *mejlis* officials and Christians alike. However, the conceptual explication of tolerance in the literature nullifies the accusation of the radical Sufis on the object of tolerance because they did not prohibit and use coercive means on others not to congratulate Christians and celebrate Ethiopian New Year nor did they impose their preferences on other

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<sup>154</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on October 10, 2017.

<sup>155</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on September 21, 2017 and Kombolcha on October 4, 2017.

communities of South Wollo.<sup>156</sup> What the Salafi Muslims refer *mechal* (forbearance) is a unilateral action carried out only by the Muslims because *mechachal* (tolerance) needs the active involvement of two actors-the one who is tolerating and the one to be tolerated. Although religious freedom is anchored in the constitution including the practice of a distinct religious thought, *mejlis* officials seems to have used the issue of calendar as tool of winning the support of state and non-state actors in South Wollo.<sup>157</sup> Apart from the difference in the classical Sufi-Salafi discourse, the intra-religious peace and tolerance of the Muslim community in South Wollo reported to have been hindered by the following attitudinal and behavioral orientations:

### 1) Misquoting and /or Misinterpreting Rival Texts

As part of the competition between Sufis and Salafists in South Wollo, both parties reported to have misquoted and/or misinterpreted rival texts with the aim of keeping a tally and damaging the doctrinal reputation of their respective contenders. This consequently affected peaceful coexistence and increase tension through coloring attitudes. Although quotations are widely misinterpreted, the zonal *mejlis* officials allegedly accused of the Salafists as promoters of discord in the Sufi-Salafi interactions in South Wollo. The following dictums help to understand the issue better:

- a) “*Labelling Sufi Muslims who are selectively adhering single medhib as kafir (apostate).*”<sup>158</sup> This is an accusation originally from *mejlis* officials against the Salafists in which the latter allegedly been accused of ascribing apostacy on the Sufis because of their adherence of a certain Islamic school of thoughts. This is commonly articulated by the Sufis, “I am a *Shafi, Hanafi...* e.t.c.”<sup>159</sup> On the contrary, the Salafists completely rejected this accusation as an act of defamation. The Sufis seem to have misquoted the teaching of Salafists out of

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<sup>156</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Interviews with *mejlis* officials held in Dessie on 10 October 2017.

<sup>159</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 25 August,2017 and Kombolcha on 7 August 2017. Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

context. What Salafists reported to have taught in relation to *medhab* was the need not to endanger the unity of the Muslims through rifting school of thoughts. As they explicitly put, “Muslims should not take school of thoughts as sources of dispute... and nor should they disrespect them.”<sup>160</sup> They further advised Muslims should only be dependent on the main sources of Islam as all *Imams* (founders of these schools of thoughts) were followers of Quran and Hadith.<sup>161</sup> Thus, the accusation of Salafists in relation to *medhab* seems to have misquoted by *mejlis* officials for in-group mobilization to win their competition with Salafists.

b) “Equating Sufi Muslims with anti-Muslim figures in history.”<sup>162</sup> According to *mejlis* officials, Salafists reported to have equated the Sufi Muslims with figures of early Islamic ignorance. For example, Sufi scholars who have been allowing pilgrimage around Sufi shrines in seeking *baraka* from the deceased saints reported to have been equated with Abu Lahab and Abu Jahil<sup>163</sup> who were anti-Islam figures contemporary to the time of Prophet Mohammed. Few Salafists is said to have wondered the difference between the Sufis and the above anti-Islam figures in their article of faith on monotheism. They even reported to have argued that both believe in Allah but practiced *shirk* alongside with. Although many Salafists do not confirm this, *mejlis* officials representing Sufis aggressively disappointed with the alleged views of the Salafists. The discontent plausibly been considered by the Sufis as a source of hostility and intolerance between the two groups.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 21 September and 2 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October 2017. FGD (ibid).

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>162</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with zonal *mejlis* officials on 10 October 2017.

<sup>163</sup> Abu Lahab and Abu Jahil were uncles of Prophet Mohammed who protested the message of Islam.

<sup>164</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 2 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October 2017.

- c) “Following man made law is an act of worshipping idol”<sup>165</sup>—This is an accusation from *mejlis* officials (especially proponents of Ahbash ideology) that Salafists have allegedly been accused of disrespecting secular laws. Even they are reported to have been unwilling to pay tax to the government. The Sufis argue that this view is reported to have bases in the book of *Fit-Hul-Majeed* (one of the texts of Salafists). The Salafists on their part discredited this as part of the subversive activity of the Sufis to win the support of the government.<sup>166</sup> The Sufis accusation seems to have politically motivated because of two reasons. Firstly, they fail to explain their accusation in context if it is behaviorally expressed by Salafists of South Wollo. Secondly, the Sufis misapplied this accusation to the Salafists although it is one of the attributes of the *khwa^rjia* group, deviant group which is even condemned by the Salafists. In relation to the second reason, few informants reported that *khwa^rjia* cell was operating in Gerba area in South Wollo where they taught their followers to refuse paying tax to the government, not to attained government job which requires taxation, not to pray on taxed land, not to use public medical services, refuse to use public transport e.t.c. However, the government indiscriminately crushed both Salafists and *Khawa^rij* together in Southern Wollo. Unfortunately, the Sufis seem to have confused the sin of the *khwa^rjia* to Salafists. Hence, the Sufis failure to understand the difference between the two groups seems to have threatened tolerance.<sup>167</sup>
- d) “Permitting Muslim women to dress trouser”<sup>168</sup> – the dressing code is sensitive and is symbol of modesty and chastity especially for the Muslim

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<sup>165</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with zonal *mejlis* officials on 10 October 2017. I have come across through book of *Fit-Hil- Majeed* but I could not see any thing confirming such allegation. For more information see Sheik Abdur-Rhman(1997), *Fit-Hil- Majeed (trans)* Beruit: Dar el Fiker.

<sup>166</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 9 September 2017 and on 21 September 2017.

<sup>167</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017. Interview held with government officials in Dessie on 23 October 2017.

<sup>168</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 21 September 2017 and kombolcha on 4 October 2017.

women. The holy sources explicitly put what and how to dress for the Muslims. Accordingly, women are forbidden to use trouser as the holy Quran prescribes women not to have similar dressing style with that of men. The Quran has made specific dressing codes for women at different places. According to Sura 24:31 of Yusuf Ali's translation of the Quran: *"And say to the believing women That they should lower Their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their Beauty and ornaments except what( must ordinarily) appear Therefore; that they should Draw their veils over Their bosoms and not display Their beauty except to their husbands..."*<sup>169</sup> According to this verse, wearing a cloth which display a very sensitive part of women's body seems unlawful. Thus, one can imagine how wearing trouser display a very sensitive part of women. Although it is not confirmed from *mejlis* officials, Salafists accused *Ahbash* of encouraging women to dress unlawful clothes like trouser. They further strengthen this view that the sources of *Ahbash* reported to have confirmed covering one's skin as the only criteria of Muslim women dressing code. This includes wearing tightened jeans trousers for women are lawful.<sup>170</sup> This seems to contradict Sura 33:59 of the Quran, *" O Prophet ! Tell Thy wives and daughters, And the believing women, That they should cast Their outer garments over Their persons (when abroad): That is most convenient, That they should be known (as such) and not molested. And God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."*<sup>171</sup> Although Sufi *mejlis* leaders dismissed this view as part of the conspiracy of the Salafists, they were unwilling to disprove the issue using *Ahbash* sources. The distrust between the two remains the source of intolerance in the Muslim community of Southern Wollo.

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<sup>169</sup> See Yusuf Ali's translation of the Holy Quran (19 46) (<https://quranyusufali.com/1/>)

<sup>170</sup> Audio-V-visual material released by Ethiopian Diaspora part (II) available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mfw42dtgQB4>

<sup>171</sup> See Yusuf Ali's translation of the Holy Quran (1946)( [www. https://quranyusufali.com/1/](http://www.https://quranyusufali.com/1/))

## 2) Polarizing Issues

The mental polarization legitimizes the behavioral polarization, which in turn reinforces the former. Sometimes Sufis or Salafists portray one against the other as an evil object and their activities as source of threat. This consequently affected Sufi-Salafi tolerance in South Wollo. The following examples are supposed to explain this thesis:

- a) “Eating meals served for the celebration of the Prophet’s birthday is tantamount of eating pork.”<sup>172</sup> The issue of *meulid* has played central role for the Sufi-Salafi conflict in Southern Wollo. It should be noted that all Muslims (Sufis and Salafis alike) agree that eating pork is *haram* but some Muslims disagree *meulid* is lawful. The Sufi *ulema* uphold the celebration of the Prophet’s birthday while the Salafists condemn the celebration of *meulid* as a mere innovation. Although it is not the view of many Salafists, this analogy seems to have forbidden *meulid* as eating pork is *haram* in the Muslim community. Beyond forbidding *meulid*, it reduced the celebration of *meulid* as part of committing sin.<sup>173</sup> As Salafi scholars pointed out, the Quran and Hadith explicitly put eating pork is *haram* while the issue of *meulid* has hardly been indicated in the two sources.<sup>174</sup> In connection to this, many *mejlis* officials representing Sufis accuse Salafists of inciting intolerance in the area.<sup>175</sup> Nonetheless, Salafi figures discredited this view as an act of defamation and a strategy to mobilize the Sufis in their bid to control *mejlis* leadership. Thus, polarizing the issue of *meulid* and demonizing the Sufis seems to have been unacceptable. And putting all Salafists in one basket has also

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<sup>172</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017. Interviews held in Dessie with Zonal *mejlis* officials on October 10, 2017.

<sup>173</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on September 9, 2017 and Kombolcha on October 4, 2017.

<sup>174</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 15 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October 2017

<sup>175</sup> Interviews held with Zonal *mejlis* officials in October 10, 2017.

been considered as an act of generalization since it is the views of a handful of young Salafi Muslims.<sup>176</sup>

- b) “*Labelling Muslims as disbelievers if they refuse to offend Sufi scholars*” -- allegedly claimed to have been quoted from the book of *Sheikh* Mohammed Abdulwahab entitled *Kitab At-Tauhid*<sup>177</sup> (founder of the Wahhabi teaching). *Mejlis* officials accused the Salafists of being war mongers. They continue to say, “*Any reluctance in the move against the Sufis is claimed to be apostate...*”<sup>178</sup> However, this is discredited by the Salafists as baseless and quoted out of context. They further challenged the Sufis to bring a statement from the work of Abdulwahab which ascribe *Kufir* to the Sufis. They even reminded that a renowned Muslim Scholar Ibnu Timya whom Abdulwahab appreciated was a Sufi. Even they argue this accusation is politically motivated to marginalize the Salafists through winning the support of the government.<sup>179</sup>

- 3) Emotional assault during preaching:** it was reported that young pro-*Ahbash* individuals were deployed in different parts of South Wollo where the base of Salafists was supposed to be strong. They monopolized the religious preaching through securing license from the regional and zonal *mejlis*. They used to offend/demonize the Salafists in different mosques of South Wollo at different occasions. These individuals reported to have come to the area following the government crackdown of the Salafists in 2012/13. Many of them is said to have come from Benishangul, Oromiya and Gojjam mainly to serve as agents of the government to control the Salafi movement in South Wollo.<sup>180</sup> According to the Salafi figures, these individuals have a mission of inciting conflict through assaulting Salafists during

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<sup>176</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017. Interviews held in Dessie on September 21, 2017 and Kombolcha on October 4, 2017

<sup>177</sup> I have read the book of *Kitab At-Tauhid* written by Sheik Mohammed Abdul-Wahab but such allegation is hardly mentioned in the book. For more information see the book of Sheik Mohammed Abdul-Wahab(nd) entitled, *Kitab At-Tauhid* available at <<<http://w.w.w.islambasics.com>>>

<sup>178</sup> Interviews held with Zonal *mejlis* officials on October 10, 2017.

<sup>179</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on September 21, 2017 and Kombolcha in October 4, 2017

<sup>180</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on September 18, 2017 and October 23, 2017.

congregational praying.<sup>181</sup> In many of their preaching, they spread hate mongering messages to the Muslim community by antagonizing Salafi Muslims as “*disbelievers, haters of meulid and xenophobic*”.<sup>182</sup> In reaction to the acts of the pro-Ahbash preachers, the followers of Salafism used to withdraw in mass before they started their hate preaching.<sup>183</sup> This was because any negative Salafi reaction to Ahbash preachers could automatically led them to prison. Vividly, the interaction between Sufis and Salafists seems to have been against the principle of tolerance by targeting the identity of Salafists. Giving recognition to other identity is not only the principle of tolerance but also a constitutional obligation. Article 27(1-3) has made it explicit that Salafists have the right to hold their own beliefs or teachings. According to this provision, antagonizing Salafists/Sufis because of their belief or teaching is an act of crime due to the fact that it violates the right to freedom of religion, belief and opinion (Constitution, 1994). As it has been indicated in other place of this dissertation, the government in collaboration with the Sufi-*mejlis* arrested and exiled the Salafists, and suspended their teaching in many mosques of South Wollo.

### **5.7 Manifestations of Sufi-Salafi Intolerance in South Wollo**

As one of the manifestations of intolerance, the Sufi community in South Wollo reported to have marginalized Salafists with the conviction that they wrongly practice Islam and undermine the unity of the Muslims. To put it differently, a strategy of marginalization seems to have been used as means of Sufi survival due to the fact that it would strengthen in-group unity of the Sufis and resist out-group Salafi influence. As one of the Sufi led *mejlis* officials puts it, “*we train our members from the lower mosque administration to the higher zonal mejlis office to be vigilant on the activities of [Salafists] infiltrators...*”<sup>184</sup> Key Salafi informants on their part admitted that there had been emotionality on the part of the Salafi oriented youth to use the same strategy

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<sup>181</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on August 24, 2017 and October 2, 2017.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid

<sup>183</sup> I personally witnessed this incident while I was attending Frayday congregational praying at Arab-Genda mosque in the summer of 2017.

<sup>184</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with the zonal *mejlis* chairman and secretary on 10 October 2017.

rather than solving the problem using peaceful dialogue. Participants of FGD succinctly put it, “*we understood little the importance of solidarity in the Muslim community ...and we used to label the Sufis as promoters of shirk*”.<sup>185</sup> Contrary to this, few Salafi figures strongly argue that Muslims should not be obedient to plain religious heresy and astray in the name of tolerance. They further argue that the principle of tolerance should only be executed under the guideline of Quran and Hadith.<sup>186</sup> Although this strategy was antithesis to peaceful coexistence, both groups persistently employed them as means of group survival at the expense of communal peace in South Wollo. The need to promote peace and stability in the Muslim community in South Wollo depends on the willingness and commitment of the parties to restore unity. Although it was not difficult to restore unity and peace in the Muslim community, many reported that the involvement of political entrepreneurs seem to have complicated the issue.<sup>187</sup> This is because external actors believed to have interest in the Sufi-Salafi conflict. For example, the government was accused of exploiting the Sufi-Salafi conflict as a strategy of combating Islamic extremism though there is possibility to achieve this with in the unity of the Muslims.<sup>188</sup> On the other side, the two parties (Sufis and Salafists) prefer to use marginalization as they are prone to competition than cooperation. This is because the Sufi-Salafi interaction was dictated by frustration to aggression as parties marginalize their opponents fearing that one would undermine the goal pursuing chance of the other. The goals of the parties might be controlling the power of communal leadership, monopolizing the resources of Islamic institutions, serving the political interest of the state, combating extremism and disseminating one’s doctrinal creed at the expense of the other.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>186</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 9 September 2017 and Kombolcha on October 4, 2017.

<sup>187</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> I personally witnessed the absence of cooperation between the two groups especially after the 2011/12 crisis in South Wollo.

Although all major religions in Ethiopia entered from the Middle East, the Sufis ascribed xenophobic attitude towards Salafists using some phrases as “*metha-hymanot*”- literally mean, “non-indegenious religion”.<sup>190</sup> The Sufis openly detached the religious teaching of the Salafists from the mainstream teaching of Islam. They usually associated Salafism with Mohammed b. Abdulwahab who was allegedly been described as ‘enemy of the Prophet.’ Many Sufis usually defended the orthodoxy of their doctrinal creed and reduced the Salafists as ‘exotic’ and arrived in Ethiopia few decades before. Although the Sufis portrayed Salafists as ‘new comers’, they do not deny that they are not outside the fold of Islam.<sup>191</sup> Key Salafi informants on their part argue that Salafism is a puritanist movement which strongly condemns the adoption of non-Islamic rituals.<sup>192</sup> The Sufis mainly define the extraterritoriality of the doctrine of Salafism in terms of geographical and historical claims (Sufis argue their teaching of Islam is claimed to be *nebar* or indigenous) while the Salafists define it in terms of theological credibility (the Salafists defend that their version of teaching claimed to be indigenous as it is compatible with sources of Islam).<sup>193</sup> To put it differently, Sufis argue that Salafism has a history of few decades in Ethiopia when it is compared with centuries of Sufism. Beyond this, they attached Salafism with the history of Saudi Arabia. The Salafists on their part argue that any cultural elements which are not compatible with the authoritative sources of Islam are ‘exotic’. This controversy between the two thoughts has implication on the legitimacy of leadership. The Sufis request legitimacy of communal leadership on the basis of historical claim while the Salafists claim legitimacy of communal leadership on the basis of theological credibility.

Although Sufis and Salafists in South Wollo do have appropriate appellations acceptable to them; they identified each other with pejorative and derogatory terms. The Salafists mostly identified by their rivals with Wahhabism but they dislike to be identified with

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<sup>190</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>191</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017; Interviews held in Dessie on October 10, 2017 and Kombolcha on August 24, 2017.

<sup>192</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 9 & 21 September 2017 and 2 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October 2017.

<sup>193</sup> FGD (ibid); Interviews held in Dessie on September 14, 2017 and Kombolcha on October 4, 2017.

this term. A key Salafi informant stated that Wahhabism was neither a religion nor a sect. It is derived from a person called Mohammed ibn Abdulwahab who was a Muslim reformer and preacher. He continues, “*I am a Muslim not Wahhabi or follower of Mohammed Abdulwahab...*”<sup>194</sup> Although it is difficult to provide a clear cut objective why the Salafists disassociate themselves from Wahhabism, the overwhelming reason seems to be religious than a tactical one. At the worst, following the global war on terrorism, a number of negative tags such as *akerari*, *tsefegna* and *ashebari* reported to have been attached to the Salafists.<sup>195</sup> It should be noted, however, that all Salafists are not extremists or terrorist but they can be fundamentalists. These derogatory terms sometimes manipulated for political reasons. The Sufis used to play with the last three terminologies for strategic reason to win the support of the government in their competition with Salafists.<sup>196</sup> The Sufis also identified by the Salafists with stereotyped terms like *mushrik* and *Ahbash*. The former is religiously derogatory due to the fact that the Sufis are allegedly been portrayed as anti-*tewhid*. The latter seems to have been used to indicate the intimacy of Sufis with the so-called *Ahbash* heretical group. The Sufis has made strategic alliance with *Ahbash* in South Wollo at least since 2012/13. These stereotyped terms undermine the Sufi-Salafi tolerance through inciting emotionality. This has also strengthened the notion of “we” and “they” mental setting having negative repercussions on the peace and unity of the Muslim community in South Wollo.<sup>197</sup>

## Concluding Remarks

The Sufi-Salafi competition is not a contemporary phenomenon in the Muslim world rather it had been in existence since the early history of Islam. This competition has

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<sup>194</sup> Interview held in Dessie on 21 September 2017.

<sup>195</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>196</sup> Interview held in Dessie with a local scholar on 16 October 2017

<sup>197</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

influenced not only religious figures but also palace politicians. Rulers did have their own preferences of Islamic thoughts as evidenced by the Ottoman Sultans who were more inclined to Sufism and the rulers of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia who have been more affiliated with Salafism. As part of the global Muslim community, the Muslims of South Wollo could not escape from the influence of intra-religious competition. Although Sufis and Salafists have goal interdependence on the teaching of Islam, they differ on the curriculum and methodology of Islamic teachings. This remained the basis of Sufi-Salafi competition for generations in the history of Islam.

Religious groups could compete for various reasons at different parts of the Muslim world. The Sufis and Salafists in South Wollo reported to have competed for three different reasons. The first factor related with the need to win more followers as it is supposed to be the basis of power and influence. For the last two decades, the Salafists worked hard to win the urban youth, the educated elites and the urban business community in South Wollo. This has greatly affected the social basis of the Sufi community in major urban areas of South Wollo. The second factor is explained by the need to dominate the doctrine of Islamic Institutions either with Sufism or Salafism. Both groups aspired to impose their own ideology at the expense of their rivals in different institutions of the Muslims. The last driving factor is associated with the desire to get social and economic advantages. This is explained by the desire to win allies out of the boundary of their religion. Both reported to have been lobbying Christian government officials to control the zonal *mejlis* and they were eager to dominate the economic resources of Islamic institutions. Sufis and Salafists have also used their own strategies to win the intra-religious competition. Winning the support of the government, lobbying Orthodox Christians and playing with the terrorist card are some of the strategies used by Sufis in their competition with Salafists. On the other hand, Salafists employed strategies such as excessive indoctrination of the active members of the urban community (i.e the youth, educated elites and merchant class) and engaging in philanthropic services as means of reaching the wider Muslim community in South Wollo. The Sufi-Salafi competition in South Wollo is expressed in the form of obstruction,

deception and institutional control through winning the support of the Muslim community and local government officials.

The Sufi-Salafi coexistence in South Wollo is characterized by passive tolerance where there was unjust and unequal relation as the Sufis had exclusively dominated all structures from zonal *mejlis* to mosque administrations following the 2012 *mejlis* election while the relation between the two in the previous *mejlis* reported to have been characterized by active tolerance in which there was significant number of Salafists represented in many zonal *mejlis* posts. The Sufi-Salafi intolerance in South Wollo was expressed in the form of misquoting and/or misinterpreting rival texts, polarizing Islamic issues and emotional attack using pejorative and derogatory terms.

## CHAPTER SIX

### ANALYZING DYNAMICS OF THE SUFI-SALAFI CONFLICT IN SOUTH WOLLO

#### 6.1 Introduction

The year 1991 was a landmark in the history of Islam in Ethiopia due to the fact that it had witnessed the official commencement of Islamic revivalism in the religious landscape of Ethiopia. This was because the new government under EPDRF inaugurated a politics of religious liberalization.<sup>198</sup> Apart from the Sufis, new Islamic actors such as Salafists, *Ja'amat al-Tabligh* and the Muslim Brotherhood who had been banned in the previous regimes came to the scene in South Wollo. Of all actors, however, the Salafists were the most powerful Islamic actors who challenged the old Sufi establishments in the Zone.<sup>199</sup> They started their operation right in the capital of the zone, Dessie, and disseminated to other districts of South Wollo. The Salafi teaching not only transformed the religious system but also the laxity of the Muslims in their religious practices (Abbink, 2006). Many Muslim women in South Wollo have adopted new Islamic dressing styles such as *hijab*<sup>200</sup> and *niqab*<sup>201</sup>. The Salafists also reinvigorated the religious commitments of the Muslims in South Wollo to observe religious rituals such as attending regular and Friday prayers and fasting.<sup>202</sup> The proliferation of Islamic publication and media products as part of the dividend from the freedom of press in EPDRF constitution contributed for the religious transformation of Muslims in South Wollo. Islamic periodicals in the form of newspapers such as *Salafiyya*, *Hikma*, *Hijira* and *Quddis*, and magazine like *Bilal* arrived from the capital on weekly basis. Many young Muslims also interested to know their religion through importing books from the capital

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<sup>198</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>199</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 15 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 7 August 2017. FGD (ibid).

<sup>200</sup> *Hijab* is a Muslim woman scarf that covers only the head and the neck

<sup>201</sup> *Niqab* is a Muslim woman's face-veil that covers the whole body including the eyes

<sup>202</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 15 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October 2017.

of the country and abroad. Beyond these, they used to spend their leisure time hearing and watching Islamic audio-visual materials such as cassettes and videotapes of local and international Islamic preachers. Muslims in South Wollo before the new constitutional order in 1991 rarely used religious language and references in their daily life of interactions. For example, the Islamic form of greetings; *aselamualyikum* (peace be up on you) has come to replace the local form of greetings such as *endemmen-adrahal* (good morning), *endemmen-welehal* (good afternoon) and *endemmen-ameshetahal* (good evening).<sup>203</sup>

The Sufi-Salafi conflict erupted in South Wollo right with the beginning of Salafi movement in 1990s. The reaction of the Sufis in the early years of EPDRF was very strong especially in rural areas that many Salafi figures were expelled in different parts of South Wollo. The Sufi opposition against the Salafists declined as the latter strengthened their position in major towns of South Wollo such as Dessie and Mekaneselam. At least three factors are mentioned for the success of the Salafists in South Wollo. Firstly, the philanthropic service of the Salafists won the support of the Muslims in major towns especially in Dessie and Mekaneselam. Secondly, the success of Salafists in controlling prominent positions of the zonal *mejlis* and the grand mosques of the capital of the zone namely Arab-Genda and Shewa-Ber mosques shifted the balance of power in favor of the Salafists. Thirdly, the rationalist approaches of the Salafists in explaining Islamic issues quenched the intellectual queries of the young urban Muslims.<sup>204</sup>

The Sufi-Salafi conflict attracted external Islamic and non-Islamic actors. All actors have their own objectives and interests out of the Sufi-Salafi conflict. Islamic actors in South Wollo were highly fragmented and diverse. Although they were many in South Wollo as the Sufis, Salafists, Muslim Brotherhoods, Tebligis and others, the first two are dominant

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<sup>203</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 21 September 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October 2017

<sup>204</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

in fierce competition over the issue who represent the correct interpretation of Islam and has the authority to speak in the name of Islam.<sup>205</sup> Sufis and Salafist are the principal actors in intra-religious conflict in the Muslim community of South Wollo as they directly involved in the conflict. The secondary or tertiary actors such as the Orthodox Church, Ethiopian government, Foreign Islamic NGOs and the US government which are driven by certain interests in the Sufi-Salafi conflict. The non-Islamic actors have a unified objective and interest in the Sufi-Salafi conflict. The perceived threat of terrorism from the Salafi Muslims in South Wollo is the focal point of their interest and they coordinated their resource to combat Islamic terrorism in collaboration with the so-called moderate Sufi Muslims.<sup>206</sup> Governmental actors in the conflict have made association between Salafists in Wollo and the international terrorist organizations like al-Qayida, al-shabab and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The view of Ethiopian government for example, was confirmed by the parliamentary speech of the former Prime Minister, Melese Zenawi<sup>207</sup> on 17 April 2012 as follows;

*As far as the religion of Islam is concerned, there are indegenious (**nebar**) Muslims which is a Sufi Islam .... Another group in Islam is a Salafi Islam which was introduced in the last twenty and thirty years. It is wrong and a crime to say all Salafists are al-Qayida but all al-Q ayidas are Salafists. An al-Qayida cell is found in Ethiopia around Arsi and Bali [Oromiya State]. Nevertheless, this does not mean all Salafists are al-Qayida , most of them are not....Few Salafists claim the majority of Ethiopian people are Muslims, the number of Ethiopian Muslims presented by the Central Statistics Agency is false. Since Ethiopian Muslims are majority, Islamic government has to be established. Some Salafists are threatening peacefulcoexistence between the Muslims and Christians. We have seen signs in Ethiopia and [other*

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid

<sup>206</sup> Ibid

<sup>207</sup> Melese Zenawi's Speech ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w\\_kb78-XCVA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_kb78-XCVA)) to parliament televised by the State television (ETV) on 17 April 2012. He served as prime minister of Ethiopia till he was replaced by Haile Mariam Desalegn following his natural death in 2012

*countries] What would Salafists would do...(Author's translation).*

The US position towards Salafists maintained through massive local and international media campaigns on Islamic terrorism. For example, the US government in one of the three Wikileaks cables portrayed the Salafi missionaries in south Wollo as a threat of indigenous culture (i.e Sufi culture), and even they are branded as “cultural imperialists”. The US government (USG) launched a cultural programming to prevent the Salafi influence through Ambassador’s fund.<sup>208</sup> The USG seems to have taken a structural prevention strategy through revitalizing the Sufi institutions in Wollo and elsewhere in the country. As the core of Abassadors program, funding and capacity building through launching developmental programs around Sufi institutions were central. It has also long term objective of containing the threat of Salafism in Ethiopia and of Wollo through building the capacity of Sufi institutions to prevent the Salafi threat.

## **6.2 Principal Actors**

### **6.2.1 Sufis**

Although the introduction of Islam dated back to the fourth quarter of the 9th Century, Sufism in South Wollo believed to have been introduced towards the end of the eighteenth and at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Sufism must have been introduced from Harar as the first Sufi *tariqa* (*Qadiriyya*) is believed to have been brought from this area (Hussein, 2001: 68-71). At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Sufis reported to have used a revivalist movement through confronting non-Islamic local cultural elements. Although scholars fail to rationalize the strategic change, Sufism through time adopted accommodative approach to local cultural practices. This remains one of the contentious issues between Sufis and Salafists in contemporary South Wollo. Salafists challenged the Sufis as promoters of *bid'a* and *shirk* in the past and has currently been perceived as carriers of the heretical doctrine of Ahabash. The spread of the Salafi teaching since 1990s in South Wollo frustrated Sufis as it would

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<sup>208</sup> <<www. [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ADDISABABA1675\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ADDISABABA1675_a.html) >>

terminate their monopoly of leadership in the Muslim community. Although they have been overwhelmed by the Salafi revivalists, they employed many strategies to deter the movement. The Sufis at different occasions desperately complain about the radicalization of the Salafists as they felt powerless to prevent the movement. They further elucidate, “*They [Salafists] took away the leadership, the youth, women and the businesspeople to their side...*” (IAG & MoFA Report, 2016:37). The Sufis raised only two historical episodes such as the 1997/98 Sufi-Salafi violence at Shewa-Ber mosque and the massacre of *Sheikh* Nuru Yimam in 2013 as evidences of Salafi radicalization.<sup>209</sup> They perceived Salafists as enemies who snatched the socio-religious leadership of the Sufis in South Wollo. Although Sufis seem behaviorally passive, they are reported to have used any powerful allies like the government and orthodox Christians in their conflict with the Salafists. The Sufis unequivocally puts the need to continue cooperation with the government to maintain the socio-religious leadership in the Muslim community in South Wollo. One of the incumbent *mejlis* officials explicitly confirmed their dedication for Sufi-government counter Salafi coalition as follows, “*We are now working with the government to dismantle the Salafi movement in South Wollo as they are “virus” of the people of South Wollo...*”<sup>210</sup>

### **6.2.2 Salafists**

The teaching of Salafi movement in South Wollo was officially started in the 1990s and soon earned reputation as the doctrine of Islam in the urban Muslim population of South Wollo. According to the report from the Zonal Administrative and Security Office, Salafists have been active in major urban centers such as Aqesta, Bistima, Degan, Gerba, Harbu, Kelala, Kombolcha, Kutaber, Legambo, Meqdela, Wogidi, and Worebabo ( IAG & MoFA Report, 2016:37). The Salafists are also noted for their strict teaching of Islam and the revival of Islamic moral codes. Although many Christian writers described the Salafists as radical and agents of foreign power, no one could trace any tangible empirical evidences for the case in South Wollo (Gebre-Yohanes 2012; Erlich 2007;

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<sup>209</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with Sufi leaders on 25 August 2017 and Kombolcha on 7 August 2017.

<sup>210</sup> Interviews held with the zonal Mejlis chairman and secretary on 10 October 2017.

Muluwork, 2012). As it has been discussed in the previous chapters, religious and political issues are the core of the conflict between Sufis and Salafists in South Wollo.

Salafists have attitudinal and behavioral orientations towards the Sufi Muslims in South Wollo. They perceived Sufis as obstacles to the teaching of Islamic monotheism and consider them as ‘government puppets’ cooperated with “enemies of Islam and the Muslims”.<sup>211</sup> According to government authorities and key Sufi informants, the Salafists allegedly been involved in the teaching extremism, challenging the established Sufi traditions, human trafficking and attempted to replace the secular order with the government of Sharia.<sup>212</sup> Key Salafi informants dismissed the accusations of the Sufis and mejlis officials as baseless and politically motivated. Further elaborating the anti-Salafi coalition of the government and the Sufis, Salafists labelled the coalition as “*a back scratching politics*”.<sup>213</sup> This is to say that there is positive goal interdependence between the Sufis and the government in which the latter is using the Sufis as patron of combating Islamic extremism and the former on their part are using the government as guardian of their power in the Muslim community of South Wollo. The Salafists stressed the need to respect religious equality of all Muslims in South Wollo and urges Sufis to be loyal to the Muslim community.<sup>214</sup> Although the teaching of Islam through Sufi scholars had been in existence for centuries in the area, Salafists perceived the past as a period of ‘ignorance’ as many Muslims followed the Sufi teaching of Islam. Although the political history of the area has significant impact on the religiosity of Muslims, Salafists seem to have depended on the tyranny of a single causation to explain the religious laxity of the Muslims in South Wollo in which they blamed only Sufism responsible for the religious laxity of wollo Muslims. Therefore, Salafists pressed for the respect of

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<sup>211</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 15 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October 2017.

<sup>212</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>213</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 9 & 21 September 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October 2017.

<sup>214</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

religious freedom in the constitution and the transformation of the Muslim community towards the ideology of Salafism<sup>215</sup>.

Salafists felt they are relatively deprived though they are entitled to enjoy parity with their Sufi rivals on the basis of the constitution. They also developed a sense of “victimization” as their religion is supposed to be under attack. They justified their grievance at two levels. Firstly, they stated that there is unjustified hostility and persecutions on the Muslims by the western Christians in different parts of the world. Secondly, they argue that there is violation of religious freedom in Ethiopia and Muslims are seen as a threat. They accused the Ethiopian government of allying with the western powers to attack Islam. They dismissed the threat of radical Islam to national security as the pro-western propaganda to justify their attacks on the Muslims. Unless this sense of “victimization” is not properly managed through developing alternative policy of security, an age old *realist security* orientation might lead Salafists to radicalization and possibly creates a recruitment ground for regional and global terrorism (IAG&MoFA report, 2016).

### **6.3 Secondary Actors**

#### **6.3.1 Government**

The coming to power of EPDRF and the beginning of a Salafi revivalist movement was concomitant in South Wollo. Key informants reported that there had been good relation between the Salafists and the government at least for more than a decade. Salafists regarded the EPDRF as the symbol of religious freedom because they exploited the period more to expand their religious creed. For example, during the 2010 election prominent Salafi leaders in South Wollo including Abubeker Ahmed is reported to have played important role for the victory EPDRF for the first time in the town of Dessie.<sup>216</sup> Although the speech was not detail and did not identify the role of actors on the success

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<sup>215</sup> FGD(ibid) ; Interview held in Dessie on 17 October 2017.

<sup>216</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 25 August 9, & 21 September and 2 October 2017, and Kombolcha on 7 August & 4 October 2017.

of EPDRF election in the town of Dessie, the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi unequivocally acknowledged the success of EPDRF for the first time in the town of Dessie (Meles Zenawi, 2011). The cordial relationship between Salafists and the government believed to have declined gradually as the latter began to attack Salafists following the 2011/12 protests of the Muslims. According to participants of FGD<sup>217</sup>, Salafists in South Wollo believed to have threatened ‘the acquired values’<sup>218</sup> such as religious tolerance and rule of law. The zonal administrative and security office head further elaborated that Salafists had violated intra-religious tolerance through demonizing Ahbash though the latter claimed to have constitutional right to express their religious belief and enjoy equality of religion. These values believed to have prime value for the people of South Wollo as they are portrayed as a model of religious tolerance and equality to the rest of the country.<sup>219</sup> Abbink (2007) also confirmed this fact in one of his article that the long-held religious tolerance and accommodation in south Wollo is at “a precarious imbalance” with immense social and political implications following the introduction Salafism. On the contrary, Salafists accused the government of imposing the ideology Ahbash on Ethiopian Muslims and promoted the radical Sufis to control *mejlis* at the expense of Salafi marginalization through conducting ‘fake election’ on August 2012. According to local scholars, the securitization of the Salafists directly or indirectly related with the global counter terrorism operation the country had signed with the international community. They argue the military campaign against Al-Shabab in Somali and the anti-Salafi campaign at home were not on the basis of a *bona fide* concern for the commitment of Ethiopian government to combat Islamic extremism but aiming at attracting economic and diplomatic support from the west especially of the US government.<sup>220</sup> To put it differently, the imposition of Ahbash and marginalizing Salafists from *mejlis* election is perceived by Salafists as a

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<sup>217</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>218</sup> See the theoretical explications of the theory of security in chapter two of this dissertation

<sup>219</sup> Interview held with Eshetu Yesuf, head of the zonal administrative and security office on 23 October 2017.

<sup>220</sup> Informal interviews held in Dessie with Wolo University lecturer and Assistant professor on 16 & 17 October 2017 respectively.

clear violation of religious equality and rule of law.<sup>221</sup> Under the pretext of combating extremism, however, the government launched a major crackdown on the Salafists following the 2012 *mejlis* election.<sup>222</sup>

### 6.3.2 Orthodox Christians

Following the conflict between Muslims and Christians in Jimma zone of Oromiya Regional State, many Christians in South Wollo (especially in Dessie) reported to have worried. This is partly because a video record showing the horrific incidents of Jimma reached South Wollo. Although it was not neutral (reflecting only the Christian view), the video tape shows the killing of worshippers, burning of churches and displacement. According to informants there was unwise and unhealthy sentiment by few Christians to dominate and oppress the Muslims in this era of freedom and democracy.<sup>223</sup> This is backed by a research report by scholars from Addis Ababa University in which few fanatic Christians reported to have worried about the religious, social, economic and political developments of the Muslims in South Wollo. They stated that, *“this period has coincided with the establishment of numerous mosques; the revivalist teaching of strict Islam; and the growing participation of Muslims in businesses, administration, and politics. These developments put the church leaders and the youth on the edge”* (IAG & MoFA, 2016). In the town of Dessie in 2009 for example, Christians who attempted to construct St. Arsema Church on cemetery of the Muslims at a place called Azwa Gedel faced unprecedented opposition from the Muslims of the area. Although Muslims had inherited from their ancestors as place of burial and praying, the government reported to have decided the land to the Christians in 2006 without the knowledge of the former. When the Christians started operation on the ground, Muslims flooded the area to oppose this decision. This forced the government to reverse its decision and stopped the Christians from building the Church. A deadly conflict erupted when Christian

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<sup>221</sup> Interviews with key Salafi informants held in Dessie on 9 & 21 September and 2 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 24 August and 4 October 2017.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid

<sup>223</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 16 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 6 December 2017

protesters violated this decision and attempted to construct St. Arsema once again. At this critical juncture, police intervened and many civilians injured. This conflict eventually attracted the attention of Prime Minister Melese Zenawi who visited Dessie and decided the land neither to the Muslims nor to the Christians (Ibid). The problem has not yet been resolved till my field visit in 2017.<sup>224</sup> According to the zonal security officers, the worst happened when a church was burned down in Meqedela Woreda where the incident had been allegedly linked with Salafi revivalists but the latter dismissed the accusation as the conspiracy of the government to blackmail the Salafi movement in South Wollo.<sup>225</sup>

Although the issue requires a scrutiny, local Orthodox Christians accused the Salafists of a threat to the culture of peaceful coexistence and tolerance built for centuries in South Wollo. The more 'pragmatic' and 'extraordinary' social practices between Christians and Muslims which were expressed in terms of inter-faith marriage, attending each other's festivities (*tebel*, *tezkar*, *Christina*, *sedeqa* and so forth), visiting holy men (Christian priests and Sufi Saints) and mixed burial societies began to decline as a result of the rigorous teaching of Salafism. According to Salafists all these 'extreme' social practices are not authorized by the scriptures of Islam and believed to have been historically imposed due to unequal social relations and ignorance of the Muslim community.<sup>226</sup> Knowing all these behavioural changes in the Muslim community, the Christians in South Wollo perceived the Salafi movement intolerant and anti-status quo.<sup>227</sup> Generally, in the eyes of the Orthodox Christians, the Muslim-Christian conflict in South Wollo is believed to be triggered by the Salafi Muslims. Many times, the Orthodox Christians

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<sup>224</sup> I personally visited the site in the summer of 2017.

<sup>225</sup> Interviews held in Desie with Eshetu Yesuf on 23 October and Getenet Assefa on 24 October 2017.

<sup>226</sup> Interviews with key Salafi informants held in Dessie on 21 September and October 2, 2017 and Kombolch on 4 October 2017.

<sup>227</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with *Deacon* Zelalem Abate, Mulugeta Hile and Maza Eshetu on 29 October 2017 and key Salafi informants on 9 & 21 September 2017.

seem to have cordial relation with the Sufi Muslims and has shown their solidarity when they are threatened by the Salafi Muslims.<sup>228</sup>

## 6.4 Tertiary Actors

### 6.4.1 USA

The Salafi revivalist movement in Ethiopia in general and South Wollo in particular worried the USG for the last many decades. The US embassy in Ethiopia closely worked with *mejlis* on issues of religious extremism. The main agenda of cooperation has been on the fight against Salafi revivalism. This is confirmed by the letter of thanks from the chairman of *mejlis*, Elias Ridman written to the US embassy in Ethiopia for their assistance on the eradicating attempts of the Salafi movement<sup>229</sup> and Yamamoto's confidential telegram revealed through a WikiLeaks cable on the issue of Ethiopian *mejlis* and the growing Salafi movement in the country. The US embassy had made South Wollo as a site for a potential Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP). Although the embassy was not genuinely concerned for the preservation of Islamic culture, a multi-million dollar project was designed to halt the advance of the Salafi movement through flaring the structural rift within the religion of Islam. This was planned to be done through reviving the Sufi cultural centers using US funding. Approached by the Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (IASC) or *mejlis* on the need to restore Jemma Nigus, the US embassy delegates in Ethiopia headed by Donald Yamamoto and the government delegate headed by President of Amhara Regional State, Gedu Andaregachew reported to have visited Jama Nigus mosque in South Wollo between June 3-5, 2009. The embassy rationalized the importance of restoring or conserving Jemma Nigus from two perspectives. Firstly, experts of the embassy gave prime importance as it had been the site of indigenous Islam where Ethiopian celebrated *meulid al-nebi* for the first time in the country. Secondly, the embassy was

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> A letter written by Elias Redman (ex-chairman of *mejlis*) to the US embassy in Ethiopia referenced 1883/60/2000 and dated on 13/5/2000 E.C .

approached by the local *mejlis* as source of alternative funding since Arab NGOs repeatedly turned down the request of restoring or conserving the shrine of Jemma Nigus. The refusal seems to have emanated from ideological difference as Arab NGOs reported to have been guided by the principles of Salafi doctrine which has zero tolerance to fund sites where *shirk* is supposed to be carried out. According to WikiLeaks confidential telegram message, the EIASC reported to have worried on the expansion of the Salafi influence in the peripheral pastoral communities such as Afar, Somali and Gambella region where education had only been provided by Salafi Madrassas. Mejlis requested the USG funding for small schools which would help these communities to lead a settled life and save from the influence of Salafism. The US government very much concerned about the growing Salafi influence in Ethiopia fearing that it would endanger the so-called “delicate balance” of religious coexistence and tolerance existed for centuries as a result of traditional Sufi orientation.<sup>230</sup>

#### **6.4.2 Islamic NGOs**

According to the US embassy, foreign Islamic NGOs especially the role of Kuwiti NGOs was decisive for the expansion of Salafism in South Wollo. Based on the report, over 150 mosques built starting from Dessie to Tigray region. Each mosque is estimated to cost \$ 30,000.<sup>231</sup> Although the role of these NGOs as organizations is unknown amongst informants, they referred the presence of certain Arabs behind the construction projects.<sup>232</sup> The EIASC accused the Islamic NGOs of agents of money laundry but many of its leaders hardly provide evidence for this. The contribution of local Islamic NGOs like Ihsan in this regard is constructive to address social problems in the study area.<sup>233</sup> Informants did not have evidences if there had been cooperation between foreign based Islamic NGOs and local NGOs. They rather confirmed that local NGOs were financed from local sources through fund raising and donations from the business

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<sup>230</sup> << [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ADDISABABA1675\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ADDISABABA1675_a.html) >>

<sup>231</sup> << [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ADDISABABA1675\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ADDISABABA1675_a.html) >>

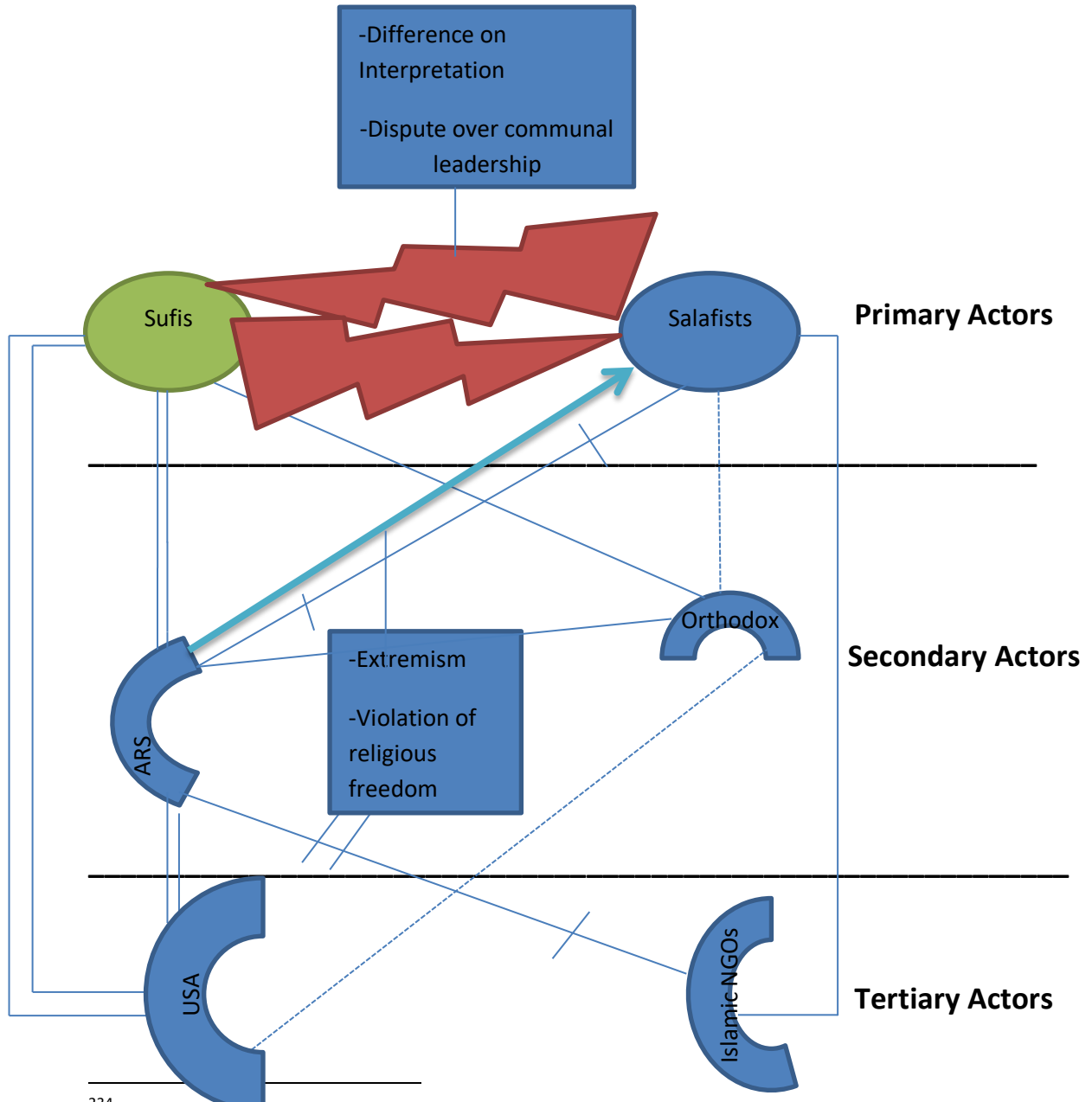
<sup>232</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid

community. Nonetheless, both foreign and local Islamic NGOs reported to have inclined to Salafi orientations.<sup>234</sup>

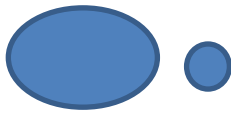
## 6.5 Mapping Actors of the Conflict

Fig-2: Mapping Actors of the Conflict



<sup>234</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with key Salafi informants on 9 & 21 September, 24 August 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October 2017.

## Key



**Circles**= shows the main actors of the Conflict. The size of the circle shows the power of the party in relation the conflict.



**Double line** = very good relationship



**Arrow** = Direction of influence or power



**Straight line** = close relationship



**Half circle and quarter of a circle** = External actors in the conflict. The size of half circle shows the relative power of the parties.



**Broken line** = shows informal relation between parties.



**Crossed out line** = broken connection



**Lightning bolt** = shows conflict and discord. The arrow shows the direction of influence



**Rectangle** = shows issues of discord or conflict relationship

*Source: developed by the author*

Based on the discussion about actors of the conflict above, it is possible to map actors of the conflict in South Wollo (see fig-2). Accordingly, the main actors of the conflict are the Sufis and Salafists. As can be seen in the above figure, the relation between Sufis and Salafists is symbolized by a lightning bolt which indicates the existence of conflict

between the two actors. The issue of discord between the two rests with interpretation of Islam and dispute over communal leadership though it is exacerbated by the need to control the resource of institutions of the Muslim community in South Wollo. However, the direction of influence is from the government to the Salafists on behalf the Sufis. This meant that the balance of power was in the direction of the Sufis as they have been supported by the government against Salafists. The Sufis relation with the regional or local government and the USA is symbolized by double line which indicates very good partnership. The relationship between Sufis and Orthodox is indicated by a single line to show the existence of close relationship while the relation between Salafists and Orthodox is indicated by broken line to show informal relationship. The arrow coming from the government to Salafists represents the direction of influence on behalf of the Sufis as the government is the only legitimate entity to monopolize power. It also indicates the presence of uneasy relation between Salafists and the government as the former accuses the Amhara Regional Government (ARG) of violating religious freedom through despising Salafists while the latter defends their move as part of combating extremism. The Salafists reported to have close relationship with foreign based Islamic NGOs (these are foreign based and local NGOs). Although the government was closely working with Islamic NGOs, it withdrew from supporting them following the Muslim uprising since 2012 and hence symbolized by crossed out line indicating broken relationship.

## **6.6 Causes of the Sufi-Salafi Conflict**

Scholars in the field argue that there is no single causation for a conflict since there are many factors of explanations and many types of conflict. Porto's "tyranny of single" causation seems to be correct because explaining a conflict on the basis of single-causation hinders the possibility of identifying the real causes of a conflict and there by complicates its resolvability (Porto, 2008:57; Haider, 2009: 5). This suggests that a conflict might have multiple causations and solutions. This is because identifying the cause of a conflict is tantamount to getting half solution of the problem. This indirectly seems to prove the soundness of the classification of causations as structural, proximate

and immediate causes. Beyond this, it helps to devise a sharp resolution mechanism for a conflict. Thus, it is decisive to identify the structural/root, proximate and immediate causes of a conflict.

### **6.6.1 Structural / Root Cause of the Conflict**

The root cause highlights the underlying, structural and deep-rooted conditions in a society. In other words, it is embedded into the policies, structures and fabric of the society. It is also manifested in the form of economic, ethnic, religious and political oppressions (Umar et al, 2008: 35). Although the structural cause of the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo lay within the religious system of Islamic interpretation, it has been augmented by the policies of the government through frustrating Salafists and promoting Sufis.<sup>235</sup> Religious interpretation as point of departure in Islam dated back to the early history Islam but, still perpetuates as the center of religious discord in the Muslim community of South Wollo. This discrepancy existed for thousands of years through creating its own socio-religious formations (Armstrong, 2002: 56-60). This is to mean both groups institutionalized their own version of Islamic teaching within their own constituencies which consequently maintained their survival for generations. The structural problem which is embedded in the interpretation of Islam has also reflected in some rituals (Sufi rituals like *meulid*, pilgrimage to Sufi shrine e.t.c.) and texts (Salafi texts like *fethul mejid*, *Usulul-Selassa* and *Kitabul-tewhid*). The case in South Wollo is not unique from other parts of the Muslim world at this level. The rise and fall of political groups in the Muslim world sometimes attached with the ambitions of rulers to utilize this dichotomy for their own political interests. They usually supported Islamic thoughts which are more compatible with their own political ideology and even manipulated the difference for their own political interests. For example, when the Sufi scholars had a preponderant position during the Ottoman times, Salafists were condemned and marginalized by the Ottoman political elites (Armstrong, 2002). Similarly, the

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<sup>235</sup> Interview held in Dessie on 16 October 2017 and Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

government policy in Ethiopia for the last couple of years supported the Sufi ideology under the pretext of combating terrorism. In this regard, Salafists were perceived as a threat to peace and securitized by the state.<sup>236</sup> The government in Ethiopia in one way or another has created “governmental Islam” that disappointed sections of the Muslim population (Ostebo, 2013; 2014).

The structural cause of the Sufi-Salafi conflict is partly explained by *social identification theory*<sup>237</sup> in which Sufis and Salafists identify themselves as social group because they involved in the process of deciding which group they belong to and help them to protect and enhance their identity. With regard to the interpretation of Islam, both groups identified each other with simplified conceptions like untrustworthy, intolerance and extremism.<sup>238</sup> The Salafists perceive the Sufi interpretation of Islam as ‘deviant’ that cannot be trusted.<sup>239</sup> The Sufis on their part perceive the interpretation of the Salafists ‘too extreme and intolerant’.<sup>240</sup> The political conflict between Sufis and Salafists is also expressed in terms of social atomization- a state of identifying oneself as ‘victim’ and others as ‘perpetrator’. The Salafists, for example, consider themselves as ‘victims’ of political marginalization and they accused the Sufis and the government of ‘perpetrators’. The government promoted Sufism at the expense of Salafists as they are perceived politically ‘risk free’ while Salafists were supposed to be politically assertive as they are allegedly requesting the establishment of Islamic government. This seems to have invited the government to step in the affairs of the Muslims which consequently dichotomized Muslims between “governmental Muslims”--Sufi and “non-governmental Muslims”--Salafists (Ostebo, 2013; 2014). Following this, the reaction of Muslims towards the incumbent political system was different. The Sufis became loyal to the

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> See the theoretical explication of the *social identification theory* in chapter two of this dissertation.

<sup>238</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>239</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>240</sup> Interview held in Dessie with key Sufi informant on 7 August 2017.

government and worked to preserve the existing political system while the Salafists opposed and strongly challenged the government to respect at least the religious freedom of the constitutional provision.<sup>241</sup>

### **6.6.2 Proximate Cause of the Conflict**

Indicators of proximate causes highlight medium-term events and situations. These might include the formation of militias, increasing popular discontent, ongoing high inflation, increasing violence against specific ethnic or religious minorities and extremely high unemployment (Webel and Galtung, 2007). In the context of South Wollo, the imposition of Ahbash ideology on Ethiopian Muslims in general and Wollo Muslims in particular is believed to be the proximate cause of the Sufi-Salafi conflict.<sup>242</sup> The introduction of Ahbash in South Wollo reported to have transformed the dormant and relatively more tolerant relationship between the local Sufis and Salafists into active and violent phase. The worst happened when the government supported the radical Sufi (Ahbash) to control mosques and *mejlis* through expelling the Salafi scholars. The Zonal and *woreda*(district) *mejlis* totally been controlled and even prominent Salafi mosques in the town of Dessie like Shewa-Ber, Arab-Genda and Arado mosques, and Teqwa mosque in Kombolcha were forcefully taken away by the new Ahbash *mejlis* officials. The Salafists seem to have been frustrated by the actions of radical Sufi *mejlis* officials as they lost their mosques coercively. The level of frustration forced them to undertake aggressive reaction mainly expressed in the form of open protest against the government and Ahbash.<sup>243</sup> As it is discussed in the previous chapter, Salafists regularly protested in every Friday for the return of Salafi Imams and mosque administrators. The Salafists also mobilized the businesspeople to cease their contributions to mosques which failed under the control of radical Sufis. One of the biggest opposition held in

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<sup>241</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>242</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017 and interviews held in Dessie with a lecturer at Wollo University on 16 October 2017.

<sup>243</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 21 September 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October 2017.

Arab-Genda mosque of Dessie in August 2012 where police used teargas and beat up protesters outside the compound of the mosque.<sup>244</sup>

The proximate cause of the Sufi-Salafi conflict can also be explained by *the theory of relative deprivation*<sup>245</sup>. When the gains of a group decline in reference to others, violence becomes an outlet of frustration (Gurr, 1970:257). Following the 2012 Zonal mejlis election, the gains of the Salafists decline in reference to the Sufis. The Sufis had secured an all-out support from the government by which they were able to control mosques and *mejlis* leadership in South Wollo. On the contrary, the government purged Salafists from South Wollo following their uprising for religious freedom.<sup>246</sup>

### 6.6.3 Immediate Causes of the Conflict

The indicators of immediate triggers are events or incidents that are difficult to predict but in combination with structural and proximate causes triggers violence. For example, high level political massacre/assassination and election born crisis are some of the triggering factors of conflict (Webel and Galtung, 2007). The controversial mejlis election in October 2012 and assassination of a prominent Sufi Cleric, *Sheikh* Nuru Yimam on 5 July 2013 in the town of Dessie is considered to be the immediate causes of the Sufi-Salafi violence.<sup>247</sup> The government along with the radical Sufi officials decided *mejlis* election extraordinarily to be held in government buildings (Herald, 9 October 2012). Although the government new arrangement of polling stations at the *kebeles* are defended from the point of view of encouraging female Muslim participants, Salafists protested against this arrangement as they understood the conspiracy of the government to intervene in the affairs of the Muslims and prevent the candidacy of Salafists from

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> See the theoretical explication of relative deprivation theory in chapter two of this dissertation.

<sup>246</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 15 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 3 December 2017.

<sup>247</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017. See photograph of *Sheik* Nuru in Appendix-III.

*mejlis* election.<sup>248</sup> Following the massacre of *Sheikh* Nuru, the government under the Ministry of Federal Affairs issued a statement which condemned the brutal killing of *Sheikh* Nuru yimam by extremists (implicitly refers the Salafists) who had no religious end. The statement also attached the incident with some political organizations<sup>249</sup> which aspired to advance their political agenda under the pretext of religion (Herald, 12 July 2013). Although many Sufis were terrified with this incident and pointed their fingers against the Salafists, eye witnesses in the area including the son of *Sheikh* Nuru dismissed the allegedly government accusation of the Salafists on the killing of the Sufi cleric. This is because they blamed the government as responsible for the massacre the *Sheikh*.<sup>250</sup> In response to this, the government imprisoned the Son of *Sheikh* Nuru as he openly accused the government of responsible for the killing of his father.<sup>251</sup> Strengthening the suspicion of the son of *Sheikh* Nuru, eye-witnesses from the residence and family of *Sheikh* Nuru utter “... before *Sheikh* Nuru was shot, a group of individuals with a civilian clothing carried by a pickup-land cruiser arrived between the house of *Sheikh* Nuru and Shewa-Ber mosque... the switch off of the public light in the area was concomitant with the shooting of *Sheikh* Nuru...”<sup>252</sup> The Salafists and individuals around the family posed a very tough question on how an individual killer was capable of switching off the public electric light which is under the control of the government. However, the government swiftly accused the Salafists of responsible for the death of *Sheikh* Nuru and presented the allegedly Salafi killer on the public media. According to informants the government officials further reported to have insisted the family of *Sheikh* Nuru to hasten the burial ceremony without undertaking investigation on the

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<sup>248</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with Key Salafi informants on 21 September and 2 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October and 3 December 2017.

<sup>249</sup> This was particularly referring AEUP which openly accused the government of interfering in Mejlis election.

<sup>250</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 2 October 2017, 18 September 2017 and 21 December 2017. See also about Sheik Nuru in chapter four of this dissertation.

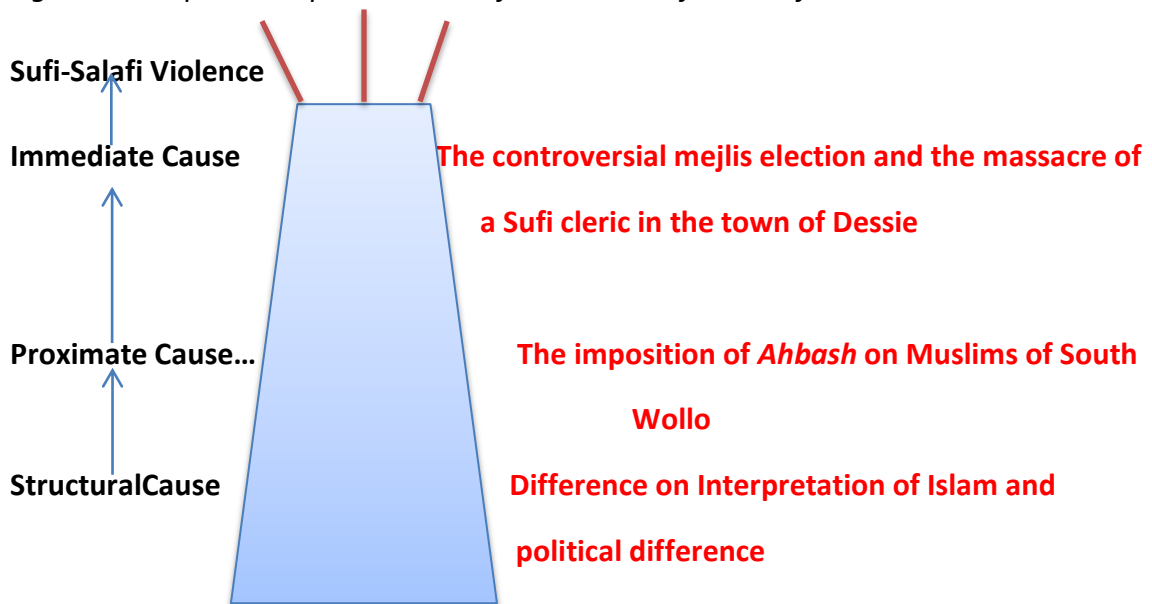
<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Interview held in Dessie on 21 December 2017.

body of the *Sheikh*.<sup>253</sup> Key Salafi informants conclude that the government orchestrated the killing of *Sheikh* Nuru to justify the forthcoming repression of the Salafists and deter their movement in South Wollo.<sup>254</sup>

Following the massacre of *Sheikh* Nuru, the government reported to have directly interfered through targeting the Salafi Muslims. Many young Salafists were imprisoned and others fled to other areas the country and abroad. The contribution of the radical Sufi *mejlis* officials on the hunting of the young Salafists reported to have been decisive. This was because the government agents had been using these officials to hunt the allegedly “extremist Salafists”, and the newly appointed mosque Imams were also used as witnesses in a number of court cases.<sup>255</sup> As a result of this, the Federal High Court sentenced on 13 Muslims accused of killing *Sheikh* Nuru from two to sixteen years of jail in July 2013 (Addis Standard, 2013).

*Fig.3: The Trapezoid Representation of Causations of the Conflict*



<sup>253</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 21 December 2017 and 9 September 2017.

<sup>254</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 9, &21 September 2017 and 2 October 2017 and kombolcha on 7 August 2017.

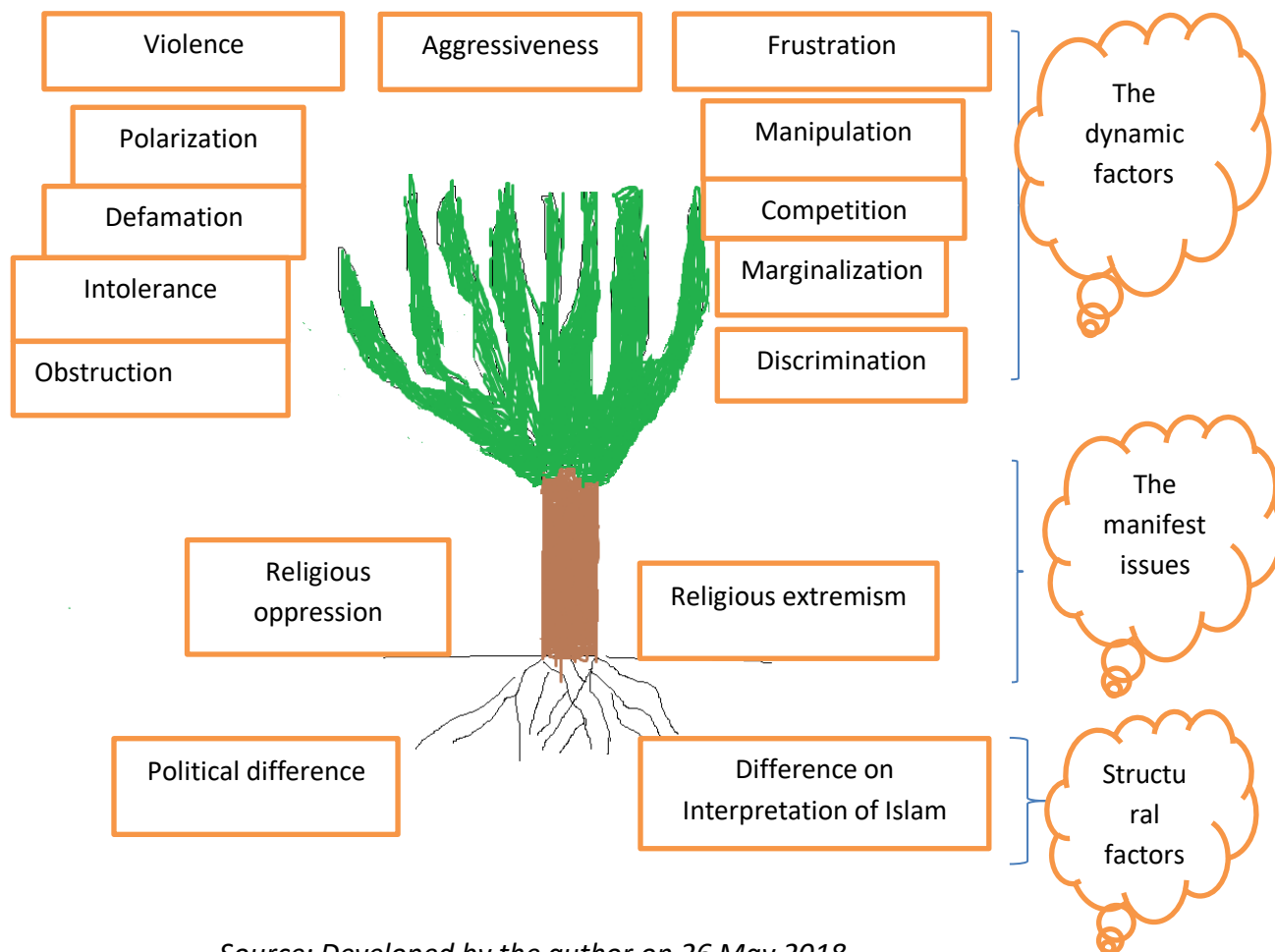
<sup>255</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 2 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 18 September 2017. For example, the newly appointed mosque Imama of Arab-Genda reported to have been used by the government as a witness for the court cases of Salafists who have been accused of killing Sheik Nuru Yimam.

Source: produced by the author on 25 May 2018

### 6.7 Tree model Analysis of the Sufi-Salafi conflict

Based on the above discussion on actors of the conflict, it is possible to analyze the cause and dynamics of the conflict using a tree model analysis. This is because it clearly depicts the structure and dynamics of the Sufi-Salafi conflict. The tree portrays the interaction between the structural, manifest and dynamics of the conflict. The root of the tree represents the structural and 'static' factors. The trunk symbolizes the manifest issues linking structural with the dynamic factors. The leaves of the tree moving in the wind represent the dynamic factors.

**Fig-4 : Analyzing the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo using a conflict tree**



Source: Developed by the author on 26 May 2018

As can be seen from the conflict tree (Fig.4) the root of the Sufi-Salafi conflict is more of systemic as it is rested with in the religious and political systems of the Muslim community in South Wollo. Religiously, the two groups have their own distinct way of understanding and interpreting the religion of Islam. The Sufis often appreciated intuition as the basis of their religious interpretation through enlightened Sufi Scholars while the Salafists opted for the literal interpretation of Islam as it was originally taught by the Holy Prophet and his companions. Politically, the two groups have distinct political response for the existing political system in South Wollo. Although both groups did not have open political claim in the country, the growing interest of the government to control Muslim religious groups through manipulations seems to have widened the rivalry between Sufis and Salafist. A sort of 'divide and rule' policy believed to have been applied by the government which consequently split the Muslims into pro-government (i.e the Sufis) and anti-government (i.e Salafists) camps. Therefore, both the religious and political aspirations of the Muslims are structural factors symbolized by the root of the tree and they are not visible as the roots of the tree are not visible on the surface.

The trunk of the tree always portrays the manifest issues which are visible to the wider communities in South Wollo. The Sufi-Salafi conflict manifested to the public as violation of religious freedom by the government and the radical Sufi elements as it is claimed by the Salafists, and countering Salafi extremism as it is articulated by the radical Sufi elements and the government. The trunk of the tree is linking the structural factors of the Sufi-Salafi conflict symbolized by the root with the dynamic factors represented by the leaves.

The leaves of the tree depict the dynamics of the Sufi-Salafi conflict. They are usually considered as the symptoms of the conflict. Based on the discussions in the preceding chapters both Sufis and Salafists had experienced the dynamic elements of the conflict. Accordingly, they claimed to have been victims of rival manipulation, defamation, marginalization, misperception, intervention, deception, violence, intolerance,

obstruction, discrimination, frustration, aggressiveness and polarization in the course of their interactions.

## **6.8 Analyzing positions, needs and interests of the principal actors of the Conflict in South Wollo using *Onion Model Analysis***

Analyzing the needs and interests of parties in the conflict might be helpful for conflict intervention. Any intervention cannot be successful unless the needs and interests of the parties are carefully analyzed. For this endeavor, Fisher et al argue that (2000: 27) *Onion Model of Analysis* might be useful to understand the underlying factors that could be expressed in terms of parties' needs and interests in South Wollo. The framework is developed on the basis of the analogy of an onion and its layers. To put it differently, actors' positions, needs and interests in the conflict can be explained in the form of strata simulating the layers of an onion. Accordingly, the outer layer is supposed to indicate the positions of parties/actors that are expressed publically. The underlying layer is the interests of actors /parties to be achieved from the conflict setting. The core of the layer is supposed to indicate the needs parties aspire to enjoy. The success of the 'onion model' of analysis depends on two determinant factors. Firstly, it works only for each actors involved in the conflict. Secondly, the tool in most cases is fruitful if it is applied in times of stability. This is because parties are supposed to disclose their needs and interests in times when relationships are "good and trust is high". If the relationship of parties is characterized by instability and mistrust, they might possibly hide their needs to avoid vulnerability (ibid).

As can be seen from the onion model analysis of fig-5 below, Salafists reported to have publically communicated for the respect of religious freedom in the constitution. During their protest between 2011 and throughout 2012, Salafists accused the radical Sufis and the government of violating this freedom as they were barred from exercising their religious freedoms in different parts of South Wollo. According to Key Salafi informants, the unbridled propagation of the doctrine of Salafism in the area is the main interest of the Salafists in South Wollo though it is not accepted by the radical Sufis. The conflict

seems to have been framed in a win-lose fashion in which the Sufis are the winners while Salafists remains the losers. Although there had been possibilities to maximize benefits of the two, the ascendancy of the radical Sufis to *mejlis* leadership was carried out at the expense of the Salafi interest. Amongst other needs, the Salafists aspired to secure their existence in South Wollo. The safety and security of the Salafi identity was the basic need of Salafists that can not be surrendered. Conflict resolution is less likely to be successful if the needs of the conflicting parties are at risk. In the case of the Sufi-Salafi conflict, the Sufi dominance in the religious space following the 2012 *mejlis* election was at the expense of the Salafi survival. This was because many were purged, imprisoned and exiled as they were considered as a threat. On the contrary, the Sufis were promoted as the source of ‘peace and tolerance’.<sup>256</sup>

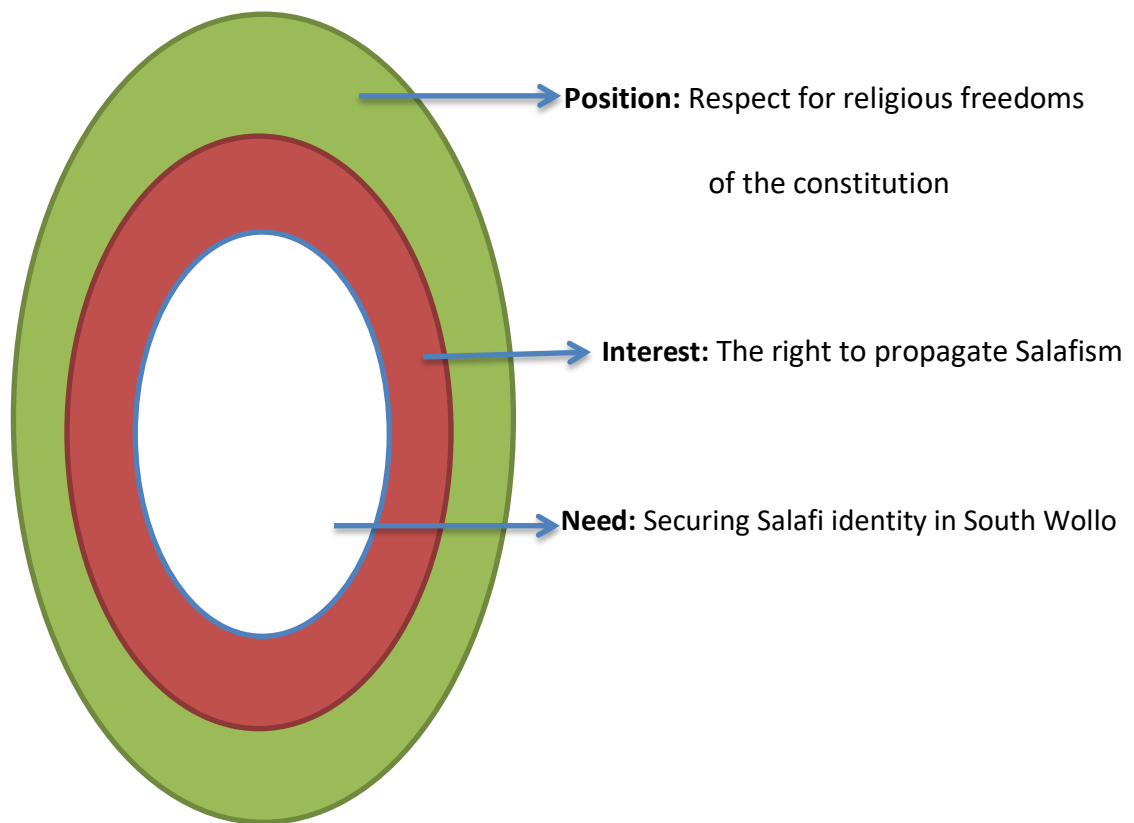
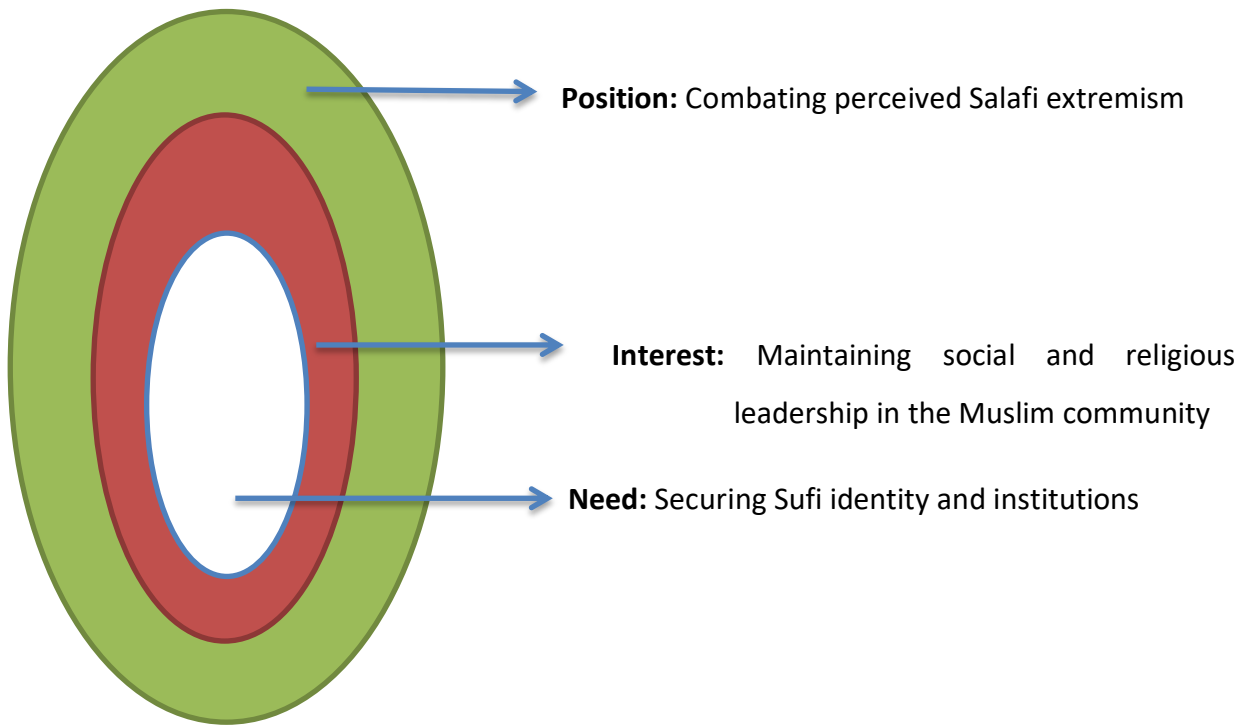


Figure- 5: Salafists’ position, interest and need vis-à-vis Sufis in South Wollo

<sup>256</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and kombolcha on 25 December 2017. Interviews held in Dessie on 10 October 2017 and Kombolcha 3 December 2017.



*Figure- 6: Sufis' position, interest and need vis-à-vis Salafists in South Wollo*

Although the position of combating the perceived Salafi extremism is compatible with the policy of the government, creating a religious space free from their Salafi rivals was the main interest of the Sufi religious elites. This is aiming at preserving their social and religious leadership in the Muslim community of South Wollo. However, this seems overlap with the uncompromising need of the Salafists as it would threaten their survival. At this juncture, accommodating mode of conflict management would be helpful to handle such disparity of interests. This could be addressed through maximizing benefits to all parties of the conflict. The need of the Sufis in South Wollo centered on the survival of their tradition and institution as they are supposed to be threatened by the growing influence of Salafism. Although the constitutional provision guarantees the protection of the identity of both religious thoughts in article 27(1)<sup>257</sup>, the

<sup>257</sup> The EPDRF constitution in article 27(1) states, "This right shall include the freedom to hold or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and the freedom, either individually or in community with others, and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

intervention of the government in religious affairs seem to have weakened the enforcement of the law.<sup>258</sup>

## **Concluding Remarks**

The Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo has been manipulated by different actors as it has political and religious repercussions. Although the principal actors of the conflict are Salafists and Sufis, external non-Islamic actors have fortified behind them as they are supposed to be affected by the conflict. External actors such as Ethiopian government, the Orthodox Church and the US government have a unified objective and interest in the Sufi-Salafi conflict as they are supposed to be affected by the perceived threat of extremism from the Salafi Muslims in South Wollo.

The causes of the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo are classified into structural, proximate and triggering factors. The structural factor of the conflict related with the system of the religion in which the interpretation of Islam is central. The distinct interpretations of Islam forced both Sufis and Salafists to develop their own separate thoughts and texts. The Sufis followed contextual interpretation of Islam while Salafists promote literal interpretation of Islam. A separate texts and curriculums have also been developed by Sufis and Salafists to educate their respective disciples. Although Sufis and Salafists were less interested to advance a political agenda in South Wollo, the alleged intervention of the government in religious affairs seemed to have attracted Sufis as pro-government and despised Salafists as extremists. The proximate cause of the Sufi-Salafi conflict associated with the imposition of Ahbash as the ideology of Islamic institutions. The triggering factors are the 2012 controversial *mejlis* election and the massacre of *Sheikh* Nuru Yimam.

Analyzing the needs, positions and interests of the principal actors in the conflict using *onion model-analysis* might be helpful for the intervention of the Sufi-Salafi conflict in

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<sup>258</sup> Interviews held in Kombolcha on 7 August 2017 and Dessie on 6 December 2017. Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

South Wollo. Accordingly, securing the Salafi identity from any kind of threat is believed to be the need of Salafists. The position of Salafists remains firm for the respect of religious freedom enshrined in the constitution. The Sufis on their part put the protection of Sufi identity and institutions in South Wollo as their primary need. Maintaining their social and religious leadership in the Muslim community of South Wollo rests as the core of their interest. They also communicate to the wider audience that their position to combat the perceived threat of Salafi extremism remains firm.

## CHAPTER-SEVEN

### PREDICAMENTS OF THE SUFI-SALAFI PEACE IN SOUTH WOLLO

#### 7.1 Predicaments of the Sufi-Salafi Conflict Prevention

Key Sufi and Salafi informants agree that religious discords in the history of Islam have been prevented by the principle of tolerance and dialogue.<sup>259</sup> As one of the Salafi scholars in South Wollo succinctly puts, *“the Sufi-Salafi dichotomy existed for thousands of years... Had there not been tolerance and dialogue, either of the two thoughts could not have been in existence currently...”*<sup>260</sup> Beyond this, tolerance and dialogue as tools of preventing conflict is mentioned in different parts of the Quran and Hadith. The Quran says, *“For you is your religion, and for me is my religion...”* (109: 6). The Holy Quran also strengthens this in other place, *“There is no compulsion in religion...”* (Quran 2:256).<sup>261</sup> These clearly indicate that no one is authorized to impose one’s point of view and religion or faith on others. In other words, respecting the views of others seem to be the best way of preventing conflict in the Muslim community. When the Prophet once asked about *Iman* (faith), He replied: *“Iman (faith) is patience and tolerance”*.<sup>262</sup> This conveys a message that those who do not have patience and tolerance in Islam are no longer being faithful. Patience and tolerance are a necessary condition for conflict prevention. The absence of tolerance and patience between rivals makes conflict inevitable. Although Sufis and Salafists in South Wollo agree on these principles, they accuse each other of avoiding responsibility.<sup>263</sup> Regarding the prevention of the conflict prior to the

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<sup>259</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 25 August 2017 and 21 September 2017 and Kombolcha on 7 August and 4 October. Information generated through FGD in Dessie on 18 December 2018 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>260</sup> Interview held in Dessie on 21 September 2017.

<sup>261</sup> See Yusuf Ali’s translation of the Holy Quran (19 46) available at <www.<https://quranyusufali.com/1/>>.

<sup>262</sup> <<www.[https:// archive.islamonline.net](https://archive.islamonline.net).>>

<sup>263</sup> Information generated through FGD in Dessie on 18 December 2018 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017. A Muslim scholar interviewed at Wollo University on 16 October 2017 and interviews held in Dessie on 2 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 August 2017. I have been witnessing participants accusing each other in the FGD sessions.

2012 *mejlis* election, conflict between the two reported to have been periodically erupted mainly on the celebration of the birth day of the Prophet. Beyond this, the conflict was confined in and around the premises of the mosque. Although the task of prevention has not been given more attention during this time, the Sufi-Salafi conflict many times resolved through the principle of tolerance and dialogue.<sup>264</sup> Following the coming of radical Sufis (Ahbash) as *mejlis* leaders since 2012, the chance of preventing this conflict on the principles of tolerance and dialogue was totally shutdown because of two reasons: Firstly, the government intervention hindered the Sufis to prevent the conflict as there was government strategic interest to combat Salafi extremism in the Muslim community of South Wollo. Secondly, the extremist position of the newly arriving radical Sufi group (Ahbash) reported to have been unwilling for tolerance and dialogue as they consider Salafists ‘enemy of the Prophet’.<sup>265</sup> When *mejlis* officials were asked about conflict prevention through tolerance and dialogue, they expressed negatively as follows, “*We do not want to talk with infidels [Salafists]...*”<sup>266</sup> Similarly, young Sufi radicals in their preaching at various mosques of South Wollo had deviantly broken the principles of tolerance and dialogue on which the task of prevention was based. This was because they involved in activities of defaming and demonizing the Salafi scholars and teachings.<sup>267</sup> However, excerpt from key Salafi informants captured the relentless unsuccessful efforts of Salafists to prevent the conflict, “*we frequently expressed our willingness to our Sufi brothers in the mejlis to prevent the conflict through tolerance and dialogue, but they were not willing to respond...*”<sup>268</sup> This seems to indicate that the radical Sufi elements in South Wollo did not have the courage and commitment to prevent the conflict using the principle of tolerance and dialogue as they claim exclusive right to control Islamic institutions.

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<sup>264</sup> Information generated through FGD in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>265</sup> FGD(ibid); Interviews held in Dessie on 2 and 16 October, and Kombolcha on 24 August 2017.

<sup>266</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with the zonal *mejlis* officials on 10 October 2017.

<sup>267</sup> Information generated through FGD in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017. Interviews held in Dessie on 15 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 3 December 2017.

<sup>268</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 9 & 21 September and 24 August and kombolcha on 4 October 2017

In reaction to the perceived threat of Salafi extremism in South Wollo, the zonal government in collaboration with *mejlis* had taken direct / operational and structural preventive measures. The former is a short-term measure often taken on threats which are presumed to be imminent. The latter is a long-term measure that is supposed to address the underlying causes. In doing so, the government reported to have taken the following measures:

### **7.1.1 Direct /operational Prevention Measures**

Although it is not inclusive, the government reported to have given training to *mejlis* and government officials on how to prevent extremism. In the training, Salafists were not participants though they had been one of the principal actors of the conflict.<sup>269</sup> The mission of prevention the government applied in this training seems to have been guided by the principle of realist conflict prevention as it is dependant on the eradication of the perceived threat of Salafi extremism due to the fact that power is applied as a means of achieving security in South Wollo. Between 2013 and 2017, the government organized counter extremism conflict prevention trainings in which stakeholders from *kebele* to zonal administrations reported to have participated. According to government report, fifty individuals from each *kebele* participated in the training. Religious leaders (only *mejlis* officials and Muslim elders from the side of the Sufis), the youth, representatives of women, elders, teachers and students were amongst the participants.<sup>270</sup> Peace at the expense of Salafi religious freedom might radicalize them and potentially creates a human pool for extremism. In the city administration of Dessie, for example, five sub-cities (namely: Arada, Buambua Wuha, Dawdo, Hotie, Menafesha, and Segno Gebeya) reported to have applied a sort of community policing where three important tasks had been implemented to prevent Salafi extremism. Firstly, individuals who were supporters and sympathizers of Salafism

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<sup>269</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with Mr. Eshetu Yesuf, the head of Zonal Administrative and Security Office On 23 October 2017 and Getenet Assefa, an expert of conflict in the Zonal Administrative and Security Office on 24 October 2017.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

made to confess to admit guiltiness and denounce extremism. Although it was unwise to label individuals with strict teaching of Islam as extremists (because all fundamentalists are not extremist), many Salafi Muslims had been victims of this operation as they were forcefully tortured by security agents to admit guiltiness. Secondly, neighborhoods who were considered to be at the risk of violent extremism established community policing centers to carry out intelligence surveillance on suspects. This seems to have been executed at the expense of the social cohesion of the people of South Wollo for the sake of state security. Thirdly, the government used to organize community level meetings to discuss about extremism (IAG & MoFA, 2016). Although the last one was constructive to prevent the conflict in South Wollo, it could have been inclusive with the participation of Salafists. This is because sustainable conflict prevention can only be successful with the participation of all actors of the conflict.

The government has also taken a security measure on the alleged perpetrators. This was the day to day activity of the security apparatus on targeted individuals, groups and institutions who are presumed to be extremists and sponsors of extremism. The purge and arrest of many Salafi figures following the 2012/ 2013 Muslim uprising escalated the tension and disappointed many followers of the Salafists in major towns of Southern Wollo especially in the town of Dessie. Moreover, the government brought some people to justice, drove others underground and still others exiled which eventually deeply enraged part of the Muslim population in urban centers, and widened the rift within the Muslim community. The security measure was not fruitful since it could potentially breed Salafi radicalization and hinder peace as it led to the perpetuation of the vicious cycle of the Sufi-Salafi conflict. It was also guided by the principles of a realist theory of peace which focuses on the forceful containment and eradication of the Salafi threat.<sup>271</sup> This reduced the type of peace in South Wollo to remain fragile as it becomes “victor’s peace”- a type of peace which is achieved on the repression or elimination of targeted

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<sup>271</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with the zonal security officers on 23 and 24 October 2017 and key Salafi informants on 21 September 2017 in Dessie and 4 October 2017 in Kombolcha.

threats. Participants of FGD underscored the need to look for alternative security strategy to contain the perceived threat of Salafism using inclusive peace approach.<sup>272</sup> In other expression, the government is urged to replace its realist orientation of security (i.e security for the state) with the Copenhagen Security. The latter seems to be relevant as it gives prime reference for the security of the society (Waeber, 1998:53). This might in turn secure part of the society who is victimized because of their identity as for example the Salafi identity in the Muslim community of South Wollo.

### **7.1.2 Structural Preventive Measures**

The government strengthened the enforcement of the legal and policy instruments to counter extremism in the country. Although the adoption of a controversial anti-terrorist proclamation No.652/2009<sup>273</sup> took place a head of the wide spread Muslim protest, it granted extraordinary power to the police and security force, deprived citizen's constitutional rights and shifted the burden of proof to the accused (Hussein, 2017 ; Henok, 2016: 87). The broad and vague definition of terrorism helps the executive body to misinterpret any form of opposition as an act of terrorism. Salafists who opposed the intervention of the state in the affairs of the religion in South Wollo in 2012/13 were victimized as they were supposed to contravene the law in the proclamation. The government had also adopted counter extremism policy documents which were believed to have emanated from two main sources. The first policy source is the EPDRF party (the ruling party) documents presented to the party for discussions at various meetings. Then, the finalized document presented to members of the party and their supporters through *Addis Ra'eye*<sup>274</sup> party magazine. Although the separation of party politics and government works in principle are acceptable, for the last twentyseven years both had been carried out without setting line of demarcations.

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<sup>272</sup> Information generated through FGD in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>273</sup> See Ethiopia's anti-terrorism proclamation issued on 28 August 2009.

<sup>274</sup> See for example many of articles on 'religious extremism' published in *Addis Ra'eye Magazine* between 2011 to 2015. Many of these publications directly converted into government policy documents by the Ministry of Federal and Pastoralist Development Affairs.

Therefore, it is plausible to conclude that government policy on the issue of extremism which had been applicable on the table emanated either from the politicians in the party or experts in the government office notably in the Ministry of Federal and Pastoralist Development Affairs (MOFPDA). In this regard, it is worth to mention the latest counter extremism policy document 2017, “*Ya-efadre Higemengist ina Yahaymanot Bzuhanet Ayayaze*” – literally means, “EPDRF Constitution and Managing Religious Diversity”. Part three of this policy document deals with the threat of religious extremism and government strategies to combat extremism (MOFPDA, 2017:101-182). The document has made it explicit the level of threat the so-called extremists poses and identifies South Wollo in general and Dessie in particular as a prominent center of Salafi extremism,

*“the [Salafists] are infiltrating in the people under the coverage of development and pro-government agenda ...in some places they are found in government security, justice and governmental organizations....This incident is more intensified in Gimma Zone of Oromiya State and Dessie and South Wollo in Amhara State...”*  
(Author’s translation, 2018).

The document accused Salafists of aspiring to impose a government of Sharia disregarding religious diversity of Ethiopia. However, it is completely rejected by key Salafi informants<sup>275</sup> as propaganda of the government to blackmail the Salafi movement. The document further criminalizes Salafists for the demolition of religious institutions and graves of great Sufi saints but it fails to identify when and where this incident has happened (Ibid: 121-122). Although key Salafi informants<sup>276</sup> accused the government of violating the constitution and interfering in the affairs of the Muslims, the government using the same tone blamed Salafists as violators of the constitution, triggering extremism and promoting a political agenda. Therefore, the Zonal Administrative and

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<sup>275</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 9 & 21 September 2017 and Kombolcha on 24 August and 4 October 2017

<sup>276</sup> Ibid; Information generated through FGD in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

Security Office in South Wollo as the representative of the government at the local level mainly depended on this policy document for the annual work plan of security issues especially for counter religious extremism.<sup>277</sup> The document also pointed out five strategies of the government to combat religious extremism in Ethiopia. These are:

*1) Strengthening the journey of development and growth in Ethiopia*

This might be from the assumption that “poverty breeds extremism” and creates a safe haven for terrorist recruitment. Although this assumption might be correct in principle, all religious extremism is not the upshot of economic grievance. This is because there is also religious extremism in developed countries where there is sustainable development and economic growth too. The issue here needs a scrutiny if the aspired economic development and growth would be a solution for religious extremism in Ethiopia and of South Wollo (Ibid: 168).

*2) Strengthening the impartiality of the government on the affairs of religion*

This seems to be one of the solutions for the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo. Salafi informants frequently accused the government of interfering in the affairs of religion in the Muslim community<sup>278</sup>. Thus, the practical implementation of state impartiality is compatible with the position of Salafists as they frequently asked the government to leave the issue of religion only to the Muslim themselves based on the provision of the constitution (Ibid:169).

*3) Educating people about the supremacy of the constitution and cultivating rational thinking*

Although educating the supremacy of the constitution is not bad, the implementation of the constitutional provisions should make religious groups equally responsible. Violation of the constitutional rights should have equally made the government body responsible

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<sup>277</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with the zonal security officers on 23 and 24 October 2017.

<sup>278</sup> Information generated through FGD in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

for the crisis in the Muslim community of South Wollo (Ibid:170). Although Salafists were the main actors of the conflict, the government reported to have marginalized Salafists from trainings on the constitution.<sup>279</sup> How could the government be successful in creating critical thinkers at the midst of Salafi marginalization in the Muslim community of South Wollo?

4) *Exposing politicians who are using religion as a coverage*

Although the government blamed some political parties using religion as a tool of political activism, the same accusation was applied by the government on the Salafi group to blackmail their opposition against the violation of religious freedom(Ibid: 172). Key Salafi informants argue that this is a strategy of the government to deter the religious movement of Salafism under the pretext of political activism<sup>280</sup>.

5) *Supporting religious organizations not to be vulnerable to religious extremism*

According to the document religious organizations like *mejlis* has to be supported on three major areas. Firstly, religious organizations has to be assisted economically so as not to be susceptible for religious extremism through economic manipulation. Secondly, the government decided to enhance the internal democracy of religious groups though the interference of the government in the affairs of religion is strictly forbidden in the EPDRF constitution. Lastly, organizing the Muslim youth, women and the intellectuals to combat religious extremism from within is deemed to be one important tool of reducing vulnerability to religious extremism(Ibid:173).The irony here is that how could religious institutions be free if they are economically and technically dependent on the government support. Beyond this, all these measures might help the government to manipulate religious institutions for its political ends and undermine the neutrality of the state.

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<sup>279</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with Mr. Eshetu Yesuf, the head of Zonal Administrative and Security Office On 23 October 2017 and Getenet Assefa, an expert on of conflict in the Zonal Administrative and Security Office on 24 October 2017.

<sup>280</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 9 &21 September 2017 and kombolcha on 24 August and 4 October 201

As part of the structural preventive measure, the government has employed a soft approach which is built into the religious system of Islam through exploiting the Sufi-Salafi contradiction. The traditional rivalry between the Sufis and Salafists now seem to have been reinvigorated through importing an anti-Salafi radical Sufi group, Ahabash from Lebanon. Advancing this contradiction and empowering the Sufis through Ahabash ideology deemed to counter the threat of Salafism in the Muslim community.<sup>281</sup> Ahabash has already established its training base in the town of Kombolcha and dominated the zonal *mejlis* structure in South Wollo. This in turn has activated the dormant religious rivalry between the mainstream Sufis and Salafists into violence through infusing anti-Salafi hatred in the minds of their students and openly criticized the Salafists in many congregational preachings. This anti-Salafi abhorrence from the Sufi leadership could ignite intra-religious tension and undermined peace and tolerance within the Muslim community in South Wollo.<sup>282</sup>

The task of preventing the Sufi-Salafi conflict mainly requires the participation of actors across layers of the community such as the government, *mejlis* and the Sufi and Salafi scholars. Beyond this, administrative and financial commitments were also sought especially from the government and *mejlis*. Administratively, both the government and *mejlis* leaders should have come with a *bona fide* decision for inclusive approach of preventing the conflict.<sup>283</sup> Contrary to this, for example, the government and *mejlis* in South Wollo reported to have organized a series of public consultations through marginalizing the Salafists though they were the principal actors of the conflict.<sup>284</sup> Any genuine sustainable prevention cannot be successful if it excludes either of the main actors. Financially, the government and *mejlis* reported to have been unprepared to fund intra-religious dialogue and peace to address the underlying causes of the Sufi-

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<sup>281</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017. See article of *Al-Ahabash* in *Yemoslemoch Gudaye*(2010).

<sup>282</sup> I have seen the base of Ahabash in Teqwa mosque during my field visit in 2017. Interviews held in Dessie on 18 September 2017 and Kombolcha on 16 October 2017.

<sup>283</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017. Interviews held in Dessie on 16 & 24 October 2017

<sup>284</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with the zonal security officials on 23 & 24 October 2017.

Salafi conflict. Rather the government and *mejlis* financed the anti-Salafi public conferences in the name of combating terrorism at different zonal structures where government cadres, *mejlis* leaders and representatives of religious groups notably from Sufi and the Orthodox Church reported to have participated.<sup>285</sup>

According to informants, the government hardly contributed for the prevention of the Sufi-Salafi conflict as it is supposed to have strategic interest out of this conflict. This is because working with ‘moderate Muslims’ is supposed to assist the government to combat ‘Islamic extremism’.<sup>286</sup> Although an inclusive peace approach of countering terrorism is considered to be fruitful through de-radicalization of the Salafists, the government reported to have used a realist security approach as it is based on containing, arresting and purging Salafists. As part of a strategy to prevent the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo, the government reported to have trained the public on how to distinguish the so-called ‘extremists’ on the basis of certain physical and attitudinal attributes such as growing beard, shortening trouser above one’s ankle, refusing to celebrate *meulid* and condemning pilgrimage to Sufi shrines.<sup>287</sup> These are clear manifestations of the Salafi behavioral and attitudinal orientations. Many Salafi figures with these qualities were securitized by the government in South Wollo and other parts of Ethiopia. According to local Muslim scholars, the government of Ethiopia promoted counter terrorism policy mainly not worried by the impact of extremism but to secure the diplomatic and economic support of the US through demonstrating anti-Salafi campaigns at home.<sup>288</sup>

As part of their problem to prevent the conflict with the Sufis, Salafi scholars regrettably admitted, “Our youngsters were not perfect in handling our senior Sufi Ulema [...] we

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<sup>285</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 2 October and Kombolcha on 4 October 2017.

<sup>286</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 21 September, 16 October and 24 October and Kombolcha on 25 August and 4 October 2017.

<sup>287</sup> Interviews held in Desseie with Security officers on 23 and 24 October 2017 and Kombolcha with x-police officer on 18 September 2017.

<sup>288</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with Wollo University Muslim Scholars on 16 October 2017. The view of these scholars has resemblance with the view of David Shin(2002) who suggested the economic and diplomatic importance of the global counter terrorism movement to Ethiopia

*handed over our tolerant Sufi Ulema to the radical Ahbash group.*<sup>289</sup> This indicates that there had been problem of engagement by young Salafists who over acted on the Sufi Scholars. Sufi scholars confirmed this that young Salafists used to slander them as promoters of *bid'a*.<sup>290</sup> Following the advent of Ahbash in 2011/12 in South Wollo, disappointed Sufis joined the newly arriving radical Sufi group (Ahabash) against the Salafists. Although attempts were made by the Salafists to prevent the conflict in collaboration with the moderate Sufis, it was too late and unsuccessful. This was because of the influence of Ahbash group on moderate Sufis and even reported to have radicalized some of them.<sup>291</sup> This clearly indicates that the Sufi-Salafi relation before the advent of Ahbash was relatively peaceful than the period after the arrival of Ahbash. Initiated by Salafists and some moderate Sufis, for example, *ye-andenet ena ye-sedeqa* program—literally means, “unity and charity program’ was launched in South Wollo aiming at preventing the conflict through restoring unity of the Muslims. The first of this program was successfully implemented in *mesjidal* Furqan in the town of Dessie in 2012 where meals were distributed and Muslims (moderate Sufis and Salafists) pledged to preserve their unity.<sup>292</sup> Although Muslims attempted to implement the same program in Teqiwa Mosque of Kombolcha town, Ahbash followers in collaboration with the government security attacked and disbanded participants. Many were assaulted and some of the participants were imprisoned by the government security. Although the forum of unity and tolerance should have been strengthened and expanded to prevent the Sufi-Salafi conflict, the radical Ahbash group hindered this movement. They were not happy with this forum and scornfully asked “*When do Salafists like Sedeqa?...*”<sup>293</sup> This conveys a message that Salafists are against the ritual of *sedeqa*. However, they

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<sup>289</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 25 August and 10 October, and Kombolcha on 14 September and 7 August 2017.

<sup>290</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 10 October 2017 and kombolcha on 7 August 2017.

<sup>291</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 21 September and 2 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October 2017.

<sup>292</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 25 August, 9 September 2017 and 21 September 2017.

<sup>293</sup> Interviews with key Sufi informant held in Kombolcha on 7 August and X- Muslim police officer on 18 September 2017. The latter (the x-police officer) was accused of collaborating with the Salafists and was forced abandon his job as a result of his participation in the forum of ‘unity and charity program’ led by Salafists.

defended that this was Sufi's misinterpretation as they equate *sedeqa* with *meulid*. Salafists reported to have been against *meulid* as it was contrary to the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, but they claimed to have welcomed *sedeqa* as it is rooted in the Quran and the Hadith.<sup>294</sup> Although the main stream Sufis with the exception of the radicals aspired to prevent the Sufi-Salafi conflict with the principles of 'dialogue and tolerance', they eventually retreated as *mejlis* was not willing to settle the conflict.<sup>295</sup>

Three reasons are mentioned by informants<sup>296</sup> for the failure of *mejlis* to prevent the Sufi-Salafi conflict. Firstly, the impartiality of *mejlis* was not witnessed as it was working hard for the interest and dominance of the radical Sufi group. This was deemed to be realized with the eradication of their Salafi rivals. Secondly, as there was goal interdependence between the radical Sufis and the government, *mejlis* leaders directly or indirectly were politically assertive in contradiction to the mission of the organization. Sometimes they boldly express their commitment for the government policy of counter terrorism. This is captured in one of the speeches of the zonal *mejlis* leader, "*we should serve our country through eradicating 'Salafi radicals'...*"<sup>297</sup> Thirdly, although the absence of early warning system in the zonal *mejlis* variously mentioned as an excuse to analyze the conflict, the issue was not hidden from the government. According to key Salafi informants the government had a plan to push the conflict to the public rather than preventing it. This had made easier for the government to take action against the Salafists. They further argue, "*if the government had genuine concern to prevent the conflict, it could have allowed us [salafists] and Sufis to come to the table and solve our problem by ourselves...*"<sup>298</sup> key Sufi informants with the exception of *mejlis* officials

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<sup>294</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 21 September and 2 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 11 October and 3 December 2017.

<sup>295</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 25 August 2017 and 7 August 2017.

<sup>296</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017. Interviews held in Dessie on 21 September, 2 October and 16 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 18 September and 6 December 2017.

<sup>297</sup> Interview held in Dessie with the chairman of the zonal *mejlis* on 10 October 2017.

<sup>298</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 21 September and 2 October 2017 and Kombolcha on 4 October 2017.

agreed with the above view of Salafists that there had been possibilities to prevent the conflict through intra-religious dialogue<sup>299</sup>. Therefore, this might strengthen the widely held notion that *mejlis* leaders were strategic partners of the government to fight the so-called Islamic extremism in the Muslim community in South Wollo.

## 7.2 Predicaments of the Sufi-Salafi Conflict Management

As it has been discussed in the literature part, the central idea of conflict management focuses on reducing, controlling and mitigating conflict. In other words, it is an act of making conflict less destructive. The effectiveness of conflict management requires the participation of actors of the conflict. This is because we need to scrutinize how actors of the conflict contribute to mitigate, control and /or reduce the impact of the conflict. In this regard, it is worth to mention the role the government, *mejlis* and Sufi and Salafi scholars in managing the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo.

According to the Zonal Administration and Security Office, the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo was managed using the perspective of a realist security approach-- “containing, controlling and eliminating” the Salafi threat. This was executed into two ways. Firstly, disseminating the anti-Salafi public propaganda in South Wollo in which the government associated the movement of Salafism in the area with international terrorist organizations such as al-qaida and al-shababe aiming at deterring the activities of the Salafists through imposing psychological pressure. Secondly, the government reported to have involved in controlling the Salafi movement through purging Salafists in South Wollo.<sup>300</sup> This is witnessed by a police officer who had participated in counter Salafi movement in South Wollo. He said, “*We were ordered to target mosques where suspects were found and seize individuals who shortened their trousers above their ankle and elongated their beard ....*”<sup>301</sup> As a result of the counter Salafi operations, some of them were arrested and many others were exiled to other parts of the country and

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<sup>299</sup> Interviews held on 7 August in kombolcha, 25 August in Dessie and 14 September in Hayiq

<sup>300</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with zonal security officials on 23 and 24 October 2017.

<sup>301</sup> Interview held in Dessie with Zonal police officer on 19 September 2017.

abroad. On the contrary, the government helped the radical Sufi elements (Ahbash) in South Wollo in their ascendancy to the zonal *mejlis* through organizing *mejlis* election in government offices (at the Kebele level).<sup>302</sup> The government seems to have used two distinct styles of conflict management to address the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo. The first style was coercive mode of conflict management in which the government asserted its monopoly of violence against Salafists and hardly cooperated with them. As the state perceived Salafists as an imminent threat to state security, quick actions were taken against them. On the other side, the government reported to have used collaborating mode of conflict management to handle the case of the Sufis in which the government promoted Sufis as a strategic partner in fighting extremism in the Muslim community of South Wollo.<sup>303</sup>

Although the Sufi-Salafi conflict is supposed to be managed by the Zonal Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (*mejlis*), the organization was dominated by a radical Sufi group (Ahbash) who did not want to come to terms with the Salafi group.<sup>304</sup> It should be noted that the principal mission of *mejlis* was to serve all Ethiopian Muslims regardless of their interpretations of Islam. However, it had completely been monopolized by the radical Sufis and the ideology of Ahbash. As one of the Zonal *mejlis* officials explicitly puts, “...[Salafism] is the source of intolerance and conflict in our country...”<sup>305</sup> This seems to have handicapped *mejlis* to manage the Sufi-Salafi conflict genuinely and impartially. As the Sufis at the *mejlis* were focusing on defeating their Salafi adversaries, they had not been willing to accommodate interest of Salafists nor did they cooperate with them to resolve the conflict peacefully. The Sufis believed that controlling power in the *mejlis* is their primary goal than working together with the Salafi Muslims for greater unity and peace in South Wollo. Coercive mode of conflict management that the Sufis followed is

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<sup>302</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with x-police member on 18 September 2017 and key Salafi informants on 21 September in Dessie, 4 October in Kombolcha and 24 August 2017 in Kombolcha but he was originally from Kalala.

<sup>303</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>304</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 16 and 17 October 2017 and key Salafi informants on 21 September in Dessie, 4 October in Kombolcha and 24 August 2017 in Kombolcha but he was originally from Kalala.

<sup>305</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with the secretary of the zonal *mejlis* office on 10 October 2017.

a zero-sum game as it is depended on win-loss approach. In other words, the Sufis became dominant at the expense of Salafi repression which inturn led the two entities to remain in the vicious cycle of conflict.<sup>306</sup> Accommodation and negotiation modes of conflict management variously suggested as tools of promoting peace in the *mejlis*. The former is based on mutual satisfactions and strong commitment for the Sufi-salafi conflict resolution while the latter is based on a win-win approach and avoids exclusive interests. As Sufis at the *mejlis* were accused of marginalizing the Salafists, accommodative mode of conflict management would allow them to entertain the questions of diverse interests through promoting reasonable and good willing. Beyond this, negotiation is suggested to end the question of power sharing in the *mejlis* as it allows concessions without undermining the interest of the Salafists. Thus, applying both tools might be helpful to manage the conflict effectively and contribute for its eventual resolution.<sup>307</sup>

Although Salafists were victims of the government and *mejlis*, they contributed to conflict management by withdrawing themselves from destructive competition with Ahbash. This has happened following the government crackdown against Salafists after the killing of *Sheikh* Nuru in 2013. They were unresponsive to this repression fearing that it could cause more bloodshed in the Muslim community as they were in a position of lower power. This meant they were no more assertive to articulate their interest and mobilize the people in non-violent means as they were doing in 2011/12. In other words, they did have little cooperation with the government and *mejlis*. Avoidance mode of conflict management that the Salafists followed contributed for the commulative efforts of conflict management through reducing tension in the Muslim community of South Wollo.<sup>308</sup> Although sustainable conflict management can also be practiced using dialogue and negotiation of all actors, the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo was dictated by the interest of powerful actors. This is to mean powerful actors

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<sup>306</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

such as the government and *mejlis* (representing Ahabash) exclusively dominating the venue as they were governed by the realist sense of conflict management. Even though Salafists were the main actors of the conflict to bring sustainable intra-religious peace in the Muslim community through dialogue and negotiation, they were marginalized as the potential threat of peace. Although the responsibility of the secular government in the Sufi-Salafi conflict should have been confined on facilitating communication between antagonistic religious groups, it had negatively managed their interaction through demoting and promoting actors of the conflict.<sup>309</sup> Thus, the government seems to have transcended the boundary of state–religion interaction that is outlined in the constitution.

### **7.3 Predicaments of the Sufi-Salafi Conflict Resolution in South Wollo**

Analyzing the causes of any conflict properly is almost securing half of the solution of the problem. Although the solution of the problem pertinent to the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo is not part of this discussion, the conflict has structural, proximate and immediate causes. The structural cause of the conflict is imbedded within the system of religious interpretation of Islam. The proximate causes related with the intervention of the government and the imposition of Ahabash ideology on the Muslim community. The immediate causes were related with the 2012 controversial *mejlis* election<sup>310</sup> and the shooting of *Sheikh* Nuru Yimam. Analyzing the role of actors in the conflict is decisive to bring sustainable conflict resolution. The main actors of the conflict in South Wollo were the Sufi and Salafi religious scholars. The Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo was influenced or backed by external actors like the government, Orthodox Christians, Islamic NGOs and US embassy.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid

<sup>310</sup> The 2011/12 Muslim protest began in the Islamic Missionary school of Awolia. The protest in Awolia was started when Arabic teachers were dismissed by the decision of *mejlis* officials in 2011. The movement in Awolia was supposed to represent the interest of the Salafi oriented Muslims against the radical Sufi dominated Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council or popularly known as *mejlis*.

<sup>311</sup> For further information see actors of the Sufi-Salafi conflict in the preceding chapter.

Under this sub-heading, however, the researcher is going to discuss the predicaments of peace efforts to resolve the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo. According to Muslim scholars, resolving intra-religious conflict in Islam has only been carried out with the guideline of Quran and Hadith.<sup>312</sup> As the Holy Quran explicitly puts, “*Oh You who believe! , obey Allah and his messenger and peoples of authorities amongst you. If you are in dispute, return to Allah (referring Quran) and his messenger (Quran, 4: 59)*”. From this provision one can deduce three important principles of Islamic conflict resolution. Firstly, the Quran orders Muslims to obey Allah, the Prophet and people in power to resolve any conflict as the decisions of these authorities are binding to all Muslims. Secondly, the guideline how to resolve a conflict in the Muslim community has already been laid down on the basis of the provision of the scriptures of Islam. Thirdly, any kind of intervention to resolve a conflict in the Muslim community has to be compatible with the provision of the Quran and Hadith. Similarly, a report from the Hadith of the Prophet narrates that: When the Prophet was asked at one occasion about religion, he was said to have replied, “*adi’nun-nesi’ha*”—literally it means ‘*religion is consultation*’.<sup>313</sup> Since consultation has attributes of negotiation,<sup>314</sup> parties in the conflict can use negotiation as important tool of conflict resolution. Key Sufis and Salafi informants in this regard in South Wollo unanimously agree on the need to respect this narrative in the Quran but they are reported to have disagreed during implementation. Reaching consensus through dialogue and negotiation is one of the pillars of the Sharia where Muslims of any thought are required to give and take ideas so as to resolve their differences (Kamrava, 2005:16). Although acting to resolve the Sufi-Salafi conflict out of the context of the provision of the Quran and Hadith is considered as part of committing

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<sup>312</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>313</sup> Interviews held in Dessie with a Salafi scholar on 2 October 2017 and kombolcha with a Sufi scholar on 7 August 2017.

<sup>314</sup> Rubin and Brown in their influential text defined negotiation as, “...the process whereby two or more parties attempt to settle what it shall give and take, or perform and receive, in a transaction between them “. For further information see authors’ book entitled, *The Social Psychology of Bargaining and Negotiation*(Rubin and Brown, 1975:2).

sin or an act of hypocrisy, none of them have been willing to come to terms due to the influence of Ahabsh in the *mejlis*<sup>315</sup>.

The Sufi-Salafi conflict resolution should have addressed three key issues, but none of them were implemented in South Wollo. Firstly, the underlying causes of the Sufi-Salafi conflict related with the political and interpretation of Islam should have been dealt if not resolved. Although the participation of all actors was required in a conflict resolution, the radical Sufis had not been willing to negotiate with the Salafists since they were working on the defeat of the latter. Secondly, ensuring the continued existence of parties is central in conflict resolution but the existence of the Sufis was established at the expense of the survival of Salafists. Thirdly, the Sufis used coercive means to silence the Salafi movement in South Wollo.<sup>316</sup> Based on the information from FGD, applying the right-based approach conflict resolution in the context of the Sufi-Salafi conflict is suggested as one of the mechanisms to resolve the conflict in the Muslim community of South Wollo as it focuses on the protection of rights. The Salafists are believed to be victims in the Muslim community of South Wollo while Ahabsh and the government are portrayed as perpetrators. The right-based approach could be carried out using independent judiciary or arbitration through third party intervention. Some of the mechanisms which are suggested to rectify violations of such rights are recognizing abuses against Salafists, restoring Salafi Imams, asking apologies for past mistakes committed and restoring the constitutional rights of Salafists to participate in the affairs of *mejlis*.<sup>317</sup> Although restoring justice to the victims (Salafists) is central, the government and Ahabsh muted this approach by activating a political and coercive means of handling the crisis. The current reform on *mejlis* at the national level following the coming of the Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed hardly reached South Wollo and the former Amhara *mejlis* officials have continued to marginalize the Salafists through

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<sup>315</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>316</sup> Information generated from FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and held in Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid

securing considerable support from Amhara Regional State.<sup>318</sup> Although it was possible to ensure sustainable peace through inclusive approach, the Sufi-Salafi peace in South Wollo is “victor’s peace” imposed by the government and Ahabash. It is also a ‘negative peace’ as there is injustice and inequality directed against Salafists. De-radicalization as instrument of sustainable peace through transforming ‘bad’ to ‘good’ individuals (referring Salafists and Ahabash) barely implemented by the government and mejlis. This could have been done through changing the cognitive and behavioural dimensions of actors. Cognitively, peace practitioners should have helped Ahabash and the Salafists to download their anti-peace rhetorics. Behaviourally, the two competing groups should have been disengaged from their violent tendencies.<sup>319</sup>

Intra-religious conflict resolution in the Muslim community in South Wollo reported to have been hindered by the absence of genuine dialogue and negotiation. Participants of the FGD argue that dialogue and negotiation is a precondition for the Sufi-Salafi conflict resolution in South Wollo.<sup>320</sup> However, this was not realized because of two reasons. The first related with the absence of willingness from the Sufi side mainly of the radical Sufi mejlis officials to resolve the conflict in the Muslim community. The second reason related with the alleged sabotage of the government for any initiatives to resolve the Sufi-Salafi conflict.<sup>321</sup> Strengthening this, informants on their side argue, “*Muslims were unable to resolve the conflict within their community because there was no free and impartial forum ...something seems to have been entrenched behind the screen ...Let the Muslims resolve their problem by their own....*”<sup>322</sup>

Towards the end of 2013, a delegation from Amhara Regional Government organized a consultation conference with the Muslim community in the town of Dessie where

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<sup>318</sup> I had been witnessing during my recent visit in South Wollo on 13 October 2019.

<sup>319</sup> Information generated from FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and held in Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and Kombolcha on 25 December 2017. Interview held in Kombolcha with a senior Sufi Clerics on 7 August 2017

Muslim scholars, elders and officials participated from the different parts of South Wollo to discuss about the crisis. The conference was chaired by a certain non-Muslim official from the capital of the region. Looking this inappropriate and counterproductive, a local elder and a prominent Sufi leader, *Sheikh* Mohammed Gayta warned external intervention might exacerbate and complicate the Sufi-Salafi crisis and proposed to leave the matter to the Muslims to solve their problem by themselves through dialogue but no one reported to have given him ear.<sup>323</sup> Initiated by moderate Sufis and Salafists, there had been another attempt of dialogue in the same year between Sufi and Salafists in the zonal capital Dessie where religious scholars from different parts of South Wollo gathered at Wollo Cultural Center but the agenda of the podium was sabotaged by the *mejlis* officials and ended up without success.<sup>324</sup> Although the Sufi-Salafi conflict could only be resolved through the dialogue of the *Ulema* from both sides, neither the government body nor any other third party has helped the two parties to settle their dispute through dialogue and negotiation since 2013.<sup>325</sup>

A sort of top-bottom approach is suggested to be productive in resolving the conflict due to the fact that the conflict between Sufis and Salafists is primarily a conflict between religious scholars of the two thoughts. Scholars of both sides have followers who are little acquainted with the doctrinal dispute yet they reacted violently basing the dictation of their respective leaders. Peace building at the level of the *ulema* should be one of the strategies to resolve the Sufi-Salafi conflict in Southern Wollo. The absence of “genuine” intra-religious council in the form of the council of *ulema* (sing. *alim*) composed of Sufis and Salafists undermined the practicality of conflict resolution in South Wollo.<sup>326</sup> More importantly, the zonal security experts on their part underlined

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<sup>323</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 7 September 2017 and 23 October.

<sup>324</sup> Interviews held in Dessie on 7 and 21 September 2017. The federal *mejlis* vice-president and the leader of Ahabash, Sheik Umer Yimam was blamed to be the main obstacle to the success of intra-religious dialogue in South Wollo.

<sup>325</sup> Information generated through FGD held in Dessie on 18 December 2017 and held in Kombolcha on 25 December 2017.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid

the need to implement a package of peace building in the post conflict South Wollo. According to informants in the FGD no systematic *bona fide* attempts were made to prevent the reoccurrence of the Sufi-Salafi conflict rather the government silenced the Salafi movement using coercive means. For example, the council of religions in South Wollo was represented by the secretary of *mejlis* who promoted the ideology of Ahbash. Although the council was supposed to broker peace, it reported to have passed a one-sided report through condemning Salafi extremism. At the worst, the government reported to have manipulated the council as a vehicle of counter extremism in South Wollo. No third party in South Wollo was able to build cooperation and trust between the Sufis and Salafits so far.<sup>327</sup>

The zonal security experts also continue to suggest that the Sufi-Salafi peace building might take programmatic and systemic approaches. The former might be implemented through developing the institutional capability of the zonal *mejlis* to accommodate diversity of religious teachings, providing conflict resolution training for stakeholders and helping the zonal *mejlis* develop effective early warning system. The latter might be an integrated strategic approach starting at the macro level down to the grassroots (top-bottom approach); government is suggested to enact an integrated strategic framework for religious tolerance through popular participation. This to say the need to enact an inclusive legal and policy framework of religious tolerance to regulate the behavior of actors in the conflict as politicians have institutional guidelines to regulate their relations in the political space. Although the zonal experts suggested these approaches to the government and *mejlis*, none of them had been implemented due to lack of political commitments and budget constraints.<sup>328</sup>

## **Concluding Remarks**

The tasks of preventing, managing and resolving the Sufi-Salafi Conflict in South Wollo was principally constrained by the intervention of the government under the guise of

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid

<sup>328</sup> Interview held in Dessie with Zonal Security officers on 23 and 24 October 2017.

combating extremism in the Muslim community and the extremist position of Ahabash to respect the principles of tolerance and dialogue enshrined in the scriptures of Islam. Although an inclusive peace approach through applying the doctrines of de-radicalization was variously suggested to ensure sustainable peace, the government and Ahabash used the realist security approach at the expense of Salafi repression. At the worst, the anti-Salafi campaign in Ethiopia and of South Wollo was claimed to be the business of the government as it pulled economic and diplomatic support from the global counter-terrorism network. Although it was inconsistent and unsuccessful, Salafists and moderate Sufis attempted to prevent the Sufi-Salafi conflict through launching 'charity and unity' forums in different towns of South Wollo.

The Sufi-Salafi conflict management in South Wollo was mainly applied by the government where it was ruled by the principles of the realist security approach. This was executed at the expense of Salafi marginalization through dispatching anti-Salafi propaganda in the wider communities of the zone and securitizing the Salafi movement in South Wollo. The government eventually negatively managed the Sufi-Salafi difference for its counter-terrorism project than managing the Sufi-Salafi conflict to peace. In this regard, the government used two extreme modes of conflict management in which a coercive approach had been applied towards the Salafists while a collaborating mode of conflict management was used to handle the case of the Sufis. The Sufi-Salafi conflict could have been properly managed using accommodation and negotiation modes of conflict management. The former allows parties to entertain questions of diverse interest as it promotes reasonable and good-willing while the latter would be used to resolve the question of power sharing in the *mejlis* as it paves the way for concession.

The Sufi-Salafi conflict resolution has to be primarily guided by the scriptures of Islam as it is culture-specific. This is because the scriptures put dialogue and consultation as important tools of resolution. However, both Sufis and Salafists could not realize this due to the alleged sabotage of the government and Ahabash. The latter believed to

have been beneficiaries of the conflict as it helped them to manage their counter extremism project and control *mejlis* leadership. Muslim scholars suggest that the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo could genuinely be resolved through intra-religious dialogue and consultation. This implies that any imposed or prescribed peace between Sufis and Salafists from outside could not ensure sustainable peace in the Muslim community of South Wollo. The intra-religious conflict resolution in South Wollo in general is miscarried because of three reasons. Firstly, no systematic attempt so far has been made to identify the underlying causes of the Sufi-Salafi conflict without which genuine resolution is impossible. Secondly, Ahabash as the representative the *mejlis* threatened the existence of Salafists though the continued existence of parties is central in conflict resolution. Lastly, the Sufis with the support of the government used coercive means to resolve the conflict.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 8.1 Summary

South Wollo can be described as one of the 'melting pots' of ethnic and religious identities in northern Ethiopia. This eventually culminated with the creation of a new identity of *Wolloye* through historical process. Although the word Wollo is originally from Oromiffa, the identity of Wolloye is the upshot of longtime interactions among various ethno-linguistic and religious groups who had been living in the area for centuries. The socio-cultural hybridity as one of the identity of Wollo has rooted in Islam, the traditional Oromo religion and Christianity too. Islam has emerged as the majority faith in today's South Wollo through bridging this ethno-linguistic fissure. To put it differently, the majority of the people are more united by the religion of Islam despite their ethno-linguistic disparity. Sufism played important role as a force of attraction and amalgamation for the identity of *Wolloye* in South Wollo. This was due to the tolerant and accommodative response of Sufism. The Sufi pilgrimage centers across South Wollo are a living witness for cross-cultural practices where diverse ethno-linguistic and religious groups gathered for religious worshipping.

Islamization in south Wollo did not occur in a vacuum as the process of Christianization had already been started in the other corner of the region. The eastern flank of the region was the center of Islamization while the western part of the region remained the epicenter of Christianization. The process of Islamization in South Wollo passed through three layers of development; introduction, consolidation and institutionalization of Islam. The Oromo population movement temporarily hindered the pace of Islamization but ended up with the conversion of the Oromos into the fold of Islam. Moreover, the process of Islamization had converted significant number of the highland Amharas too.

Revivalism is not the monopoly of Salafism as it has been expressed in the history of South Wollo. The nineteenth century revivalism in Wollo was aimed at defending the

orthodoxy of Islam through the agency of Sufi scholars. The preexisting traditional beliefs and rituals were anti-theological to the teaching of classical Sufism. The Sufi clerics defended orthodoxy from traditional beliefs and rituals using rigorous teaching *tewhid* and coercive Jihadist campaigns. Revivalism through the agency of Salafism a century after is more organized and systematic as it draws resources from the global Salafi networks. Unlike Sufis of the previous century and contemporary global radical Salafists, the movement of Salafism in South Wollo promoted a puritanist agenda in which the missionary work is central to transform the local community and hardly acquired Jihad as a means of Salafi mobilization.

The main religious dispute between Sufis and Salafists in South Wollo is centered on classical and local ritual practices. The Sufis aspired to maintain classical rituals such as *meulid*, pilgrimage to Sufi shrines, celebrating saints' birthday and preserving *tariqa*. The Salafists condemn all these as mere innovations with no support from the teaching of Quran and Hadith. Beyond this, the Salafists also denounce local Sufi practices such as post burial procession (*sadaqa*), veneration of *chat*, appeasing evil spirit and excessive obsession of *menzuma* as part of innovations on the religion of Islam. Although Salafists at individual level are different in their approaches of treating Sufis, they all are working towards the dissemination of *tewhid* in South Wollo. Thus, Sufis and Salafis are identified on the bases of their behavioral orientations. Those who are fond of practicing and promoting the Sufi rituals are categorized as Sufis while individuals who are defying Sufi practices as mere innovation are labeled to be Salafists.

The early reaction of Sufis to their Salafi rival was characterized by anti-Salafi propaganda campaign (through releasing anti-Salafi publications), social isolation and deterrence using the support of government officials. Salafists were considered as troublemakers; they were expelled from different mosques of South Wollo using government police force and even were physically assaulted. This forced Salafists to come up with new strategies through approaching the youth, influential figures and focusing on philanthropic services. They gradually were able to control key Islamic

positions through their systematic and organized posture and surpass all challenges from the Sufis and became prominent through controlling the religious space especially in the zonal capital. The Salafi movement in South Wollo soon became strong in the capital and the western part of the zone while Sufism has stronghold in the town of Kombolcha and many rural parts of South Wollo. The expansion of the Salafi teaching in South Wollo greatly impacted the Sufi shrines in different parts of South Wollo. The number of pilgrims to these Sufi sites dramatically declined as the teaching of *tewhid* expanded in the area. This is because the teaching of *tewhid* forbids rituals around the graves of Sufi saints.

The second Sufi reaction against Salafists occurred following the coming of Ahbash in South Wollo. The 2012 government sponsored *mejlis* election ended up with the ascendancy of the radical Sufi (Ahbash) group to the zonal *mejlis*. This has paved the way to Ahbash to join solidarity with the disgruntled local Sufis. The Ahbash dominance in the zonal *mejlis* had a fatal consequence on the Salafi movement in South Wollo as they were outlawed and targeted by the government (some of them were purged and the remaining many were exiled). More than any other place; the anti-Salafi movement in South Wollo has been strong in and around the town of kombolcha due to the presence of strong Sufi institutions. This has also been augmented by the ascendancy of radical Sufi (Ahbash) in the zonal *mejlis* following the 2012 *mejlis* election.

The Salafists on their part devised strategies to resist the influence of the radical Sufis at the zonal *mejlis*. At least four strategies have been used to this effect. Firstly, they opened unity and charity forums at different towns of South Wollo to alienate Ahbash in collaboration with moderate Sufis. Secondly, they exposed the heresy and conspiracy of Ahbash through disseminating the anti- Ahbash documentary film. Thirdly, they initiated a *jum'a*-based weekly protest at different mosques of South Wollo. Fourthly, they mobilized the businesspeople to boycott the religious funding of Zakat to the newly appointed mosque and *mejlis* leaders. None of these strategies, however, could be

effective to prevent the advance of Ahbash since the government forcefully intervened against the Salafi movement.

The radicalization of Ahbash undermined the social harmony and cooperation in the Muslim community in South Wollo since 2012. The movement of Ahbash breached the social cohesion within the Muslim community through promoting hatred between believers in the Muslim community and risked marriages of young Muslim couples. Beyond this, it undercut the unity and cooperation of the Muslims to work and worship together as one Muslim community. Moreover, the *tekferization* (lit. an act of ascribing apostasy on religious opponents) of Ahbash which was unprecedented in the history of Sufi-Salafi interaction in South Wollo in the last two decades confused the local Sufis, especially of senior *ulema*.

The Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo has social and economic bases. Socially, the Salafi movement is largely an urban phenomenon basing major towns of the zone such as Dessie, Harbu, Degan, Kelala and Aqesta while Sufism is largely backed by the rural community, especially among the rural peoples of Qallu woreda where many of the Sufi shrines are located. The urban youth, merchants and educated elites are the main supporters of Salafism in South Wollo while urban elders and the rural community are largely the supporters of Sufism. Despite all these social divisions, both Sufis and Salafists continued to pray in the same mosque. Economically, Salafists are depended on the funding of local businesspeople and diaspora Muslims while Sufis are dependent on meager economic resources of the rural peoples.

Competition among religious groups in the Muslim *umma* began right in the early history of Islam. Debates on the metaphysical speculations, especially on the attributes of God and the methodological approaches to understand Islam led to the evolution of two streams of religious thoughts. These are Sufi and Salafi ways of understanding Islam. The two perspectives have been inter-changeably used in the Islamic world on the bases of the preference of the ruling circles. For example, Sufism was the hallmark of the Ottoman Islam while Salafism is the bedrock of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The

competition between great scholars of the two thoughts has been characterized by respecting and disrespecting rival texts, containing and counter-containing rival ideas and influence, debates on sensitive issues of Islam, winning supporters and lust for power in the Muslim community.

Methodological difference on how to teach Islam is the basic source of Sufi-Salafi competition in South Wollo. This disparity has consequently colored the attitudes of actors as they negatively perceived each other's positions---they perceive each other playing negative roles on the success of their rivals. The competition in South Wollo is characterized by misperception, obstruction, deception and manipulation. The misperception within the Sufi-Salafi conflict is the upshot of negative attitude and substitutability since actors of competition perceive each other's rivals as agents of obstruction. This can be expressed by Salafists' predisposition to reject any actions of the Sufis as negative and not to be satisfied with their activities. The misperception of the Sufis againsts Salafists expressed in the form of self-fulfilling prophecy and unwitting commitment. Both Sufis and Salafists have also used techniques of deception to misrepresent the image of their rivals to win the process of competition. They also used manipulative power to win followers and the support of government officials in their competition for power and resource. All these negative attributes of competition are indicators for the presence of negative goal interdependence between Sufis and Salafists in South Wollo.

The Sufis and Salafists have their own goals to achieve in the Muslim community of South Wollo. Although the Sufis are influenced and dictated by the government, they have social, political and cultural goals to achieve----maintaining their position as leader of Muslim community and Islamic institutions, cooperating with the government in support of the policy of counter extremism and preserving syncretic cultural practices are the focus of the Sufis. The Salafists on the other hand have moderate political, social and cultural goals in South Wollo. The political goal of Salafists is far from radicalization as they are interested neither to form Islamic political party nor Islamic government in

the region. They rather want to enjoy the political rights of citizen guaranteed in the constitution of EPDRF. Socially, Salafists equally aspire like the Sufis to enjoy the position of communal leadership in the Muslim community of South Wollo since they are competing to control mosque and *mejlis* leadership. They also seek to redefine the social fabric in a way to be compatible with the scripture. Culturally, Salafists are also intolerant for some of the syncretic cultural practices which are incompatible with the scripture too.

There are three driving factors for the Sufi-Salafi competition in South Wollo. The first being winning converts as it is the base of influence/power for Sufi and Salafi factions. The second factor related with the motive to control organizational doctrine and resource as both Sufis and Salafists aspire to influence and control mosques and *mejlis* using their respective ideologies in South Wollo. The last factor for the Sufi-Salafi competition related to the need to achieve social and economic advantages. In this regard, both Sufis and Salafists tried to win friends outside the domain of their religion especially of government officials. Moreover, they had a motive of getting recognition from the wider Muslim community of South Wollo. Although it is subtle, the need to control the economic resources of Islamic institutions is also another motivating factor for the competition between the two factional groups.

Sufis and Salafists in South Wollo employed their respective strategies of competition. The Sufis employed strategies such as winning the support of the government and Orthodox Christians as they are supposed to assist them in controlling Islamic institutions. The other more sensitive strategy of the Sufis which passionately predispose the government and the public in favour of them in South Wollo is their ability to play 'the terrorist card'---labeling Salafists as promoters of terrorism. The Salafists in their competition with the Sufis employed aggressive indoctrination of *tewhid* and philanthropic services as tools of reaching the wider Muslim community especially urban poor Muslims of South Wollo . Beyond this, both Sufis and Salafists

employed in-group mobilization and out-group discrimination as a means of preserving in-group unity and resisting out-group influence.

Although the Sufi and Salafi differences in South Wollo basically emanates from the interpretation of the scripture, it is behaviorally manifested at different social and religious occasions. They employed tolerance as a tool of maintaining coexistence in times of differences for the last two decades though there had been few sporadic conflicts between the two groups. The degree of conflict ranges from emotional to violent level. The Sufi-Salafi tolerance can be divided into period of active and passive tolerance. The period of active tolerance witnessed in South Wollo before the Salafi protest of 2011/12 during which Sufis and Salafists were relatively enjoying equal positions in communal and religious leadership of the Muslim community. While the Sufi-Salafi tolerance in post Salafi protest was characterized by passive tolerance where communal and religious leadership in South Wollo was exclusively dominated by the radical Sufi group(Ahbash). The outward behavioral manifestations of Sufis and Salafists for political and cultural values also are the basis of categorizing groups as 'peaceful' and 'intolerant' in south Wollo---For example, Sufis are regarded as 'peaceful' while Salafists are portrayed as agents of 'extremism'.

The Sufi-Salafi tolerance in South Wollo is hindered by attitudinal and behavioral orientations. Some of these problems are related with misquoting/misinterpreting rival texts on the religious status of Muslims as true believer or not, equating the doctrinal belief of Sufis with anti-Islamic figures in pre-Islamic Arabia, mislabeling the adherence of secular law as part of idol worshipping and disagreement on the permission of lawful and unlawful practices in Islam(e.g. dressing code). Polarizing some religious issues in the Muslim community of South Wollo is also the source of Sufi-Salafi intolerance. Following the ascendancy of the radical Sufi group in the zonal *mejlis*, the preexisting Sufi-Salafi tolerance was violated through polarizing the rituals of *meulid* and threatening the culture of coexistence using misquotations from Salafi texts. Intolerance between Sufis and Salafists is also expressed in the form of marginalization, xenophobia,

and using pejorative and derogatory terms. The Sufis reported to have used marginalization as a tool of dominating Islamic institutions and resisting the influence of the Salafists, and the vice-versa has also been implemented by the young Salafi groups in the name of defending *tewhid*. The Sufis expressed xenophobic attitude towards the Salafi movement as they often associated it with the activities of foreign nationals. The Salafists also reacted to such allegation in a slightly different way through labeling Sufism as alien to the orthodoxy of Islam. Both Sufis and Salafists use pejorative and derogatory terms to identify each other--Sufis are identified with *Mushrik* and *Ahbash* while Salafists are identified as *Wahhabis*, *akerari* and *tsefegna*. Both of them dislike to be identified with these derogatory and pejorative terminologies.

Following the coming of EPDRF in 1991, the religious space of Islam which had been dominated by the Sufis in South Wollo began to be suffocated with the newly emerging Islamic actors of which the Salafists were influential and powerful. The relentless missionary activities of the Salafi Muslims were able to transform the religious and behavioral orientations of the Muslims in South Wollo. The allegedly religious laxity of Wollo Muslims appeared to be replaced with strong religious commitments which were observed on their keen to perform regular prayers and the willingness to use Islamic dressing styles. Beyond this, Muslims were able to boost their religious Knowledge as a result of the proliferation of media outlets following the new constitutional order.

The Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo started right with the beginning of the Salafi movement in 1991 which was gradually calmed down as the Salafists shifted their strategy of confrontation from the Salafi *Ulema* to working on the youth and impoverished part of the Muslim society of South Wollo. This greatly strengthened the power base of the Salafists which later helped them to control key positions of the zonal Islamic institutions. The Sufi-Salafi conflict attracted the attention of external actors in South Wollo. Intense competition among Islamic actors on the interpretation and legitimacy of leadership highly fragmented the power of the Muslims. The non-Islamic

actors were more unified to manipulate the conflict between the two Islamic factions as they were framed by the threat of global terrorism.

The Sufis as the principal actor of the intra-religious conflict in South Wollo had historical prominence in the dissemination of 'popular Islam' throughout Wollo and the rest of the country in the South. The Sufis accommodative approach for centuries is supposed to be the bed rock of religious tolerance and harmony in South Wollo though it displeased Salafists as the agony of Islamic monotheism. This remains the crux of the Sufi-Salafi conflict in contemporary South Wollo. Aggrieved by the monopoly of key Islamic institutions and the proliferation of the Salafi ideology in South Wollo, the Sufis used to collaborate with non-Islamic actors such as the government and the local Orthodox Christians to restore their historic claim of religious leadership as the latter two were powerful in the local politics. The Salafists as the rival of the former began to erode the power base of the Sufis through the teaching of *tewhid* and easily penetrated the urban youth and influential figures through sensitizing the rationalist approach to understand the message of Islam. The negative perception of the Salafists towards the Sufis as an obstacle to the teaching of *tewhid and* agents of the government hinders cooperation. This notion is backed by the perceived symbiotic relation between the Sufis and the government in the counter extremist movement in South Wollo. This is evidenced by the Salafists as a testimony for the betrayal of the Muslim community in South Wollo. The Salafists further strengthened this view that cooperation between the Sufis and the government in the name of countering Islamic extremism in the Muslim community victimized them.

The government as external actor had interest in the Sufi-Salafi conflict as the fracture of the Muslim community is supposed to be helpful to counter extremist movement. The rift between 'moderate Sufis' and 'radical Salafists' in the Muslim community is more beneficial for those interested external actors who are working on counter extremism in South Wollo. In the eyes of the government, counter extremism in the Muslim community can only be successful if there are collaborators from within. On the

contrary, peace and unity within the Muslim community is supposed to be unfavorable for the counter extremism as it hinders collaboration from within. The Sufis in the Muslims community are supposed to be moderate and they are beneficial to support the government policy of counter extremism within the Muslim society of South Wollo. The Salafists are considered as radicals since they are supposed to promote extremism in the Muslim community. The government targeted the Salafists using the surveillance of the Sufis by which the latter were marginalized and purged.

The Orthodox Christians as secondary actor in the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo worried by the perceived threat of Salafi extremism. The practical decline of the long established accommodative social values which were recognized as the identity of *Wolloyee* and the influence of the local and international media on the perceived threat of Islamic extremism seem to have shaped the Christians to hold anti-Salafi posture. Moreover, in the eyes of the Orthodox Christians, the Muslim-Christian conflict in South Wollo is believed to be triggered by the Salafi Muslims. This seems to have forced them to establish cordial relation with the Sufi Muslims and had shown solidarity with them when they were threatened by the Salafists.

The US and Islamic NGOs are tertiary actors who have developed interest in the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo. The US government very much worried by Islamic revivalism in the Horn of Africa notably of the Salafi movement and reported to have worked with the Sufis to deter the advance of Salafism in the *mejlis*. The US government implemented a 'soft approach' of countering Salafism in Ethiopia and of South Wollo through supporting moderate Sufi Muslims. The so-called countering Salafism through 'cultural programing' had a mission of funding and restoring the old Sufi cultural centers like the shrine of Jemma Nigus so as to help them to ward off the threat of Salafism. Although there is no evidence showing cooperation between the local and foreign Islamic NGOs, the roles of Islamic NGOs especially of the foreign ones are variously mentioned as the sponsors of Salafism through constructing mosques and *medressa* and distributing Salafi literatures in South Wollo.

The causes of the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo can be divided into structural, proximate and immediate. The structural cause of the conflict basically vested with the interpretation of Islam; Sufism advocates the interpretation of Islam using human intuition while Salafism promotes literal interpretation of Islam. They developed their own curriculum which existed for centuries. The application of these curricula have been influenced or manipulated by the political elites in layers of times. The counter terrorism policy of the government in South Wollo has widened this structural rift in which the Salafists are identified as threat of the government and the Sufis as pro-government. The proximate cause of the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo is attached with the imposition of Ahbash as the ideology of the Muslim community. Ahbash naturally happened to be fierce enemy of Salafists which later antagonized and marginalized the latter through controlling Islamic institutions in South Wollo. This aggressive measure against Salafists frustrated the latter to react violently. The immediate causes of the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo were the controversial nationwide *mejlis* election and the killing of the *Sheikh* Nuru Yimam in the town of Dessie. These sparked the second Sufi-Salafi conflict in which the Salafists were forced to relinquish all their positions in Islamic institutions of South Wollo to their radical Sufi rivals.

Analyzing the positions, needs and interest of actors in the conflict is helpful for any successful intervention. In this regard, securing the Salafi identity from any kind of threat in South Wollo is supposed to be the need of Salafists. The Salafists as the core of their interest aspire to propagate the doctrine of Salafism freely and make their ideology dominant. The position of Salafists remains firm for the respect of religious freedom enshrined in the constitution. The Sufis on their part put the protection of Sufi identity and institutions in South Wollo as their primary need. Maintaining their social and religious leadership in the Muslim community of South Wollo rests as the core of their interest. They also communicate to the wider audience that their position to combat the perceived threat of Salafi extremism remains firm.

Intra-religious conflict prevention in the history of Islam had been administered through the principles of tolerance and dialogue. Tolerance and dialogue are a precondition for conflict prevention in Islam. The scriptures of Islam at different verses underscored the importance of tolerance, patience and dialogue for the prevention of conflict in the Muslim community. The Sufi-Salafi conflict prevention in South Wollo is hindered because of two factors; the intervention of the government in the affairs of the Muslims and the extremist position of Ahbash in the *mejlis* are claimed to be obstacles of Sufi-Salafi conflict prevention in South Wollo. The task of prevention requires active participation of actors and resource allocation yet local reports indicated that all government sponsored peace conferences were at the expense of Salafi marginalization and both the government and *mejlis* hardly funded intra-religious peace settlement in the Muslim community. Although an inclusive conflict prevention approach through de-radicalization of the Salafists is helpful to bring sustainable peace in the Muslim community of South Wollo, the government seems to have implemented a realist peace approach which could not break the vicious cycle conflict in the Muslim community. Although a handful of conflict prevention initiatives have been launched by the Salafists and moderate Sufis in the name of 'unity and charity program' in South Wollo, it was interrupted by the government and *mejlis* possibly fearing the unity of the Muslim community. This is because the unity of the Muslims is supposed to hinder counter extremism as it quits collaborators from within. *Mejlis* on its part failed to prevent the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo because of three factors. Firstly, *mejlis* is exclusively dominated by the radical Ahbash. Secondly, there is positive goal interdependence between Ahbash and the government to counter Salafi extremism in South Wollo. Lastly, the absence of effective early warning system hindered the effort of proactive measure to prevent the Sufi-Salafi conflict.

Conflict management as an act of mitigating the destructiveness of conflict requires the active participation of actors to reduce the impact of the conflict. The roles of actors differ as per their position in the community. The government implemented a realist conflict management approach which was executed through releasing anti-Salafi

propagation and securitization. The government reported to have used two distinct styles of conflict management; collaborating mode of conflict management to handle the case of the Sufis as they are supposed to be partners of the government to counter extremism and coercive mode of conflict management to handle the case of salafists as they are accused of extremism. Although sustainable conflict management is supposed to be realized with the impartiality of *mejlis*, Ahbash's monopoly of *mejlis* using the support of the government hindered the accessibility of the latter to Muslims of different interpretations. It is better to argue that the government was managing differences negatively than managing conflict to peace.

Muslim scholars argue that the Sufi-Salafi conflict resolution in the Muslim community has to be carried out in accordance with the guideline of the Quran and Sunnah. It should be noted that any intervention to resolve this conflict has to respect the provisions of the scriptures. Tolerance and negotiations are important tools of the Sufi-Salafi conflict resolution. Although these tools should have been implemented to resolve the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo, the alleged sabotage of the radical Sufis and the government hindered its implementations. At the worst, the government reported to have manipulated the radical Sufis neither to prevent nor to resolve the conflict. Many respondents from both sides suggest that the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo could genuinely be resolved through intra-religious dialogue and consultation. This is to mean that any imposed or prescribed peace from outside cannot ensure sustainable peace between Sufis and Salafists in the area as the case believed to be culture specific. Key informants suggest that an intra-religious dialogue and consultation in a top-bottom model should be implemented to get the conflict resolved; consensus among Sufi and Salafi Ulema should be followed by discussion at the grassroots. Zonal conflict experts on their part underscored the need to implement programmatic and systemic peace building which could be given in the form of capacity building and producing policy guideline for religious tolerance.

## 8.2 Findings

Based on the discussions in the previous chapters, some of the negative aspects of the Sufi-Salafi interactions in South Wollo have been expressed in terms of competition, intolerance and violence. Both Sufis and Salafists have been competing for communal leadership and institutional control which were the bases of doctrinal domination and influence in the religious space of Islam. They have employed their own distinct strategies to win the faithful and /or the government. The Sufi-Salafi intolerance in South Wollo has been manifested in the form of marginalization, xenophobic attitude, and usage of pejorative and derogatory terms which in turn undermined peace in the Muslim community of South Wollo. The ascendancy of Ahbash to *mejlis* leadership and the subsequent securitization of the Salafi movement hindered the efforts of conflict resolution in South Wollo. Based on the analysis made from informants, focus group discussion, personal observation and documentary analysis, the study has come up with the following findings:

***1. The presence of intense competition which is expressed in the form of obstruction, misperception, deception and manipulation between Sufis and Salafists hindered peace among the Muslim community of South Wollo.***

Although Sufis and Salafists claim to work for the religion of Islam, they have incompatible social, political and cultural goals to achieve in South Wollo. This intra-religious competition is expressed in the form of misperception, obstruction, deception and manipulation. The misperceptions are reflected in the form of negative attitude and negative substitutability. The former is expressed by the predisposition of Salafists to reject any actions of Sufis as negative while the latter is expressed in terms of not to be satisfied with the activities of Sufis. Parties employed techniques of deception to misrepresent the image of their rivals to win intra-religious competition. They also used manipulative strategies to win supporters and government officials on their side. All these negative attributes of competition were indicators for the presence of negative goal interdependence between Sufis and Salafists in South Wollo. There are three

driving factors for the Sufi-Salafi competition in South Wollo. The first is winning converts as it is the base of influence/power for Sufi and Salafi factions. The second factor related with the motive to control organizational doctrine and resource as both Sufis and Salafists aspire to impose their own ideology (Sufism/Salafism) on Islamic institutions in South Wollo. The last factor for the Sufi-Salafi competition related with the need to achieve social and economic advantages. In this regard, both Sufis and Salafists tried to win friends outside the domain of their religion especially of government officials and the motive is to get recognition from the wider Muslim community of South Wollo. Moreover, the economic incentive around Islamic Institutions was another motivating factor for the Sufi-Salafi competition. The misperception of the Sufis towards Salafists is informed by self-fulfilling prophecy that the Salafi reform would terminate their social and religious leadership. This seems to have forced Sufis to express unwitting commitments (holding rigid and irrational positions) to the efforts of peace in South Wollo. The violent reaction of Ahbash towards Salafists is also partly explained by the theory of *frustration to aggression* as they were informed by their historical experience and goal seeking objectives. As the level of Sufi frustration was so deepened, they forged alliance with the most powerful actor (i.e government) to deter the movement of Salafism rather than looking for alternative intra-religious peaceful resolution mechanism.

***2. The the presence of passive tolerance which is expressed in the form of marginalization, xenophobic attitude and emotional attack using pejorative and derogatory terms hindered peaceful coexistence between Sufis and Salafists in South Wollo.***

The source of intolerance between the Sufis and Salafists mainly emanates from the interpretation of the scripture and behaviorally manifested at different social and religious occasions. The period of active tolerance reported to have been witnessed between Sufis and Salafists from 1998 to the 2011/12 Salafi protest in South Wollo as Sufis and Salafists were relatively enjoying equal positions in communal and religious

leadership of the Muslim community. While the Sufi-Salafi tolerance from the new political reform in 1991 to 1996/7 and the post Salafi protest in 2011/12 was characterized by passive tolerance since communal and religious leadership in South Wollo had exclusively been dominated by the Sufis. The outward behavioral reflections of the Sufis and Salafists for political and cultural values are the basis of categorizing groups as 'peaceful' and 'intolerant' in south Wollo. For example, Sufis are regarded as 'peaceful' while Salafists are portrayed as agents of 'extremism'. The Sufi-Salafi tolerance is hindered by attitudinal and behavioral orientations as the two groups race to misquote /misinterpret rival texts on issues such as the status of Muslims as apostate or not, equating the doctrinal belief of Sufis with anti-Islamic figures in pre-Islamic Arabia, the alleged accusation of Salafists on mislabeling the adherence of secular law as part of idol worshipping and disagreement on the permission of lawful and unlawful practices in Islam (e.g. dressing code). Intolerance between Sufis and Salafists is also expressed in the form of marginalization, xenophobia attitude and pejorative and derogatory terms. The Sufis reported to have used marginalization as a tool of dominating Islamic institutions and resisting the influence of the Salafists, and the vice-versa has also been implemented by the young Salafi groups in the name of defending *tewhid*. The Sufis expressed xenophobic attitude towards the Salafi movement as they often attached it as 'exotic' ideology. The Salafists also reacted to such allegation in a slightly different way through labeling Sufism alien to Islamic orthodoxy. Both Sufis and Salafists use pejorative and derogatory terms to identify each other. Sufis are identified with *mushrik* and *Ahbash* while Salafists are identified as *Wahhabis*, *akerari* and *tsenfegna*. However, both of them dislike to be identified with these derogatory and pejorative terminologies.

**3. *The intervention of the government as external actor in supporting Ahbash leadership complicated the Sufi-Salafi relations through transforming the dormant conflict into active violence in South Wollo.***

The government as one of the external actors has developed an interest in the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo since countering Islamic extremism in the Muslim community was perceived to be successful through exploiting internal contradiction within the Muslim community. In doing so, the government exploited the traditional Sufi versus Salafi dichotomy for its own political objective in which the Sufis were approached as moderate Muslims to participate in counter Salafi extremism in South Wollo. Supporting the mainstream Sufis in South Wollo was not found to be sufficient to combat Islamic extremism. Thus, *mejlis* in collaboration with the government was forced to import a radical Sufi group, Ahbash from Lebanon to lead the mainstream Sufi camp. No sooner had Ahbash controlled *mejlis* in Ethiopia and of South Wollo than promoted hatred against Salafists. This was made possible through organizing training to the *Ulema*, mosque Imams, university students and the faithful. Beyond this, the government supported Ahbash to control Islamic institutions in South Wollo through conducting a fake election at government offices. This helped Ahbash leaders to control Islamic institutions at the expense of Salafi marginalization. The conflict between Sufis and Salafists for the last two decades had been dormant as it was confined in the premises of the mosque and had not been a national agenda. The conflict in post Ahbash period was activated in a way to be more violent through marginalizing and eventually securitizing the Salafi movement. In addition to these, the conflict between Sufis and Salafists became a national agenda through attracting more external actors.

**4. *The Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo is caused by structural, proximate and immediate factors.***

The Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo is caused by the structural, proximate and immediate factors. The structural aspect of the conflict rooted with the system of religious interpretations in Islam. Sufis and Salafists followed distinct forms of religious interpretations which sustained the identities of the two groups for thousands of years. The Sufis promote the contextual interpretation of the scriptures of Islam while Salafists followed the literal interpretation of Islam. As these distinct interpretations are the

sources of their identities, they are immutable. Thus, the issues of identities should be handled through intra-religious tolerance and accommodation. The counter terrorism policy of the government in South Wollo has widened this structural rift in which the Salafists are identified as threat of the government and the Sufis as pro-government. The proximate factor of the conflict is associated with the arrival of Ahabash from Lebanon and the imposition of its ideology on the Muslim community of South Wollo. Ahabash with the support of the government activated the dormant conflict which existed between the mainstream Sufis and Salafists. Ahabash unprecedentedly radicalized the Sufis to the extent of wrecking the social and religious coexistence of the Muslim community in South Wollo. The immediate causes of the Sufi-Salafi conflict are two. Firstly, the controversial *mejlis* election in South Wollo disenfranchised the Salafists from the electoral process which consequently triggered the Salafi protest in 2012. Secondly, the killing of *Sheikh* Nuru Yimam in 2013 activated the Sufi-Salafi conflict where government security targeted Salafists as they were allegedly accused of orchestrating the crime. The purge of the Salafists by the government security had been carried out through the support of the radical Sufis at the *mejlis*.

***5. The absence of impartial intra-religious dialogue and negotiation undermined peace in the Muslim community of South Wollo.***

Impartial intra-religious dialogue in the Muslim community free from the influence of external actor mainly from the government and Ahabash is reported to have been the solution for the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo. As the conflict between the two is mainly religious elites driven, the solution has to begin from Sufi and Salafi religious leaders. Thus, leaders from both sides have come to the table for dialogue if they want to resolve the conflict genuinely. A top-down model of religious conflict resolution approach should have been fruitful to handle the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo in which consensus between religious scholars would bring lasting peace to the grassroots. The Sufi-Salafi religious conflict is suggested to be carried out mainly on the basis of the scriptures of Islam with active participation of the principal actors. Nonetheless, intra-

religious dialogue in South Wollo was hindered by the alleged sabotage of the government and Ahbash as they were not willing to work with Salafists. Therefore, the interference of the government and Ahbash was believed to be the main obstacles to the Sufi-Salafi peace in South Wollo. Although the role of the government should have been confined only to facilitate communication between the Sufis and Salafists, it transcends the boundary through promoting Sufis and despising Salafists.

***6. The realist security approach of the government is no more compatible to promote durable peace in the Muslim community of South Wollo.***

The realist security approach focused on “controlling, containing and eradicating threats” needs scrutiny as it is incompatible to a pluralist society where identity politics is playing a central role. Following the 2012 Muslim uprising in South Wollo, the government securitized the Salafi movement and identified Salafists as a threat though the identity of Salafism is constitutionally protected. The indiscriminate attack on the Salafi identity was executed into two ways. Firstly, the government isolated Salafists from the society using massive propaganda in which the latter were portrayed as ‘terrorists’ who allegedly accused of communicating with international terrorist organization like al-Qayida and al-Shababe. Secondly, the government directly involved in arresting, torturing and forcing others to leave South Wollo to other parts of the country and abroad. Although it was possible to ensure sustainable peace through inclusive approach, the Sufi-Salafi peace in South Wollo is ‘victor’s peace’ imposed by the government and Ahbash. It is also a ‘negative peace’ as there is injustice and inequality directed against Salafists. The government realist security orientation needs scrutiny as it victimized part of the Muslim community because of their identity as for example the Salafi identity in the Muslim community of South Wollo. Thus, the realist security orientation of the state poses a ‘security dilemma’ to the Salafi identity as it is a source of insecurity for the Muslim community of South Wollo.

### **8.3 Recommendations**

**1. *Sufis and Salafists should avoid intense competition and promote cooperation to ensure sustainable peace in the Muslim community of South Wollo.***

Intense competition between Sufis and Salafists promotes intolerance and conflict in the Muslim community of South Wollo. As both actors have incompatible goals and subjected to external manipulations, they did have little chance to work together. There is linear relationship between intense competition and escalation of tension in the Muslim community of South Wollo. Promoting cooperation through intra-religious conflict management would open up the chance to work together and maximize benefits to all actors. The more Sufis and Salafists have positive goal interdependence or cooperation, the lesser chance they would involve in conflict. This can be realized through encouraging actors to develop a joint project to work together and refrain from differences that could hinder intra-religious peace.

**2. *The Government and Ahbash should refrain from interfering in the affairs of the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo.***

The constitutional provision clearly demarcates the boundary between religion and the government. The government as a political entity is not allowed to interfere in religious matter and religion also should not interfere in state affairs (Art.11:3). Although the constitutional provision confirms non-interference, the ruling EPDRF party manifesto clearly puts the need to use religion as a tool of propaganda machine as follows, "...we should mold their [religious organizations] views, curtail their propaganda against Revolutionary Democracy, and even use them to seve our end... find out and exploit to our advantage their internal contradiction..."(EPDRF manifesto, 1993). This has made the interference of the government inevitably and complicates the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo. The government with the objective of combating Islamic extremism in the Muslim community interfered through supporting the moderate Muslims (Sufis) at the expense of Salafi marginalization. The imposition of Ahbash as the ideology of *mejlis* in

the Muslim community of South Wollo unprecedentedly widened the rift between the mainstream Sufis and Salafists. Although Ahabsh uses Sufism as a mask, it is a new religious formulation which violates the conventional interpretation of Islam. The arrival of Ahabsh in South Wollo radicalized many young Sufis in a way to be destructive on the social and religious life of the Muslim community. Beyond this, the imposition of Ahabsh complicates the Sufi-Salafi conflict resolution as Ahabsh promotes extreme abhorrence on the Salafi movement. Thus, the interference of the government and the imposition of Ahabsh in the Muslim community of South Wollo should be interrupted as it has negative repercussion on the Sufi-Salafi interaction. The government should respect the constitutional provisions of religious freedom and avoid interference in the affairs of religion. Let the mainstream Sufis and Salafists solve their own problem through intra-religious framework for communal peace.

***3. The government should implement alternative security approach to protect society and the state***

Although identity politics since 1991 takes a centripetal position in Ethiopian politics, the government pursued incompatible realist security orientation to handle the issue of religious conflict. This does not mean the realist security approach is necessary for all security issues of Ethiopia. This might be helpful for external threats which could endanger the security of state existence. The intra-religious conflict which is basically rooted in the interpretation of Islam for thousands of years has not been a threat to state security in Ethiopia. The government should use an alternative security policy compatible to the constitutional provision of religious freedom to handle the issue of the Muslim community of South Wollo through implementing a Copenhagen security approach as it might secure part of the society who is victimized because of their identity (Waeber, 1998:53). Therefore, the government should use a hybrid of Copenhagen and realist security approaches. The former can be used to protect threats to identity groups while the latter is used to protect the state from external threats.

***4. A peacebuilding project has to be implemented to transform the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo.***

Given the Impartiality of the government in the affairs of religion, there are certain areas of cooperation to promote peace in the Muslim community of South Wollo. The non-governmental organizations which are operating on peace have to implement a peace building project. There is anarchism in the mejlis and it appeared to be ineffective to handle diversity of Islamic thought. The peace building project has to be implemented into two ways. Firstly, a programmatic peace building should be implemented aiming at developing the institutional capacity of Islamic institutions so that actors of the conflict would have the knowledge and skill on how to accommodate diversity of religious thoughts, promote tolerance, versed with conflict resolution mechanisms and develop effective early warning system. This could be achieved through organizing a package of trainings for actors of the conflict on issues like cooperation, tolerance, conflict prevention, conflict management and conflict resolution. Secondly, a systemic peace building has to be implemented in which all Islamic groups should come to the table and come up with their own rules of conduct that would regulate their interactions in Islamic Institutions in South Wollo.

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## List of Informants \*

No	List of Informants	Date of Interview	Orientations	Sex	Age	Place of Interview	Remark
1	Anonymous No. 1	7 August 2017	Sufi scholar	M	82	Kombolcha	Key Sufi informant
2	Anonymous No. 2	25 August 2017	Sufi scholar	M	74	Dessie	Key Sufi informant
3	Sheik Hussien Ali	24 August	Salafi scholar	M	69	Kombolcha	Key Salafi informant originally from Kellala
4	Anonymous No. 4	9 September	Salafi scholar	M	48	Dessie	Key Salafi informant and graduate of <i>Ahlul-Sunna Waljamma</i>
5	Anonymous No. 5	14 September	Sufi Scholar	M	76	Hayiq	Key Sufi informant
6	Anonymous No. 6	21 September	Salafi Scholar	M	53	Dessie	Key Salafi informant
7	Anonymous No. 7	2 October	Salafi Scholar	M	46	Dessie	Key Salafi informant
8	Anonymous No. 8	4 October	Salafi Scholar	M	47	Kombolcha	Key Salafi informant; one of the disciples of Sheikh Ahmed Mohammed
9	Sheik Umer Mohammed	10 October	Sufi Scholar	M	75	Dessie	Mejlis Chairman and Key Sufi informant
10	Anonymous No. 9	15 October	Salafi Scholar	M	65	Dessie	Merchant
11	Sheik Kedir Hussien	10 October	Sufi Scholar	M	54	Dessie	Mejlis Secretary and Key Sufi informants
12	Ato Getenet Assefa	24 October		M	48	Dessie	Expert in Zonal Administrative and Security Office
13	Ato Eshetu Yesuf	23 October		M	53	Dessie	Head of administrative and security office
14	Anonymous	18		M	38	Kombolcha	X- police

	No. 10	September					member
15	Anonymous No. 11	19 September		M	44	Dessie	Police commander at Zonal Police office
16	Ato Mohammed Seid	8 October	Sufi	M	81	Kombolcha	farmer
17	Anonymous No. 12	14 October	Sufi	M		Kelala	farmer
18	Anonymous No. 13	16 October	neutral	M	34	Dessie	Lecturer at Wollo University
19	Anonymous No. 14	17 October	neutral	M	48	Dessie	Assistant Professor at Wollo University
20	W/o Ansha yimam	2 August	Salafi		54	Hayiq	Farmer
21	Deacon Zelalem Abate	29 October	Orthodox	M	37	Dessie	Government employee
22	Anonymous No. 15	29 October	Orthodox	M	43	Dessie	Government employee
23	Anonymous No. 16	29 October	Orthodox	F	36	Kombolcha	Government employee
24	Tsehay Alemu	29 October	Orthodox	F	54	Hayq	farmer
25	W/O Fatima Ali	14 September	Sufi	F	46	Dessie	farmer
26	W/O Tiru yimam	11 October	Sufi	F	52	Kombolcha	farmer
27	Anonymous No. 17	3 Agust 2017	Salafi	M	49	Dessie	merchant
28	Haji Muhidin	15 December 2017	Sufi	M	83	Kombolch	Guardian of the shrine of Geta
29	Anonymous No. 18	3 December	Salafi	M	29	Kombolcha	University student
30	Anonymous No. 19	6 December	Sufi	M	38	Kombolcha	Government worker
31	Hussien Ali	13 October	Sufi	M	75	Hayiq	merchant
32	Sheikh Toha Ali	16 October	Sufi	M	74	Mekaneselam	merchant
33	Anonymous No. 20	21 December	Sufi	M	41	Dessie	Eye-witness on the death of Sheikh Nuru

							Yimam
34	Anonymous No. 21	7 October 2017	Salafi	F	33	Kombolcha	Merchant
35	Anonymous No. 22	11 December	Salafi	F	32	Hayiq	House wife
36	Anonymous No. 23	>>	Salafi	M	30	Kombolcha	Student
37	Anonymous No. 24	>>	Salafi	M	37	Borena	Student of Medressa
38	Anonymous No. 25	12 December	Salafi	M	41	Dessie	Student of Mederessa
39	Anonymous No. 26	15 December	Salafi	M	40	Kombolcha	Government employee
40	Anonymous No. 27	15 December	Sufi	M	72	Dessie	Urban dweller

\* Many of the informants listed in the table strongly informed the researcher to keep their names anonymous while the remaining others would not mind if their names are verified.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix-I : Questions for Interview and Focus Group Discussions**

The researcher sets similar questions for interviews and focus group discussions with the objective of triangulating information and there by enhance its validity. This was helpful to cross-check the answers and the veracity of data gathered. Several sensitive questions were suppressed based on the answers of informants. The following are the main questions of the research;

1. How do you describe the Sufi-Salafi interaction in South Wollo since 1991?
2. Who were the most prominent preachers of Salafism in South Wollo?
3. How do you describe the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo since 1991?
4. How do you describe the Sufi-Salafi competition in South Wollo?
5. What are the causes of the Sufi-Salafi competition in South Wollo?
6. How do you describe the Sufi-Salafi coexistence in South Wollo?
7. What are the sources of Sufi-Salafi intolerance in South Wollo?
8. Who are the principal actors and parties involved in the conflict?
9. How do you describe the views of actors to wards each other?
10. What is the view of external local actors (orthodox and government) to wards the Sufi-Salafi conflict?
11. What are the needs, interests and positions of principal actors in the conflict?
12. How do you describe the predicaments of the Sufi-Salafi conflict in South Wollo?
  - a) Conflict Prevention
  - b) Conflict Management
  - c) Conflict resolutuion
13. How do you describe was the role of actors (mejlis, Sufis, Salafists and government) in conflict prevention?
14. How do you describe the role of actors (mejlis, Sufis, Salafists and government) in conflict managment?
15. How do you describe the role of actors (mejlis, Sufis , Salafists and government) in conflict ?



Appendix-III : Photograph of *Sheikh Nuru*

