

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE
(GRADUATE PROGRAMME)

**THE IMAGES OF WOMEN IN THE PROVERBS AND SAYINGS
OF THE OROMO: THE CASE OF WEST ARSI ZONE**

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June, 2008

**The Images of Women in the Proverbs and Sayings of the
Oromo: the Case of West Arsi Zone**

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**A thesis Presented to the Department of Foreign Languages
and Literature (Graduate Programme)**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Literature**

June, 2008

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DECLARATION

I, the under signed, declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university, and that all sources of material used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

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This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as a university advisor.

Dr. Abiye Daniel.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is my pleasure to express my heartfelt thanks to a number of people and institutions for their help and support during the research and writing of the thesis. First of all, I would like to owe countless thanks to the effort of my advisor, Dr. Abiye Daniel. The thesis could not have the present shape with out his careful guidance. The invaluable help of Ato Asafa Tafara and my uncle Ato Adane Guddina in providing me with the important reference materials and ideas about the nature of Oromo oral literature deserves my sincere gratitude. Thanks are due as well to all my friends who helped me in sharing their knowledge and reference materials, through out my library work. I also convey my heartfelt thanks to the faculty of Education at Jimma University for its kindness in sponsoring my study at Addis Ababa University. The same thanks go to the School of Graduate Studies at Addis Ababa University for its financial grant. My sincere gratitude also goes to the administrators of Kofale and Arsi Negelle Woredas of West Arsi zone; the school administrators of Kofale Secondary and Preparatory School and Kilture'e Preparatory School in Arsi Negelle; Ato Hinsene Dekebo and W/ro Fatuma Hirkiso, because of whom the elders of Arsi Negelle were accessed; and my previous university friends, namely, Gemechu Nabe, Geriya Tullu and Abdurahman Burka, who offered me a great help during my first visit to the area to make a rapport with the officials and the elders and at the time of my actual data collection as well. My current friends Gemechu Hinsene, Gemeda Hinsene and Nura Irrenso deserve my deepest gratitude for their unreserved cooperation during the field work. I also thank Mestawut Gulumma, Ashenafi Belay, Hika Fekede, Abiot Negera and many others, for their genuine cooperation at the time of typing and edition of my work. My heartfelt gratitude will not end without mentioning my family and relatives for their continuous encouragement and assistance during my study.

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OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

- **Proverbs and sayings:** In this study, the terms ‘Proverbs’ and ‘sayings’ were used to represent the general term “*mammaaksa*”. Since both terms are referred to by this single terminology and as far as both proverbs and sayings play equal role in this specific topic, the terms were sometimes used alternatively in order to reduce repetitive and lengthy phrases by dropping either of the two words.
- The terms ‘*Dubartii*’, ‘*Beera*’ ‘*Nadheen*’ were used alternatively by the respondents to mean ‘**woman/women**’.
- The word ‘*Intala*’ was also used by the Arsi to mean ‘**a woman**’ or ‘**a girl**’
- **Context:** Is the situation, point of discussion or event in which a proverb naturally occurs.
- **Occasion:** Is a circumstance, occurrence or state of affairs that bring two or more people together and provides reason for discussions.
- **Aaddee:** Is an Oromo equivalent of ‘**Mrs.**’
- **Obbo:** Is an Oromo equivalent of ‘**Mr.**’
- **[Oromo]:** Is use instead of the derogatory term ‘**galla**’.

ABBREVIATIONS

OCTB: Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau

JOS: Journal of Oromo Studies

NFS: Number of Female Students

NMS: Number of Male Students

NT: Number of Teachers

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PRONUNCIATION OF ‘AFAAN OROMOO’ VOWELS AND CONSONANTS

Vowels

- a..... as in about
- aa..... as in bar
- e..... as in bed
- ee..... as in communication
- i..... as in sit
- ii..... as in seal
- u..... as in put
- uu..... as in pool
- o..... as in dot (Br. E.)
- oo..... as in coarse

NB. All single vowel letters represent short vowel sounds while the doubled ones represent long vowel sounds of their type as in (aa) above.

Consonants

- g..... as in get
- j..... as in July
- k..... as in keep
- Ch..... as in child
- Sh..... as in short
- c..... does not have an English equivalent.
- q..... does not have an English equivalent.
- Dh..... does not have an English equivalent.
- Ph..... does not have an English equivalent.
- Ny..... does not have an English equivalent.

NB. The rest of the letters are pronounced in the same way they are pronounced in English.

Doubling all consonants results in stressed syllables except for (Ch, Dh, Ph and Ny) that do not show physical change whether stressed or not.

- (.) Serves as a full stop.
- **'fii' / 'f'** in between words and sentences serve as conjunction 'and' in English.
- (') when used as an apostrophe, separates two different types of vowels and three identical vowel letters not to come together which are not allowed in Oromo pronunciation. Eg. **"gaa'ela"** (separates two different vowels); **"re'ee"** (separates \three identical vowels).

ABSTRACT

The major goal of this study is to examine the portrayal of women in the proverbs and sayings of the Arsi Oromo and to assess the awareness of the people about the effects of these proverbs and sayings on women. To achieve this goal, an attempt was made to collect proverbs and sayings that refer to women and attitudinal information from two woredas of West Arsi zone- Arsi Negelle and Kofale. The data was collected using three types of instruments (focus-group discussion), interview and questionnaire. The collected data was transcribed, tallied and tabulated (for questionnaires), translated from the original language ('Afaan Oromoo) to the target language (English) and finally, it was analyzed and interpreted qualitatively. The study shows that women are portrayed both positively and negatively in the proverbs and sayings of the Arsi. The image of women as mothers is a positive one, despite the fact that even the proverbs sayings that are used to praise women also reflect a socio-cultural attitude of the people and the sex-role stereotypes that are hidden in these proverbs and sayings. Even though the majority of the respondents have indicated that among the Arsi, proverbs are used to add flavor to their speech; to settle social problems; to correct misbehavior; to criticize, praise and encourage good behavior; etc., they directly or indirectly show the inferiority of women and the biased social attitudes towards them. In these proverbs and sayings, women are depicted as weak and dependent, illogical, irrational, irresponsible, ignorant, jealous, unfaithful, unreliable and unpredictable, and as inferior members of their community. Positively, women are portrayed as good house makers and obedient servants for their family. And it was found out that, the women have internalized the negative attitude the society shows towards them and they act according to the social code of conduct honestly. The elders attributed the cause of the existing negative attitude towards women to the cultural adoption of the Oromo people after the fall of Gadaa system due to the conquest of Minelik II to the region. Though they are not aware of the socializing effect of the proverbs and sayings that they use for their aforementioned functions, the respondents indicated that the proverbs and sayings they use towards women have both positive and negative effects on them. It is also found out that the transmission of these proverbs and sayings from one generation to the other generation facilitates the continuation of the existing images of women to the future, thereby causing women's negative self image that results in low women's participation in different social affairs. Finally, it was indicated by the respondents that this problem will be alleviated by: teaching the society about gender equality; increasing women's participation; hindering the use of proverbs and sayings that undermine women; and by educating women so as to enable them defend the violation of their rights.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Aili Nunola, in Fekade Azeze's compiled notes on folklore, mentioned the reality of women's place in the world. That is, the women's image as 'Other' ('body and soul' as she puts it) and obedient possessions of men, is not restricted to African countries, rather it is a worldwide exercise. Regarding this, Nunola puts forward her amazement of why "...our Western so called democratic societies are still unequal and exploitative." (Fekade, A. Reader for EtLi. 621, 2003; 566) Likewise, as it is said above, this suppression and denigration of women by their own society is evident in many African societies as well. The Oromo are the largest ethnic group who had their own traditional religion known as '*Waaqeffannaa*' and whose language 'Afaan Oromoo' is the second most widely spoken in the whole of Africa next only to Hausa. (Melba, 1988; Kassam and Megersa, 1994 quoted by Kuwe Kumsa in Asafa, J. (Ed). (1997)) Different scholars have indicated that these people, in the previous decades, have got a parallel women organization with '*Gadaa*' ('a uniquely democratic socio-cultural structure'-as Kuwe puts it) - 'the *Siinqee* Institution', where different women had ruled their country as queens and had fought at different war-fronts. She says that this institution served women as a weapon to fight violation of their personal right and, social and religious ethics. (Kuwe, K. in Asafa, J. 1997; Beletech, D. 2003)

In spite of this fact, as a result of slavery and Abyssinians' (The Amhara and Tigreans) forced religious and cultural assimilation, the Oromo women lost both their institution and identity in the newly constructed patriarchal society of the Christian Abyssinians. (Ibid) Thenceforth, the Oromo women, including many women of the nations and nationalities of the country, were/are forgotten in all aspects of social life. For instance, Kuwe, in Asafa Jalata's 'Oromo Nationalism' disclosed the ignorance and denial women faced in an armed struggle and many of the literary works, despite their innumerable contribution in their society. Beletech Deressa similarly mentioned some model Oromo queens and rulers in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, who were not given credit unlike their male counterparts. And, Jaylan Hussein in 'African Study Monographs 26(1)' and Abreham Alemu, in a 'Journal of African Studies', tried to show how

women are made invisible, dependent, 'others', and how they suffer from social discrimination and denigration in oral narratives of the Oromo.

Oral literature is a highly wide-scoped concept of any society's oral tradition. Bascom, W. (1968) stated that verbal arts serve to keep cultural continuity from one generation to another generation. Proverbs are one of the various genres of folklore. According to Finnegan, R. (1970), proverbs are very brief sayings with extremely compact messages shared by a large number of people and they 'tersely' communicate social truths. It is also agreed upon by many scholars that proverbs, in previous times, and even today, especially, in the nonliterate (traditional) society, play a great role in the people's culture of educating one another; appreciating, commenting on and criticizing behaviors, religions, norms, values, leaderships and in bringing up their offspring according to their norm. In other words, a proverb is a mirror in which its society observes its whole being. D'angelo, J.F. (<http://links.jstor.org>), indicated that, "almost every nation has its share of proverbs and sayings." He asserted that, "Because proverbs are so familiar, they often win uncritical acceptance from the audience..." Thus, like any other African society, the Oromo have their own oral tradition, of which proverbs are the popular ones that elders most often use as a spice of their speech in every contexts of life. Previously, the oral tradition of the Oromo people was not found in a written form. These days, however, few of them are collected and found in a written form only in very limited sites and they belong to only a limited area of the people in the region.

Since proverbs are linked with every aspect of people's life, it is difficult to study all types of proverbs in the society at a time. As a result, for the time being, there are few/no works that analyze (examine) the shortcomings or the effects of proverbs. Buchanan, D. (1965: xvii), stated that, "No nation of civilization is perfect." He mentioned as an example that, "Japanese psychology and culture have their own shortcomings as well as many excellent characteristics." Similarly, though proverbs have unlimited importance in the Oromo, it is difficult to say they have no pitfalls. The Oromo have a special place for their mothers (wives) and they have a lot of proverbs with which they express their respect to their mothers (wives) as in proverbs: "*Haadha dhabuu mannaa, haadha dhabduu wayya.*" which means, ("Having a destitute mother is better for a person than not having a mother at all."); "*Haatiif bishaan hamaa hin qaban.*" which means, ("A mother and water have no evil.") Where a mother is symbolized by water, without

which any life cannot exist on earth; “*Cidha beerti feete aanan qodaa hin hanqatu*” This is to say, (“When a woman has decided to go to a wedding: her milk does not fall short of her milk holder.”) which literally means if a woman is determined to go to a wedding, she will do her best to collect as much milk as needed to the wedding feast. The proverb is actually used to indicate the strength of women’s determination to achieve their objectives. Source of the proverbs: Jaylan Hussein -

(http://www.africa.kyotou.ac.jp/kiroku/asm_normal/abstracts/pdf)

On the contrary, as it is obviously found in oral tradition of many societies, there are many proverbs and sayings that undermine Oromo women in general. For example, there is an American proverb: “A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree, the more you beat them, the better they be.” (Wolfgang, M. (2003: 3)), which has got an equivalent proverb in the Oromo: “*Dubartii fi harreen ulee jaallatti.*” (“A woman and a donkey like a stick.”)/“*Dhalaafi ijoolleef uleetu qoricha.*” (“It is a stick that is good (medicine) for women and children.”) This has a great moral deterioration on women as they are associated (compared) with animals and plants. The other proverb “*Dubartiin qoonqoo tolchiti malee dubbii hintolchitu.*” which means, (“Women make good dish, but not good speech.”) This exactly shows the sex-role stereotype in the society that women have to work in the kitchen. As a matter of fact, the researcher herself in her age of stay in the society has been facing the same difficulty.

It is therefore, with this gendered input that the researcher is initiated to investigate the images of women in proverbs and sayings of the Oromo, with a specific focus on the Arsi Oromo oral tradition, paying a special attention to the effects these images have on women and how the society reacts to the images of women in their proverbs and sayings.

1.2 Statement of the problem

As it is stated above in the background of the study, oral literature has a wider scope of which proverbs and sayings are part of this wider concept with which people exchange their intention, feelings, comments, criticisms, appraisals, etc., using few words. Regarding this point,

Buchanan, D. (1965: xv) wrote: “The wisdom of nations lies in their proverbs, which are brief and pithy.” This means, proverbs clearly show the identity of its people. Accordingly, proverbs and sayings equally reflect the strong and weak sides of any society. Thus, similar to proverbs and sayings of any other society, in Oromo proverbs and sayings, despite the variety of functions and uncritical acceptance they have in the society, there exist proverbs and sayings that reflect sexism, and this highly undermine women in this community.

Therefore, this study is conducted to investigate the following leading questions:

1. How are women portrayed in the proverbs and sayings of the Arsi Oromo?
2. How are these images of women in the proverbs and sayings of these people related to the day-to-day life experiences of women?
3. How do these people react to the images of women in their proverbs and sayings?
4. How does this portrayal of women in the Arsi Oromo proverbs and sayings reflect the socio-cultural attitude of the community?
5. Are there any gendered sex-roles embedded in the proverbs and sayings of the Arsi Oromo?
6. Does the transmission and transformation of these proverbs and sayings influence the continuation of such images of women to the coming generation?
7. What are the possible solutions to the problem mentioned?

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research is, to assess the images women were/are given in the proverbs and sayings of the people under study and to identify to what extent the society is aware of the effect these proverbs and sayings have on women. It is also intended to assess how much the transmission and transformation of the proverbs and sayings of this community from generation to generation influences the continuation of the effects into the future and to make known if there

are any embedded gendered sex-roles in the proverbs and sayings that are used by the society. Besides, the study is intended to make a base for further investigation of this issue.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the images of women as it is portrayed in the proverbs and sayings of the Oromo, particularly the Arsi.

Under this general objective, the research will specifically try to:

- ❖ examine the portrayal of women in the proverbs and sayings of the West Arsi Oromo.
- ❖ examine the awareness of the people about the effect of these proverbs and sayings on women.
- ❖ assess whether the transmission and transformation of these proverbs and sayings facilitate the continuation of the existing images of women to the coming generation.
- ❖ assess any gendered sex-role construction and the socio-cultural attitude of the community that are embedded (hidden) in their proverbs and sayings.
- ❖ suggest (recommend) the possible solutions (ways to the solution) to the problem raised.

1.5 Significance of the study

The result of this study is expected to be shared by people of different groups. Firstly, since the use of proverbs and sayings starts at home, every family in the society can get awareness regarding the influence of the language they use towards their children. Secondly, elders in the society, who often use proverbs and sayings in their speeches, are expected to consider the effect of their proverbs and sayings on women after they understood the reality in the result of this study. The other group to be benefited from this study is thought to be, every school community, who after reading the result of this research, are expected to care for their use of proverbs and sayings, and teach the society by coming together in a form of clubs or committees for the change of the adverse effects (if any). Since a school community is the collection of individuals

from each door, this group is expected to play a great role to change the attitude of the society. Next, women as a whole, after sharing the result of this study, are expected to get enough awareness of their images in the society's language use, and try their best to bring the bad attitude to an end. Finally, this research work may also serve as a base (source of information) for any researcher of a similar field of study.

1.6 Scope and limitations of the study

1.6.1 Scope

Because of the limited time gap for the study, the scope of this research is limited to the identification of the images of women in the proverbs and sayings of the Oromo people around Arsi Negelle and Kofale areas in West Arsi zone; the assessment of the society's awareness of the effects of the to be images on women; and the assessment of the nature of the transmission and transformation of their proverbs and sayings.

1.6.2 Limitations

The first and the major problem the researcher faced while conducting this study was the fact that proverbs have no separate social occasion (as it is stated by Finnegan, 1970 and Sumner, 1995) that it made the intention to collect the proverbs and sayings in their real context hopeless. However, the researcher has minimized this problem by making a successful selection of highly skilled elders, making enough rapport with the respondents and by preparing as many contexts as possible in which proverbs and sayings that refer to women were used, in order to help the elders recall them. In fact, after the elders were given the situations, they were able to create a stage that was more or less like the real one and therefore, the data collection became successful.

The other limitation the researcher faced was that, due to cultural and traditional influence they have been experiencing, women in the selected areas were not good at using proverbs. Anyway, due effort was made to give them similar contexts to the male respondents and certain number of proverbs were gathered from them. Of course all the proverbs that are collected from all respondents were more or less similar or alike regardless of the instrument through which they were gathered. Therefore this limitation does not affect the results of the study.

The researcher has also suffered a lot by using a candle light through out the night due to the current problem in the distribution of sufficient electric power through out the country. Besides suffering from the dim light of a candle, there was also a considerable problem to get a continuous photo copy and computer services.

However, despite the influence of all the above mentioned problems, a great effort was made by the researcher to complete the research successfully in the way it was planned.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

This research was conducted in two ways: through library research and field research.

2.1 The library research

The library research was carried out to assess what have been done in the field of oral arts in general and proverbs in particular. Similarly, works that have been done on women and their images in oral arts were also consulted in order to put a theoretical framework for the actual field research and its analysis. It also enabled the researcher to decide on the appropriate tools for the data collection.

2.2 The field research

2.2.1 Subjects

The participants of this study were: the selected elders from two *woredas* of West Arsi Zone and *Afan Oromo* teachers and Oromo students of the same area. Two *woredas*, namely, Arsi Negelle and Kofale were selected from the zone. These areas were preferred for the reason that the people are believed to have a strong tie with their culture and they follow Islam, a religion which allows polygamy where there are two or more wives and mothers within one compound all andled by one husband, that it is worth studying the way they express women in their oral arts, especially in proverbs and sayings.

2.2.2 Sampling techniques

A total of 792 students and 16 teachers were selected from two preparatory schools in the zone. The selection was made on the basis of their *Afan Oromo* language speaking ability. 50 percent of the Oromo speaking male students were randomly taken from both *Woredas*. Since their number was too small, all female students and *Afan Oromo* teachers were selected. For it was believed by the researcher that oral literature is a common life experience of the people as a whole, convenience sampling method was found to be feasible for this study. Therefore, 20 potential male and female elders (10 each) were selected from different *kebeles* of the two *woredas* for the focus-group discussion.

2.2.3 Instruments of data collection

The data for the study was gathered using three instruments of data collection. These are focus-group discussion (the maintool), semi-structured interview and an open-ended questionnaire. The focus-group discussion was used to collect data from the community elders, where as the interview was used to get attitudinal information from the teachers and the students. The questionnaire was also employed in order to collect women related proverbs and different personal views about the topic under study, from the teacher and student respondents, so as to strengthen and cross-check the information that was obtained from the elders. Of course the main objective to use the questionnaire was to assess the transmission of the proverbs and sayings and its effect on the continuation of the existing images of women to the future.

All the instruments were translated into *Afan Oromo* so that the subjects can respond to the questions with full understanding. These instruments were distributed to few individuals in order to check whether the intended data could be accessed through them or not, during the pilot survey session that was under taken two months before the actual data collection. During this session, the researcher also met many individuals who have helped her in the processes of making a rapport with different officials and visiting the sites of the study. Besides, the researcher took the addresses of different individuals at each site and gathered enough information about the population size so as to ease the main field work. Therefore, the pilot survey enabled the researcher to fix the appropriate time for data collection, know (decide) the actual number of respondents and, to revise and reshape the methodology ahead of time before the main field work.

2.2.4 Data collection

By the time the researcher left for the actual data collection, all the necessary preconditions were completed. The questionnaires were duplicated and stapled; the recording instruments, a photo camera, enough amount of money and the field assistants, all were ready. As a result, the actual data collection took only 15 days and every thing was successful.

2.2.4.1 The focus – group discussion: The first focus-group discussion was held with the elders of Kofale *woreda*. The researcher could easily access the potential elders through her previous university friends who were residents in the same *woreda* with the elders'. The appointment was not tiresome for the date was fixed deliberately to be on the *Gadaa* meeting of the community elders. The day was Sunday and it was a holiday (the Ethiopian Easter) that transportation was not a problem. The researcher was right at the place early in the morning at 8:00 am., after she had a trip of about 40 minutes from Shashamene town by car. The researcher together with her field assistant who knows the people of the area very well and is good at the dialect of the people, had enough time to get introduced herself to some of the elders who had been there ahead of the meeting time. When it was 9:00 am, the researcher was given the appropriate individuals including the *Gadaa* leader by the head officer of the *woreda* Cultural and Tourism Office. Since they were well informed about the objective of this study by the head officer earlier, the elders willingly delegated other persons to lead the meeting, leaders and responsible individuals of the community as they were, and joined the researcher. They felt very happy when

they saw the researcher in their own cultural dress and they were very happy to share their ideas after the researcher had explained in detail the purpose of the discussion they were going to make. Of course, they were not reluctant to examine the identity of both the researcher and the assistant, deep to their clans. It was fortunate that the field assistant was from their own clan which finally convinced them of the identity of the researchers. Every preparation was over and the group discussion was started at 9:30 am. among five male elders.

Since there was no scarcity of recording instruments, there was no need to write the proverbs and other points of the discussion. The major duty of the researcher was therefore, to facilitate the discussion by giving them the appropriate contexts that initiate the use of the proverbs referring to women and to ask clarifications of when and why a given proverb is used, when necessary. And everything was recorded verbatim for it was believed by the researcher that it helps to understand the contexts in which the proverbs were used and that it helps to translate the proverbs from the Oromo version into the target language.

The discussion among the male respondents was completed at 12:00am. And the same procedure was applied for the women's focus-group discussion that was carried out in the afternoon starting from 2:00 pm to 3:20 pm. Like that of the men, the women's group also consisted of five members. However, the women's focus-group discussion was not so lively and it took only one hour and twenty minutes. It was so because of the fact that proverbs are mostly used by the male elders and women in that area have no exposure to such public discussions that some of them were even shy to speak. But the inclusion of women whom the issue directly refers to was believed to be a must by the researcher, because, whatever that was obtained was believed to help to cross-check the information that was gathered from other respondents about them. Moreover, the researcher has made an effort to get the women to the points of purpose and that was also successful except for the women's failure to recall the intended proverbs despite the researcher's due effort to help them recall the proverbs by giving a number of contexts in which the proverbs are being used.

The same was true for the focus-group discussion that was held with both male and female elders of Arsi Negelle. The only difference is that the *Gadaa* leaders and other elders who were known for their rich skill in saying proverbs were accessed through close friends and relatives who were residents of the same *kebele* with the elders', and that the women elders in this *woreda* know

more proverbs than the previous ones. This focus-group discussion was held on their big market day (Wednesday) to let the respondents hit two birds with one stone. Since women were thought to be busy at home especially on such market days (as they have to go to market and complete the work that waits for them at home as well), the male elders allowed the researcher to have women's discussion first (in the morning). In the same manner, the men's discussion was carried out in the afternoon and was over at 4:00 pm. All the respondents were invited a lunch and a drink of their choice (of course, only from mead and soft drinks).

2.2.4.2 Interview: Interview, as it is already stated earlier was another instrument of data collection. It was used to get attitudinal information from students and teachers. A total of 24 students three males and three females from each grade level (11th and 12th) of the two selected preparatory schools in the *woreda* namely, *Kilture'e* Preparatory School in Arsi Negelle and Kofale Secondary and Preparatory School, and all *Afan Oromo* teachers (only one from *Kilture'e* and seven teachers from Kofale) were interviewed. Only selected questions that need clarification and that ask the individuals own attitude towards the images of women in Oromo proverbs and sayings were used for interview and therefore, it took only 20-30 minutes per individual. However, since the researcher did not want to let the assistants collect the actual data (except for their accompany to help by carrying the luggage) and since there is only the morning shift in the school, the interview at Arsi Negelle (*Kilture'e*) Preparatory School took her two days, while that of Kofale was completed within one day (morning and afternoon). Similar to the focus-group discussion, all the interviews were recorded on tape since all the interviewees were volunteers to get their voice recorded.

2.2.4.3 Questionnaire: Questionnaire is also the other tool that was used to support and cross-check the data gathered through the main tool of the study. A total of 808 questionnaires of 11 items that were prepared in *Afan Oromo* language were distributed to all Oromo speaking female students and 16 *Afan Oromo* teachers. Since there was only one *Afan Oromo* teacher at *Kilture'e* Preparatory School, 8 *Afan Oromo* teachers were added from Arsi Negelle Secondary School to make the data representative. The questionnaires were collected at the end of each shift to avoid the bias that might occur if the questionnaires were taken home for the respondents might write the proverbs by asking from their parents and fill other questions also being with

their friends. Since the questionnaires were administered and collected by the help of the classroom teachers, all the distributed questionnaires were successfully collected.

2.2.5 Data analysis

The first step of data analysis was the transcription of the tape recorded materials and the tallying and tabulation of the data gathered through questionnaires. All the important elements that were believed to be referred and used during the data analysis were transcribed on two different note books. All the necessary proverbs were selected and transcribed on a separate note book together with their situations and explanations. The rest of the conceptual and attitudinal data that were recorded from the interviews and the focus-group discussions were transcribed on the other separate note book. After the recorded materials were transcribed and the data from the questionnaires were tallied, tabulated and changed into percentages, the next step was the translation of the data collected in a local language to the target language.

According to Newmark (1982), the most appropriate approach to the translation of such metaphorical and cultural texts is the communicative translation approach. He stated that the use of communicative translation approach helps the researcher to make the text in the target language smoother, lighter and communicable to the reader. He further explained this saying “The approach gives him/her the right to correct or improve the logic, to replace the clumsy words, to remove obscurities, to eliminate repetitions, to exclude the less likely interpretations of ambiguity, and to clarify the highly cultural terms.” (Ibid: 50). Therefore, due to all these merits of it, the communicative approach to translation was employed during the translation of the data collected for this study. As a matter of fact, all the highly metaphorical proverbs and texts with cultural elements and local jargons were translated with out much difficulty. However, this does not mean that the translation is hundred percent correct. There might be mistakes that the researcher did not notice.

After the process of translation was over, 110 proverbs and sayings were identified and categorized according to their contextual themes and the analysis was made qualitatively by integrating the data gathered through the three instruments. Proverbs and sayings that were almost similar in their themes and context were dropped during the analysis. Finally, based of the

discussions and analyses made using the proverbs and sayings chosen, conclusions were made about the images of women in the proverbs and sayings of the West Arsi Oromo.

CHAPTER THREE

Review of Related Literature

3.1 Background history of the Oromo

3.1.1 Historical background

Let us start with a quotation from a book “History of the Oromo to the Sixteenth Century” published by Oromia Cultural and Tourism Bureau (OCTB), which says: “Nothing can escape from it’s past. The past had gone for good, yet it left its print behind that serves forever.” (2006:1) This idea, though general, is an exact expression that directly points towards the history of the Oromo, whose previous distortion of its name and origin in the past has resulted in the ambiguous and distorted history of the present Oromo people and nation. In fact, the source has mentioned that, “[t]he true history of the Oromo has never been published for several years.” (Ibid) and the reason is attributed to the fact that both the church and the state were interested in glorifying the history of the royal family and their beliefs. Where as, “...they did their best in distorting the history of the suppressed people to the degree that really downgrade their self-image.”, (ibid) that these people reached the extent to which they are deprived of their right to a residence to their own Origin land. The worst thing regarding the distortion is that the source for foreigner researchers was also obtained from the written documents by the clergymen or the ruling classes of Ethiopia.

As a matter of fact, up to the near past, the Oromo have been considered immigrants and second citizens alien to their homeland. To mention few examples, some say: “One manuscript from northern Ethiopia suggests that the Oromo descended from a Portuguese who was in the service of the emperor and who was unjustly banished into the province of Bali.” (Antoine, D’abbadie in

Journal of Oromo Studies, 2007, Vol. 14. No. 1:121); others say that they are from the Hamitic race that migrated to this continent from Asia, (“...from its ancient homeland found outside Africa”) (OCTB, 2006:281); still, others were saying that they had migrated from southern part of Ethiopia -‘*Madda Walaabuu*’, to the central, western and the northern parts of the country (Ibid); and the other one is the most striking idea that the origin of the Oromo was believed to be the ancient Syrians only because of the close similarities between Oromo proverbs and the proverbs in the Bible. Even more awkwardly than this, they justify their belief saying: “Thus we have been able to observe in the proverbs, the coincidence, and if not of expression at least-and this very frequently – of the moral idea and principles, however higher these may be than the moral of the [Oromo] people itself. This shows that ideas are rather borrowed and imported, than the natural product of their own national genius.” (Sumner, C. 1995: 55) However, for the Oromo at that time, let alone that they borrow the Biblical proverbs; they had got nothing to do with the Bible itself. This is because, for one thing, the ancient Oromo were the followers of their own traditional religion –“*Waaqeffannaa*” (to believe in God), and for the other thing that, the majority of the Oromo, even in this recent century were a traditional society that they hardly deal with written materials.

Generally, these and other similar distortions of the origin of Oromo people by local and foreign writers have played their important roles in the making of a controversial history of the present Oromo people and Oromo land. However, thanks to some foreign scholars and the mythological and linguistic evidences of the people, these days it became possible to access the true history of the people. Let us now see it very briefly.

The Oromo who had been known to the external world and their Semitic Abyssinian colonizers (the Amhara and Tigreans) by a derogatory name –“*galla*” ([Oromo] through out this paper) - are proved by many writers to be the largest ethnic group in the horn of Africa. According to the 2002 statistical reports, they constitute more than half (about 30,000,000) of the population of the Ethiopian empire. Moreover, the Oromo are said to belong to the Eastern Cushitic language stock of the Afro-Asiatic super-family, who have lived in the northern and eastern Africa for as long as time immemorial. (Eshete, G. 2007; OCTB, 2006; Workineh, K. 2001; Kuwe, K. in Asafa’s Journal of Oromo Studies, 1997; Beletech, D. 2003 and Sumner, C. 1995) Similarly, (Bates, 1979; Braukamper, 1986 and Mohammed, H. 1994) in Workineh, (2001:2) have

indicated that “*Afaan Oromoo*” (the Oromo language), “...is one of the most widely spoken languages in Africa.” According to Bates, “[t]he [Oromo] were a very ancient race, the indigenous stock, perhaps, on which most other peoples in this part of Eastern Africa had been grafted.” (Ibid) Eshete says, “With the exception of Begemeder and Tigray, they inhabit all the regions (provinces) of the country (Ethiopia). They make up the largest proportion in Arsi, Bale, Hararghe, Shawa, Wallegga, Wollo, Ilu- Abbabor, and Kafa; but they constitute the minority in Gamu Gofa, Gojjam, Sidamo, and Kenya.” (2007:1) For our surprise, the name ‘Ethiopia’ itself was formerly given to the land of ‘*Cush*’, ‘*Nubia*’ and its inhabitants, which later on was adopted by King Ezana of Axum to refer to the kingdom of Abyssinians.(OCTB, 2006)

3.1.2 Socio- political background

***Gadaa* system**

The Oromo people are known to different scholars and nations for their uniquely democratic socio- political structure known as ‘*Gadaa*’. (Cerulli, 1922; Huntingford, 1955; Kuwe in Asafa, J. 1997; Asmarom, L.1973; *Gadaa*, M. 1988; Workineh, K. 2001; and Beletech, D. 2003) *Gadaa* system is a complicated (as many scholars call it) institution that is handed over every eight years in assuming a political, military, judicial, legislative and ritual responsibilities among the male members of the society on the basis of age group. (Beletech, 2003; Eshete, 2007) According to Eshete (2007, PH. D. dissertation), the *Gadaa* system has been in function before 1300’s, even if Eshete (2007: 41) says, “1522 was recorded too late as the term of its full use.” D’Abbadie in Eshete’s dissertation indicated that the *Gadaa* system had been introduced by the Oromo wise man (‘*Hayyuu*’) known as ‘Makkoo Billi’ at about 1589. It is also mentioned in the same source that, “Makkoo Billi of Macha and Dawwe Gobbo of Borana are the two great creative thinkers and philosophers who made the *Gadaa* traditional law. ...Unlike other traditional African societies in transition, the *Gadaa* is one of the remarkable achievements, which show the uniqueness of the people.” (2007: 33) However, there is an inconsistency in the dates registered to show the time since which the *Gadaa* system has been in use among the Oromo and this necessitates a further investigation to make available more dependable information about its origin. Regardless of this problem, Eshete asserts that, “Despite its imperfection, this period of cultural evolution remains the living reference to Oromo society.” (Ibid) Here, it must be the reason why it caught the attention of many scholars like: Asmarom, L.; Cerulli Enrico, Antonio Cecchi, Alessandro Triulzi, Donald, N. Levine, Baxter, D’Abbadie, Huntingford and others.

Though different scholars (as Kuwe mentioned in Asafa (1997)), have indicated that the Oromo in the earlier periods had a parallel women's organization the 'Siinqee Institution' (an institution that served women as a weapon to fight violation of their personal right and religious ethics), many others witness that women are actively excluded from the political and military structures. (Asmarom, 1973; Bartels, 1983; Waqayyo, 1991) Hence, it is common to come across classification of *Gadaa* grades which comprises only of the male members of the community. There are five *Gadaa* grades. The names given to the five classes may differ from place to place or may be put differently for fathers and sons as in the Borana. Here are the often used classes with their parallel names for sons.

Table1. The *Gadaa* Classes

Classes	1	2	3	4	5
Fathers	<i>Birmajjii</i>	<i>Malba</i>	<i>Muudana</i>	<i>Roobalee</i>	<i>Duuloo</i>
Age	(40-48)	(48-56)	(56-64)	(64-72)	(72-80)
Sons	Adala	Horata	Bifoole	Sabaqa	Kiloole
Age	(0-8)	(8-16)	(16-24)	(24-32)	(32-40)

(JOS, 2007, Vol.14, No. 1:125; Eshete, 2007:33-34)

Moreover, Workineh (2001) stated that the *Gadaa* system puts Oromo people (usually males) into 7-11 groups according to their differentiated duties in the society which varies from shepherding to counseling through out every eight years. These are:

- *Dabballee* (0-8 years)
 - *Foollee* or *Gaammee xixiqqaa* (8-16 years)
 - *Qondaala* or *Gaammee gurguddaa* (16-24 years)
 - *Kuusaa* (24-32 years)
 - *Raaba* (32-40 years)
 - *Gadaa* (40-48 years)
 - *Yuuba I* (48-56 years)
 - *Yuuba II* (56-64 years)
 - *Yuuba III* (64-72 years)
 - *Gadaamoojjii* (72-80 years)
 - *Jaarsa* (80 and above years)
- (Source: Workineh, 2001:3)

Accordingly, (Sumner, 1995 and Eshete, 2007) pointed out that fathers on *Gadaa* power are five grades (5x8) apart from their sons. Here, what makes *Gadaa* system unique is that, it gives opportunity to every member of Oromo (except females), to participate in certain activity of their age, equally for every age cohorts. And more importantly, the power is handed over from one class to the other peacefully and ritualistically. However, this peaceful egalitarian system has effectively served the Oromo up to 1880's and came to an end after the Semitic Abyssinians came to power during the 1880's. (Eshete, 2007:1)

The *Siinqee* Institution

It takes more than a chapter to discuss the *Siinqee* institution. In this sub section, we only look at it very briefly. According to Kuwe in Asafa, J. (1997), *Siinqee* is "...a stick symbolizing a socially sanctioned set of rights exercised by women. (pp: 115) kuwe indicated that the *Siinqee* Institution was given to women by *Gadaa* laws and it was highly respected by the society. Women used to use their *Siinqee* for different religious, social, and economic issues to protect their property rights; to control over sexuality and fertility, to protect their social rights and to maintain religious and moral authority. (Ibid) These all were used to take place in through 'Iyya *Siinqee*' (the *Siinqee* scream) where women take their *Siinqee*, get together and sing (scream) raising it high to address the community elders what problem they faced.

Therefore, according to Kuwe, the only occasion to which women do not use their *Siinqee* is the funeral ceremony and, "The breaking of *Sii[n]qee* upon the death of its owner signifies the end of its functions with the end of life's activities." (Ibid: 123)

Religion

As we have already discussed above, the Oromo are from a Cushitic origin. By the same token, their religion is also emanated from the ancient Cushitic people and this Cushitic origin of the Oromo religion makes it the oldest of all religions that it existed for about 6,000 years before the recent day. (Workineh, 2001 and OCTB, 2006) Momoh, (1996) puts forward that the absence of proverbs is an exact sign for the absence of religious concept (concept of God) in traditional African countries before the Christian and Islamic era. However, the Oromo's possession of the concept of 'One God' has been proved by their bulky number of proverbs that praise '*Waaqa*', their one word for 'God'. For that matter, Workineh asserts that "The Oromo never worshipped carved statues, trees, rivers, mountains or animals as substitutes." (2001: 22)

For the Oromo people, *Waaqa* is the creator of every thing – living things and non-living things including the earth and water. Thus, their religious belief bases itself on the concept that there is only one *Waaqa* (God). The Arabic word ‘Rabbi’ is also used among the Moslem Oromo of today and others to refer to the supreme God. They also believe that *Waaqa* is, “He who is before every thing else.” (Ibid) *Waaqa* for the Oromo is also: *Uumaa* (Creator); *hunda beekaa* (omniscient); *hunda tolaa* (omni benevolent); *hunda danda’aa* (omnipotent); the source and lover of *dhugaa* (truth); intolerant of injustice, crime, sin and all falsehood. (Ibid) Because of this the Oromo have ‘*Safuu*’ “(respect to God) – the creator”. (OCTB, 2006) In fact, the Oromo often pray, “*Safuu Waaq*, save us from such an action.” (Ibid)

In traditional Oromo society, we find many saint like divinities known as ‘*Ayyaana*’ which are usually seen as the manifestation of the one *Waaqa*. The same term, at another time is referred to as ‘spirit’. It is also believed to be the angel of *Waaqa* that speaks in the mouth of ‘*Ayyaantuu*’ (‘*Qaalluu*’) with the people. Workineh put this in another way saying: “*Ayyaana* is attached to individual *Qaalluu* and speaks through his mouth during possession. ...The role of the *Qaalluu* is similar to the role of a Bishop in the Christian world and of Imam in the Moslem world.” (Workineh, 2001: 26) Concerning the concept of ‘*Ateetee*’ and ‘*Maaram*’ in Oromo traditional religion, there are certain controversies about their exact meaning. For our purpose, let us put Bartels’ definition as it is quoted by Workineh: “...*Ateetee* is the name of a ritual in which *Maaram* is invoked” (2001: 28) whereas *Maaram* is believed to be the ‘divinity of women’ (Ibid).

To wind up, it is evident that the Oromo used to have their own monotheistic religion ‘*Waaqeffannaa*’. But similar to the history of their origin, it was distorted (misled) for evil doings (paganism) and the people were forced to accept Orthodox Christianity by the Christian Abyssinians. Consequently, a majority of the Oromo have accepted Islam and other religions like Catholic and Protestant, only not to adopt a forced religion. Hence, the Oromo today are the followers of mixed religions- their own traditional religion ‘*Waaqeffannaa*’, Islam, Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox Christianity by itself. (Beletech, 2003 and Workineh, 2001)

Economy

The economy of the Oromo people is mostly dependent on the geographical location of their land. Accordingly, in the high lands, the base of their economy is mixed farming of grain crops

and coffee together with cattle breeding, while they are pastoralists in the low lands. In the temperate areas, where both types of land are found, we find both pastoralists (herders) as well as agriculturalists in the same family. (Sumner, 1995) Therefore, Oromia is the land where both agriculture and animal husbandry is possible. As a matter of fact, Sumner referred to Oromia as the 'best land of Ethiopia'.

(Sumner, 1995: 29)

3.1.3 A brief background history of the Arsi

Unless specific information is needed almost all the points that are discussed above are also common to the Arsi Oromo. However, since the Arsi are the focus of this study, it is worth mentioning briefly the background information about this area and the people.

Just as the Oromo are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia and are divided into two main branches- *Borana* and *Barentu*, the Arsi Oromo are also the largest group who are divided into two main branches 'Sikko' and 'Mando' and have settled over a larger area than any other settlement of the Oromo main tribe. (OCTB, 2006; Jaylan, H. 2005, West Arsi zone Culture and Tourism Office, 2007) It is also said that the West Arsi were settlers (residents) of their present area before the 12th century. And similar to the main land Oromia, whose boundaries are Somali, Afar and Djibouti in the east; Sudan in the west, Somali and Kenya in the south, the Amhara and Tigre land in the north, and by the Southern Nationalities in the South West (Beletech, 2003), the Arsi land is also bordered by the Tulama and Ania in the north, in the Somali in the east, by the *Borana* in the south and by the Sidama and Darasa (Gedeo) in the west. (OCTB, 2006) Like the Oromo as a whole, the Arsi Oromo were ruled by *Gadaa* system and though they were followers of the Oromo traditional religion 'Waaqeffannaa' (a belief in Waaq- a supreme God), after the conquest of Menelik, they have adopted Islam. (Jaylan, 2005; OCTB, 2006)

When we come to the specific area of this study, West Arsi zone, it is located at a distance of 250 kms to the south from the capital city Addis Ababa. The zone shares boundaries with East Shoa zone in the North, Southern People's Regional State in the south, Bale zone in the East and with Kambata and, Alaba and Tembaro zone in the West. (West Arsi Zone Culture and Tourism Office, 2007) West Arsi is also mentioned to be the widest zone in the region with an area of 12,938 sq. km inhabited by more than 1.8 million of total population (1994 population and housing census). Of the total population size, women account for about 50.5% with low female

school enrolment ratio which is 44.72%, 36.3%, 27.48% and 16.44% for first cycle primary, second cycle primary, first cycle secondary and, high schools and preparatory schools respectively (Ibid). Hence, the fact that the zone has got more than fifty percent of female population and low rate of female school enrolment makes the study on the area appropriate. Besides, since the majority of the population of West Arsi zone is the Oromo, *Afan Oromo* is the official language of the zone, while in the town (Shashamene), Amharic, Wolayta, Guraghe, Kambata and Hadiya were spoken in addition to *Afan Oromo*. The West Arsi Oromo people are followers of Islam faith which allows polygamy. These people are agrarian community, with a conducive climate, where the annual temperature ranges from 12°C to 30°C, higher in January and lower in October, and ample rainfall ranging from 600mm to 2500mm, which therefore, allows biannual crop production. Thus, crop production and animal husbandry are the backbone of their livelihood. Besides, West Arsi zone has a diversity of untouched natural and cultural potential for tourism. To mention some: Rift-valley lakes such as Langano, Abjata, Shala, Cheleleka, North part of lake Awassa, Langano recreational beaches, Bishan Gari and Weni lodges, different mountainous areas, common wild animals, and so forth (West Arsi Zone Culture and Tourism Office, 2007; Abas, 1982).

As far as the Oromo did not have a written literature in the past, the Arsi is not different. The Oromo have numerous and a variety of oral tradition. And as far as the Arsi are part of the Oromo, they also have a vast and rich oral tradition which is closely intertwined with their local identity. Hence, it is evident that one finds countless religious oral traditions and legends like: the cult of Sheik Hussein, marriage traditions (most often about polygamy), agriculture, cattle songs (especially, the '*Faaruu Loonii*' (praise songs of their cattle)), sex-role stereotypes, etc., in oral arts of the Arsi Oromo. (Jaylan, 2004, 2005, Eshete, 2007) Eshete, (2007) further stated that "Oral literature depicts the collective images that govern the society. ..." (pp: 49). So, it is with one of these collective images (the images of women in proverbs and sayings of the Oromo of West Arsi area) that this specific study deals.

3.2 Folklore and its functions in the society

It is mentioned by many scholars that it is very difficult to have a uniform and precise definition of folklore. And Thompson as cited in Melakneh, M. (2005:10) ascertained this nature of folklore saying:

Although the word folklore is more than a century old, no exact agreement has been reached as to its meaning. The common idea present in all folklore is that of traditions, something handed down from one person to another and preserved either by memory or practice rather than written record. It involves the dances, songs, tales, legends and traditions, the beliefs and superstitions and the proverbial sayings of the people everywhere. It also includes studies of the customs, traditional, agricultural and domestic practices, types of buildings and utensils and traditional aspects of social organizations.

Let us now look at some definitions given to the term by different scholars and see whether they really have something in common with what is discussed above. Leach (1948:398), puts folklore as, "...the generic term to designate the handicrafts, customs, beliefs, traditions, tales, magical practices, proverbs, songs, etc. In short, the accumulated knowledge of a homogenous un sophisticated people." In this case, folklore does not only refer to oral value of a given society, but also it refers to different forms of cultural practices that include speech, auditory and visual senses, and sense of touching by itself. Boswell (et al. 1962:1) put Espinosa's definition of folklore as, "...accumulated store of what people have experienced, learned and practiced across the ages as popular and traditional knowledge as distinguished from scientific knowledge." Here, folklore is defined as a collective container of people's knowledge and practice through out their life and across longer periods. Similarly, folklore is said to refer to, "People's manners, customs, tales, jokes,...riddles, chants, charms, blessings, curses, deaths, insults, ...teases, greetings, ...folk dances, folk drama, folk art, folk beliefs, folk medicine, folk music, etc. (Dundes, 1965: 6 and 12) Dorson (1972: 2-3), categorizes this into four broad divisions: **verbal arts** (oral literature) - riddles, proverbs, myths, folktales, fairy tales, etc; **material culture** - traditional materials (tools) used by the society; **performing folk arts** such as traditional drama and song and dance and, **social folk customs** which include the people's traditional belief, dressing style and other ways of life. Others like: Courlander, 1975; Fekade, 1999; Michael, 1984 and Taylor, in Dundus, 1965 also support Dorson's idea.

In general, it is better to say definition of folklore by different scholars is rather a multidimensional attempt, but only to mean the same thing in different expressions. Therefore, as far as folklore is an instrument through which cultural, religious, economic, social, political, philosophical and any other belongings of a given society manifests, it is better not to reduce its meaning to certain points, but to call it a mirror that reflects each and every aspect of society's life as it existed(s). In short, it is every thing of its people.

For the same reason that folklore deals with all aspects of human life, be it, peace, war, adventure, courage, disaster, love, hatred, political and social value, weakness or strength, humor or sorrow, marriage or divorce, ...etc., gender stereotypes and social values for men and women are also no exception to be reflected in folklore. Accordingly, it is on the images of women in proverbs and sayings, one of the different genres of this wide- scoped concept – folklore, that this study is to be conducted. However, before we go to the images of women in proverbs and sayings of the target people, we need to look separately at proverbs and their function in the society.

3.3 Proverbs and sayings

3.3.1 Proverbs

Proverbs also share the above characteristics of folklore. And in the same way they reflect African common ideas, themes, suppositions and truths; they also reveal creations (values) unique to and differentiated by ethnicity, socio - cultural and geographical factors. (Courlander, 1975) Therefore, it necessitates defining them in accordance with their own properties that differentiate them from the rest of folklore genres. Finnegan, (1970) and Sumner, (1995) have claimed the attempt to define a proverb to be so difficult and that there is no clear cut definition of a proverb. In spite of this claim, many scholars including these two have defined it in different ways. This widely varied sense of definition is of course initiated by the popular functions they serve in the society. Below are some of these definitions.

Finnegan herself defined a proverb as a saying which has got a fixed form and known by its brief, meaningful and flavorful nature that has popular acceptance of the realities communicated in it (1970), where as Achebe, (1974) has related proverbs with a ‘palm-oil’ to indicate that proverbs are the spices of a speech, through which people exchange different variety of issues (messages) using few words. The Oromo also have expressed the idea of ‘palm-oil’ in their proverb, “*Ittoon soogidda hin qabneef dubbiin makmaaksa hin qanbne hin mi’aawu.*” which literally means (A stew without salt and a speech without a proverb are tasteless.) Okpewho, (1992:226) has defined it as, “...a folk wisdom expressed with terseness and charm.” The “terseness” implies a certain economy in the choice of words and a sharpness of focus, while the “charm” conveys the touch of literary or poetic beauty in the expression. Parallel with this point, the Oromo proverb is said to be framed in brevity, where metaphor, symbolism, satire, irony and

the like are concentrated within a single line of a proverb. (Eshete, G. 2007) Others defined a proverb as: “short and pithy sentences forming a popular saying, and expressing some results of the experienced life in a keen and lively fashion.”; Coyle (1991: 80); “A short pithy saying which embody a general truth. It is related in form and content to maxims and aphorism.” (Cuddon, 1982: 539); “Proverbs are short and witty traditional expressions that arise as part of everyday discourse as well as in the more highly structured situations of education and judicial proceedings.” (Dorson, 1992: 119); etc.

Similar to the definition of folklore, all the above definitions given by different scholars show the various characteristics of proverbs in common – short, withy, pithy, popular saying, brief, terse, flavorful,...etc. are some of the different terms these scholars used to refer to proverbs. Hence, since it is difficult to have the exact and real definition of a proverb, in general, it is better to call it a noble genre of especially, African oral tradition in general and Oromo oral tradition in particular, which carries the wisdom of a people, that has been distilled from experiences made over centuries.

3.3.2 Sayings

Berhanu Mathewos, (1986: VI) forwarded that, “It is sometimes difficult to differentiate between proverbs, idioms and sayings.” Consequently, many writers use the words – ‘a proverb’, ‘a maxim’, ‘an aphorism’, ‘a saw’ and ‘a saying’ interchangeably or as closely related terms, and define one in terms of the other. For example, Greimas in Sumner, (1995) has differentiated between proverbs and sayings in terms of connotation and denotation. For him, proverbs are connoted elements where as sayings are non-connoted elements. Egmond, J. (2000) on web-site, <http://www.spreakwoord.net/uk/intro.html>, defined a saying as, “That which is said; a declaration; a statement, especially, a proverbial one; an aphorism; a proverb.” This source mentions that there is a very little difference between the two terms and therefore, a proverb is a saying and a saying is a proverb. Hence, both mean the same. Similarly, Finnegan (1970) has also stated that it is not often clear whether the general characteristics which govern proverbs also work for sayings, or not, “In many cases presumably the sayings [included in collection of proverbs] are proverbs in this full sense.” (pp: 394)

However, according to Sumner, in the Oromo language there exists a one general term that includes ‘sayings’, ‘proverbs’ and ‘maxims’-[*Makmaaksa*] (1995) Sumner also added that only the, “An incommunicable quality tells us this sentence is proverbial, and that one is not.” (Ibid: 39)

Among some Oromo group, the term ‘*makmaaksa*’ sometimes refers to different genres like folktales and anecdotes, in addition to their popular reference to proverbs. For example, for the *Borana*, proverbs and folktales are categorized under the same genre ‘*makmaaksa*’, for the two are used in the same situations and for the same purposes. (Sahilu, 2002) In the context of this particular study however, the term ‘*makmaaksa*’ is used to refer to both proverbs and sayings of the Oromo excluding other possible references.

Makmaaksa is the most beloved and famous genre in the Oromo oral tradition. And according to Sibusiso, “proverbs are useful means of studying a people. ...They reveal what people’s outlook on life is, and will” provide the student of human science with a peep into character of a people. (1963: xii) Buchanan (1965) also certified that it is obvious that proverbs and sayings of a given people most precisely depict their national behavior and personality trait.

Therefore, it is on the basis of the same belief that this study is proposed to investigate the image of women as it is depicted in this popular genre of the Oromo. The next section focuses on the function of proverbs in the Oromo.

3.4 Functions of Oromo proverbs

Proverbs are overwhelmingly similar (the same) all over the world despite their difference in time and place, as people are fundamentally and psychologically the same regardless of their continental and color differences. (Bascom, 1992; Sumner, 1995; Finnegan, 1970) According to Sumner, this is because, “Love, hunger and fear are the basic factors that rule mankind, primitive or cultured; are factors uninfluenced by environment or civilization.(1995: 53) Similarly, many authorities indicated that in most traditional African societies proverbs may serve similar functions, even in nearly the same meanings that are different only for their actual context of performance than due to their content and attitude. (Lindfors, 1977; Finnegan, 1970; Ben Amos, 1975a) However, as far as purposes of use can be different based on the variation in context within which they are performed, it is important to treat the function of Oromo proverbs and

sayings in their own socio-cultural context. The *Masai* illustrated the importance of context in proverbs saying: “Bark on one tree will not adhere to the bark on another tree.” (Sumner, 1995: 54) This means, whatever the similarity might be, still, surely, there exist a difference between proverbs of two culturally different peoples.

Similar to most African people, the Oromo also have a great value for their proverbs that they compare it with a salt in a stew in the same manner the Igbo society did with the palm-oil, and the *Chaga* who indicated this in their proverb, “Have four big possessions: land, cattle, water and proverbs.” (Finnegan, 1970: 413) Regarding the value the Oromo have for their proverbs, Sumner wrote: “Since the beginning of my ministry among the [Oromo] populations, I have been struck by the importance given to proverbs by these people, who made a vast usage of them.” (Op. cit.: 44) He added that, the proverbs then, stand as a storehouse of the accumulated experience, knowledge and philosophy of the people.” (Op. cit.: 45) Evidently, therefore, the Oromo do not appreciate their proverbs for nothing.

Generally speaking, proverbs principally serve two broad functions - didactic and aesthetic functions. (Bascom, 1965; Finnegan, 1992; Chesaina, 1997) This indeed works for Oromo Proverbs too. Here are few of the functions proverbs and sayings serve among these people.

3.4.1 Didactic functions

Didactic functions of proverbs imply the educative (pedagogic) functions through which proverbs express, promote and recognize the beliefs and customs; care for and reinforce morality and tradition by giving them higher value (Ibid). This is illustrated in Taddese’s thesis as follows: “Thus, its art both material and moral, inspirations and frustrations, customary practices, social norms, in short, the sum total of its realities of life can be observed and learned through proverbs. In doing so, proverbs play the role of bridging the past socio-cultural values to the present ones.” (2004: 46) In addition to its function of cultural continuity, Finnegan, (1992) and Miruka, (1994) forwarded that the didactic function of proverbs serve people to teach morals, diligence and purity and, ridicule laziness, snobbishness, immorality, rebelliousness and other evil behaviors. Hence, in the case of Oromo people, (especially elders), they often use proverbs and other genre to teach their children about their past, honesty, politeness, faithfulness, and to criticize misbehavior in general. This shows that the educative function of proverbs and sayings is widely common among the Oromo too.

3.4.2 Aesthetic functions

Finnegan (1970) and Sumner (1995) have pointed out that proverbs have no separate social condition (occasion) for their performance. But they can be used in speech and action any time (day or night), and therefore, are not meant for recreation or entertainment. Thus, the aesthetic function is attributed to the concept of palm-oil in the Igbo and the salt in a stew in the Oromo (discussed above), where proverbs are used to give color and pragmatic force to formal discussions and an ordinary conversation. (Bascom, 1965) Besides, the aesthetic function of proverbs also takes place in written literature thereby adding cultural and local color and beauty in narrative discourses. Lindfors, (1973) mentioned Achebe as an example of authors who abundantly use proverbs in their novels. Generally, the use of proverbs in speech and written literature can help people/texts get attention from the listeners/readers. And this shows the power of proverbs in making discussions/readings attractive and, in influencing people to listen/read. (Damme, 2000) The aesthetic function of Oromo proverbs according to Sumner, (1995) and Okpewho, (1992) is achieved through binarism/parallelism, terseness, metaphorical and poetic nature (rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, assonance, simile, metaphor) that is found in them. The same idea is ascertained by Sumner that, "...“binarism” or “parallelism” is the heart of Oromo rhythm: Phonic, synonymic, antithetic, synonymic-antithetic.” ...where an utterance not to contain any type of binarism at all, explicit or implicit ...this saying should not be considered as an Oromo [*Makmmaksa*].” (1995: 51 and 52)

To conclude, proverbs and sayings are used among the Oromo to keep cultural continuity through their educative nature and to beautify speech; clarify meaning through analogy and to bring a case and settle it at the end in formal situations like settling disputes and judicial cases. This means, they serve the media through the society teach one another; control social norms, customs and values; criticize or comment on one another's personality and a mechanism through which behavior and norm is enforced and practiced to fit the socially and culturally constructed norms. Sumner concluded that Oromo oral arts serve at least five extra-linguistic functions: cognitive, expressive, educative, disruptive and cultural functions. (1995) And Jaylan, H. adds a normative function mentioning the hymns sung in the praise of Sheik Hussein as a typical example. (2005)

3.5 Who uses proverbs and sayings?

Finnegan (1970) and Sumner (1995) have stated that proverbs are potentially known to every one and are free for any person to listen to or to utter them. However, they both have mentioned that certain people, (in most cases, men, as they are responsible for most public issues and law cases) are more gifted than others in using proverbs. Finnegan explained more this by indicating the fact that proverbs are more common in court cases, and men usually monopolize the court cases including their wife's issues. As a result, women seldom use proverbs and most often, the proverbs of advice are normally used by male elders. On the contrary, Sahilu, (2002) and Okpewho, (1992), stressed that in many traditional African societies only older people (especially men) are considered to be experts to use proverbs. Okpewho attributes the reason to their age and experience which is believed to promote better understanding of the truth and wisdom in proverbs. Where as Sahilu put forward that an old woman from the Oromo responded, "Ani jaarsaa ka mammaaksa beeku?" ("Am I an elder [male] who would know *mammaaksa*?") (2002: 44) when he asked her to tell him a very popular legend of Dido. This implies that in the area of his study (*Borana*), a proverb is normally used by male elders. While Sumner says, "...a proverb is not the privilege of elders." (1995: 356) Finnegan, (1970); Sahilu, (2002) and Okpewho, (1992) stressed that younger members may use proverbs among themselves, but never used to or at the presence of their elders. In fact the Oromo usually say, "As our fathers (forefathers) have said..." when they want to use proverbs. From this as it is true for any patriarchal society, we can deduce that in the Oromo, proverbs are dominantly used (said) by male elders.

As it is already mentioned in the preceding pages, there is no particular social occasion (condition) for the use of proverbs unlike folktales which are most often told in the evening as the family members are waiting for a dinner. However, Finnegan (1970) quoted an expression by a *Fante* elder: "There is no proverb without a situation." (1970: 24) this means, understanding the situation in which proverbs are used is mandatory, because the same proverb/saying when used in different context of speech, may suggest variety of different meanings/truths.

3.6 Contents of Oromo proverbs

Even though Finnegan, (1970) says, because of their practical reference to any situation, it is difficult to give a correct account of the contents of African proverbs, the major contents of proverbs and sayings are found in line with their theme. These are: social values, norms, politics, religious, historical, philosophical, psychological make up and social institutions and so on. It is therefore, based on the images reflected in similar contents of Oromo proverbs and sayings, that this research will be carried out. The next sub-topic deals with the image women in Oromo Proverbs and sayings.

3.6.1 Images of women in a society and sex-role stereotypes

3.6.1.1 Images

Margaret Jean Hay in Canadian Journal of African Studies, has mentioned that historians, until recently have neglected the history of African families and family organizations. (<http://www.jstor.org>) Consequently, the shortage of written documents about African women necessitates recourse to the use of different sources like proverbs, creation myths, folktales, ritual activities, taboos and other symbolic expressions in oral tradition, to help in the study of people's ideology. Strobel, M. (<http://www.jstor.org>). Hence, as we have already seen in the preceding sections that oral literature of people serve almost similar (the same) functions around the globe, from a look at the research finding of oral arts and cultural backgrounds of different people of the world, we can deduce that all people across the world are patriarchal society. Marinova, (2003), refers to patriarchal society as a violent one, and though the degree may vary, all of them are male dominated. In patriarchal society, female and male have different images: men are dominant and women are invisible, where as these different images of the two sexes are facilitated by the use of language and different genres of oral literature. Dale Spender (1998: 32-33) puts Kramer's (1997) idea that assures the different images of women in the patriarchal society:

Image of one sex is enhanced by the language while that of the other is diminished.; ...women are negative because they are minus male.; ...men's speech is forceful, efficient, blunt, authoritative, serious, effective, sprang and masterful; while, ...women's speech is weak, trivial, ineffectual, tentative, hesitant, hyper polite, euphemistic and is often marked by gossip and gibberish.

Thus, women's image is negative while that of men is positive. And this image is almost similar for all societies in the world. To mention some: Claire, R. Farrer (1975), in Journal of American Folklore, mentioned that the dominant image in American Folklore is their image as, "...

creatures confined to home and hearth; a danger, a witch...”; in Morocco, women’s right to move (live house) is authorized by their husbands and only men enjoy their right to choose spouse from different religions, while polygamy forces women to marry men who are two generations older than they are (Allan, J. (Ed.)1978); Arab women do not know that there is other option of life other than marriage. “ It is by being a wife and a mother that a woman defines herself as a success, not by a career in the working world of men. ...Being honorable means conformity to culturally defined ideals...masculinity and femininity.” (Op. cit.: 286); In China, women are intuitive (‘Yin’) while men are active (‘Yang’) (Janeway, E. 1971); In *Gikuyu* society, “...a woman is a commodity or object whose price is negotiable depending on her state at the time of marriage. (Catherin, M. Ndungo in Mesfin, A. and Abiye, D. 2006: 30); in Ethiopia in general and Oromia in particular, women, like *Gikuyu* women, are depicted in their folk-literature as house wives, mothers, weak, irrational, unintelligent, jealous, unfaithful, foolish, evil,...etc. (Jaylan, H. 2004; Abraham, A. 2007; Emanuel, K. Dogbevi: 2007)

Generally, most women around the world encounter a systematic gender-biased denigration and discrimination in every field of their life - their personal, economic, educational or political right. This marginalized image of women leads us to see how these images are facilitated in a given society through gender-role socialization.

3.6.1.2 Gendered sex-role stereotypes

Before we directly go to the main issue, let us first see the difference between gender and sex.

Sex: refers to the biological distinction (difference) between male and female. (Adanech, K/M. and Azeb, T. in Tsehay, B/S. 1991) Dogbevi (2007) on her part defines sex more pointing the difference in: human genitalia; hormonal and chemical functions; physiological make up and the ability to be pregnant and the ability to give birth that are all naturally endowed. Therefore, sex is some thing that is free from human influence. That is, to be female or male sex cannot be encouraged or discouraged by human beings.

Gender: is defined by Adanech and Azeb in Tsehay B/S (1991) as, “a broad socio-cultural classification of men and women into masculine and feminine respectively.” In other words, gender is a culturally and socially shaped group of expectations, attributes and behaviors assigned to that category of human being by the society into which the child is born through socialization.

Now, let us proceed to the main point with a quotation Reeves used as a chapter opening statement, “The visible world is no longer a reality, and the unseen world is no longer a dream.” (1971: 109) This saying is related to this specific sub-title in that, a stereotype is also not a reality and that, what seemed unthinkable yesterday will also be achievable.

Many scholars have witnessed in their books and articles that gender- stereotypes are passed on socially in various ways and are believed to begin early at the time of birth, through different activities of the family (society), through child stories, school text books, a husband after marriage, etc. For instance, in the Oromo, at the time of birth, people usually ask the sex of the baby and then congratulate the family. Most often, they show their happiness with a sound of a gunshot, if the baby is found to be a boy and say, ‘It does not matter’ if the baby is a girl. Besides this, relatives and neighboring women celebrate the joy by ululating five times for a baby son and only three or four times for a baby daughter. (Jaylan, 2004; Abraham, 2007; Reeves, 1971)

Then after, begins the socialization through folktales, legends, fairy tales, appraisals, punishment, role-modeling and showing. Consequently, Marinova, (2003) says, girls start to play with dolls, learn to deal with house hold duties like preparing food, washing clothes and every activity that is carried out by women (mothers), where as boys are playing with mini cars, weapons and exercise huge/difficult activities and sports, and are thought to be winners in the world. (Ndungo in Mesfin and Abiye (Eds.), 2006; Dogbevi, 2007); Reeves, (1971); Abraham, (2007); Nnaemeka, (1997)) Janeway, (1971) has stated at the very first page of her book, “It is a man’s world. Woman’s place is in the house.” In fact, Oromo mothers have been and are shaping their daughters to be submissive, fragile, a good house wife, and a good mother (as opposed to a good career man) and if they act against this culturally constructed norm, they are considered masculine which is considered as shame. For example, in Maltese people, a woman who sings in front of the public is considered as a prostitute. Similarly, in 1977, Ilfinash Qannoo, a young popular Oromo singer, sang an Oromo bravery song ‘*geerarsa*’ on a stage saying, “*Dubartummaan fafaa ree!*” (“Is it wrong to be woman (female)?), for the first time, and surprised the society. (Sumner, 1995; Jaylan, 2004; Abraham, 2007; Kuwe, in Asafa, J. 1997)

But in reality, sex-role stereotypes usually do not reflect the real differences in the ability and behavior of the two sexes. Janeway considers this an interwoven, mysterious, ‘monstrous’ but all artificial, while Lowell, in Reeves (Ibid), criticized that “we are dealers in a used furniture. In

accepting the old stigma of sex as a critical element of difference between people, we are harking back to the naïve observations of our primitive ancestors, who also believe that the stars were some thing to tell fortunes by.” (pp: 106); “We think in one world and live in another.” (Reeves, 1971: 239) Reeves further questions why the technological influence (material change) on people’s way of life is unable to change the attitude and the traditional social construction that moulds one’s behavior. These and many other comments indicate the existence of change in women’s sex-roles and that it necessitates the reassessment of the societal attitude too. Saying this much about sex-role stereotypes, we will come to the next part, the images of women in different areas of their life.

3.7 Images of women in areas other than proverbs

Women are portrayed negatively not only in proverbs, but also in politics and peace making, in school books, in language, in oral arts like fairy tales, myths and legends, etc., at school and work places, in written literature and language, etc. In most fairy tales, men are glorified and depicted as adventurers, where as women are depicted as witches, deceivers, weak and dependent creatures, and this on the other hand, promotes the socialization of unhealthy sex-role stereotypes. (Jordan, R. and F.A. deCaro, 1986) In the same manner with fairy tales, myths and legends are used among people as justifications for the gendered characterization and sex- roles such as women are unfit to rule a country; deceivers; narrow minded; objects of sex; etc. In the Oromo for example, there is a legend of ‘*Akkoo Manooyyee*’, a great wise woman leader of the Oromo of the then times, whose history of rule was distorted and symbolized by cruelty, arrogance and irrational deeds. After telling this legend, parents usually conclude, ‘Since then, women were not allowed to rule.’ (Researcher’s own knowledge of the legend; Abraham, 2007) Ibrahim Abdi in web-page (<http://www.Google.com.et/Women+Defending+Peace+Conference+22ND+to+24th>), also indicated the absence of women’s participation in peace making saying, “It seems that all African tradition have one thing in common and [that] is women have no role in peace and peace making is only the jurisdiction of male gender.” Sumner, 1995; Sahilu, 2002; Kuwe in Asafa, 1998 and Asmarom, 1973, have mentioned that the same thing is true for Oromo women, especially, after the fall of *Gadaa* system where they used to have a parallel institution known as ‘The *Siinqee* Institution’, with which they used to involve in peace making and defend the violation of their rights.

Regardless of their biased and burdened sex-roles and parental discouragement at home, women's low achievements at school are attributed to a sexual difference in aptitude between male and female. Genet Zewde, in Tsehay, 1991 adds that in different school books, females are portrayed as weak, dependent and inferior, as opposed to the image of male students which is positive. Below is one example from a school text book where boys are active and girls are silent observers.

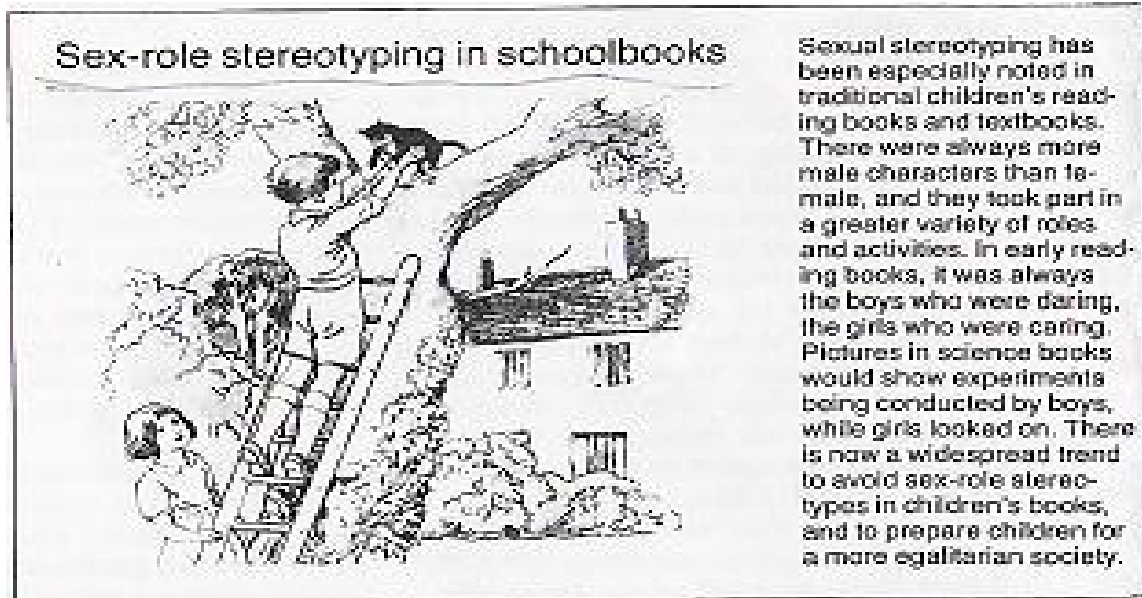


Fig.1

Illustration of sex role stereo-types in school books [Source: Wallace, Kowalski (1997: 46)]

Their image at school also follows them to their higher institution and job places where women are not encouraged (expected) in fields like Medicine, Engineering, Law, etc. and rather more expected in Home Economics, Teaching, Nursing, Secretarial Sciences and other similar occupations. (Genet, Z. in Tsehay, 1991) The gendered images of women are also depicted in different media of which written literatures such as novels and short stories are identical. In these media, the distorted images of women are communicated and therefore, appropriated to the manner of conduct for individuals. (Kuwe in Asafa, 1998) Sexism in language of the society is another way through which negative image of women is portrayed. Asher stated that, "Language reflects the structure of society; unequal society will have unequal language." (vol. 6 1994:3866) For instance, the use of 'man'/'he'/'his' as generics that refer to both sexes in most languages including *Afan Oromo*; the use of male oriented terms while they can in fact work to both sexes. (eg. Mankind for human kind (human race); man power for human resource; salesman for

salesperson; policeman for police officer; chairman to mean chair person; etc. and, ‘*Abbaa seeraa*’ (a judge); ‘*Abbaa Alangaa*’ (an attorney); etc, in Oromo, and the word ‘*Abbaa*’ literally represents the term ‘father’ where there are female judges and attorneys too. (Xiolan Lei, 2006; Asher, E.R. 1994)

What so ever the fields might be, sexist language misrepresents the portrayal of women and men as different but equal human beings. Dale strengthens this idea saying, “Given that language is such an influential force in shaping our world, it is obvious that those who have the power [men] make the symbols and their meanings are in privileged and highly advantaged position.” (1998: 142) For that matter, Barrie, T. and Nancy, H. (1975: 20), indicated the existence of sexism in every society saying, “Anthropologists have found no societies in which women are publicly recognized as equal to or more powerful than men; everywhere men have some authority over women.” Besides, Paula and Francine (1989) stressed that sexist language has a negative influence on women that it encourages the feeling of demeaned and alienated, and keeps the use of this sexist language among every generation that learns (imitates) the language of the society. These and others being the image of women in different fields of life, next we will see the images of women in Oromo proverbs.

3.8 Images of women in Oromo proverbs

To begin with, Courlander mentioned that “...traditional oral literary forms of African peoples have woven out of the substance of human experience...” (1975) Thus Oromo people, like any other society, have their own traditional oral literature through which they reflect their experience in all fields of life and their national character and personality trait. Accordingly, proverbs and sayings are the most popular among the Oromo society. Despite the fact that almost all researchers on a similar topic found out that women are negatively portrayed, the present researcher believes that it is unlikely for a society to totally have a negative attitude towards women who are their mothers, wives, sisters and daughters. Hence, though the number and the frequency of use may differ, the researcher prospects both positive and negative images of women in the Arsi Oromo. It is also suspected that the negative images themselves will have their own justifications in the society. This is because, as Ndungo puts it, “No one wills to have evil off springs.” (Ibid, in Mesfin and Abiye, 2006 (Eds.)), no one wants her/his children grow wrong. Here are some examples of the Oromo proverbs.

- “*Intaloon namuma, badiin dhabuma.*” /“A girl is also a human being, what is bad is sterility.”

Even though this proverb communicates the fact that there is a sex preference in the society, it is more than this in that it has a sound message that it accuses (criticizes) sex preference, which is a positive message.

- “*Dubartiin mootii; waaqni mootii; lafti mootii.*” /“A woman is a queen; God is a king; the earth is a King.”

In this proverb also, the Oromo expressed their respect for women comparing them with God a creator, the earth from which the basic needs for one’s life are obtained.

- “*Kiyya bal’isuun kan isinitti mul’ate, kan isaa bocuun maaf isin dhokate?*”/ “While widening my organ is so simple for you, why it is hidden from you that sharpening his penis is also possible?”

Here, it tells us that the society wants only women to suffer, for mutual benefits where it is possible for men also to share the suffering (difficulty). More vividly, however, it reveals that women are sharp minded than the people around her to see and suggest the easiest and possible solution together with a criticism for their failure to see the possibility. In addition to this, one can also observe from this proverb that women are not assertive enough to oppose something against them directly that she has put her opposition as a comment (suggestion).

- “*Haadha dhabuu mannaa, haadha dhabduu wayya.*”/ “Having a destitute mother is better for a person than not having a mother at all.”

In this proverb, we understand that there is no difference between poor and rich mothers, since their absence equally hurt their children.

- “*Haatifi bishaan hamaa hin qaban.*”/“A mother and water have no evil.”

Here, a mother is compared with water – a universal solvent. It will be foolish to list the importance of water here and the same is true for a mother as it is depicted in this proverb.

The above proverbs are exemplary for the positive images of women. And below are few of the negative ones.

- ❖ “*Dubartiin beektuu hin qabdu beekaa deessi malee.*”/“A woman is not intelligent, but she gives birth to the intelligent ones.”

Through this proverb, the society communicate a message that these intelligent persons are ‘men/males; addressing women’s inferiority to their people.

- ❖ “*Dubartiin lama hin beektu, tokko hin wallaaltu*” / “Women are best at one thing (women are good only at one thing).”

This is quite a generalized idea that women in general are not intelligent. But in real life, even in the world where there is patriarchal influence, there are women who are equally/more equally competent with men.

- ❖ “*Dubartiifi ijoolleen gara golaa*”. / “A woman and children reside to the kitchen.”

This is a kind of saying that clearly reflect the sex-role bias in the society that the kitchen is the main domain of women. In fact in the previous ages and even today, most women of the Oromo were/are homemakers (housewives) being economically dependent on men, who were/are socially made the only income generators.

- ❖ “*Dubartiifi lubni keessummaa hin qabdu.*” / “A woman and a priest are never guests.”

This means, there is no guest of a woman and a priest that they should serve where ever they go.

- ❖ “*Dugda dubartiifi dugda harree irraa nyaatu.*” / “It is from a woman’s and a donkey’s back that every body feeds.”

Here, it is commonly agreed up on that donkeys carry whatever is loaded on them and this proverb is used for the same analogy about women.

However, Kuwe, K., argues that “Oromo women still wield and strong power and control despite the imposition of new value.” (Ibid in Asafa, 1997: 136) She quoted Helcomb’s speech on her interview as: “It is not the way men talked ...it is the way they behaved towards their women that told how much they respected them. If women did not agree, nothing would work; nothing would happen.” (Ibid) If it is as such, then, how much assertive are the Arsi women in order to say no!? We do not know. Let us wait for the finding. Still, Kuwe, K. believes that, “Exposing the hitherto hidden social wound is to prepare it for treatment, to pave the way for the process of healing” (Ibid in Asafa, 1998:173). Similar is the purpose of this study. In the next section we will see the view of feminists about such kind of problems.

3.9 What do feminists say towards the solution?

Definition of feminism is relative that it is difficult to give one right definition. Many scholars defined it in different ways. Few of these are: “Chapman quoting an Arab feminist Nahib Tubia, said, feminism is a state in which females feel free to express their feeling of happiness, uncontrollable anger, revenge and love. (<http://www.helpack.com/feminists.is.html>) For her, it is

a situation in which women use their mental ability, education and skills and, redesign their involvement in the past. For Richards, on the other hands, feminism is the full social, political and economical equality of women and men. And she said that females didn't reach this equality yet (Ibid in Chapman).

Panpadreou, in Foerstel, (1991) (Ed.) puts feminism as: "...an eye glass I have put on my brain to see with clarity what is really being done by those who have the power to deceive..." (PP: 21-22) With this eye glass, she said, she can understand when there is effort to confuse her or to make her dependent, and to take away her voice of protest. As to her, feminism gives her , "...the strength not to fall into that trap...; It gives me courage to speak and write and give my account of the lessons of a Gulf War, its impact on women and the challenges that we face in the days ahead" (Ibid: 22). It is also stated by (Guerin (et. al.), 1998), as feminism aims at disclosing the patriarchal system together with its resulting hatred towards women and evaluates the social, cultural, and psychosexual manifestation of literature and literary criticism.

Feminists' aim is to promote and encourage a female's tradition of writing; to interpret their literary works in order not to be ignored by the male point of view; to rediscover old texts; to analyze female writers and their works from female point of view; to fight sexism in literature; and to increase awareness of the sexual politics of language and style. (Guerin (et al.), 1998) Therefore, the feminists' movement is engaged in the wholesale attack against the fore mentioned sex-role stereotypes, and their consequences. In fact, (Lewis, (1974) <http://www.jstor.org>) confirmed this saying, "The function is revolutionary: the aim is to activate and to initiate change..." And besides this, she indicated that the feminist's movement has utilized folklore material, applying it to the struggle for female equality.

By and large, according to many feminists, changing the old history through awareness creation among the society and revision of images in the past will lead to the solution. Farrer, (Ibid 1975), assures this idea as, "The consciousness of men as well as of women was raised by feminist literature and this led to the current revival of interest in women's rights in all aspects.

To sum up, a look into feminists' view can help in the process of searching for a solution to gender biased attitudes and women's invisibility in a society. So, let us dig for the hidden barriers and bring change using every possible way; for "...what a woman wants and needs is what a man wants and needs..." (Murray, 1973: 28)

3.10 Review of local studies

Despite the fact that these days, there are a number of studies on Oromo proverbs and sayings, most of them focus on the thematic and content analysis and, functions and values of proverbs in the society, paying little or no attention to the portrayal of women in the proverbs. Some of these are mentioned below.

Mengesha, (1992), has dealt only with collection and translation into English of Oromo proverbs and sayings; Sumner, (1995) and Sahilu, (2002), have treated proverbs as a topic in their books paying attention to the value given to proverbs and sayings of the Oromo, and functions of the proverbs indicating that proverbs are most often used by male elders. In the same manner, Ararsa Negesso (1995), has done his senior essay on the “Analysis of some selected Oromo proverbs, with a specific reference to Wolisso area”; Samuel Adola, (2000), on “Some selected Oromo Proverbs around Dembi Dollo” ; Alemu Anno, (1984), on “The Contents of Oromo Proverbs in Jibat and Mecha Awraja”; Ayana Kabeta, on “Some Selected Proverbs and Riddle of Wollegga Oromo”; (all B.A senior essays), have attempted to reveal the socio-cultural relevance of Oromo proverbs, their contents and functions (almost similarly), regardless of any consideration of the images of women in the proverbs they studied. Eshete Gemed, (2007) and Taddese Jalata, (2004, M, A thesis), are no exception for they did not put a light on the gendered image of women in proverbs during their treatment of Oromo proverbs in their dissertation and thesis respectively. Of course they did not hide that proverbs and sayings reflect the wisdom of its society where personality traits are also shaped in accordance with the cultural construction of values in the community.

So, all the above Mentioned local studies are different from this research in that they all have ignored to discuss how women are depicted in the proverbs and all are different in the area of study from this one.

Tufero Bunkure, (2004), has studied on “The Images of women in Arsi Oromo proverbs” for his senior essay and found out that women are portrayed both positively (as mothers and good house-makers) and negatively(as house-wives in general) in proverbs of the Arsi. He also found out that women themselves have accepted and internalized their negative images in proverbs and that these negative images can affect women both socially and psychologically. Though the

topics are almost similar, the two are different both in study area (his is on a single area-Munessa, which is not in West Arsi), and in scope. The current study will be carried out in two districts (*woredas*) of the zone and the society's awareness of the effect of the existing images of women, the possible causes and consequences of the images and the solutions (as it will be suggested by the subjects) to the problem will be sought in addition to the investigation of the existing images of women.

Similarly, Tadele Solomon (2006) has done his senior essay on "The Psychological Impact of Oromo Folklore on Oromo Women" and found out that negative images of women are abundant especially on areas of dependency, ignorance, wickedness, and cursed being, subjects for men and worthlessness. He also asserted that these abnormal and stereotyped references will have a great effect on women's social interaction and self image. His paper also deals with only one aspect of the objectives of this study (the consequences of the images), while it is mainly concerned with the psychological impacts.

Generally, a scope (not as wide as the Ph.D. dissertations and as narrow as senior essays) and the geographical (location) differences are the main differences between these local studies and the current study. In other words, this study is different from the above local studies in that it is not only concerned with the images of women in proverbs and sayings of the target people, but also with the consequences of the images and the society's awareness of these consequences.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis and Interpretation

Since it is believed by the researcher that the society's concept of proverbs, their functions and by whom these proverbs are said, will directly or indirectly influence the images of women in proverbs, the chapter begins with the definition and function of proverbs based on the participants' responses. The issue of 'who often says proverbs' will also be discussed. Then, the images of women as it is depicted in the proverbs collected will be analyzed and interpreted.

4.1 The West Arsi Oromos' concept of proverbs, their functions and by who the proverbs are frequently used (said)

Like the Oromo people as a whole, proverbs are widely used than any other genres of folklore among the West Arsi Oromo. According to the respondents, a proverb is *a way of speech*, which they use to add flavor to their speech so as to add strength to their issues. The elders mentioned that the Oromo proverbs are as old as the people themselves. All the respondents quoted the same proverb, "*Jabbileen bifa Kormaati; mammaaksi bifa dubbiiti.*" ("Calves resemble a bull; proverbs resemble a speech/a case."), to define the term 'proverb' ('*mammaaksa*').

Regarding its functions, all the respondents stated that proverbs serve so many functions in the Oromo in general and the Arsi in particular. Accordingly, proverbs in the Arsi are used at public meetings and legal proceedings to bring cases, explain the cases through analogy and to facilitate decision making in a very condensed phrases or sentences with in a short period of time. Similarly, when used at home, proverbs serve as a medium through which parents mould their children into responsible members of their community. In other words, the society uses proverbs to advise their children by discouraging their bad habits and by praising the good ones. One of the elders stated this function saying, "*Abbichi itti mammaakamu yoo dogoggoree jiraate dogoggora isaa hubatee irraa akka sirraa'uuf itti mammaakama. Gorfachuufi jechuudha.*"

(“Proverbs are used to enable the person to whom it is said to recognize her/his mistakes and get correct herself/himself. That is to advise them.”)

Eg. *“Dhiyaatteef qilee hin utaan, bareeddeef intala haadhaa hin fuudhani.”*

(“However shallow it is, one cannot jump a ravine; and however beautiful she is, one cannot marry his sister.”)

So, the functions of proverbs and sayings in the West Arsi Oromo go inline with the didactic and aesthetic functions discussed in chapter two. Here are the proverbs the Oromo use to show the immense functions and importance of proverbs and sayings in their society.

- a. *“Mammaaksi ibsa / hiika dubbiiti: tokko dubbii fida, tokko dubbii fixa.”* (“A proverb is an explanation / interpretation of a speech: one brings a case; the other concludes it.”)
- b. *“Mammaaksi of argaa uummataati; itti mul’isa.”* (“A proverb is a mirror of the society; it shows them their own reflections.”)
- c. *“Mammaaksi soogidda dubbiiti.”* (“A proverb is a salt of a speech.”)
- d. *“Ittoon soogidda hin qabneef dubbiin Oromoo yoo mammaaksa hin qabne, hin mi’aawu.”*
 (“The Oromo speech with out a proverb is tasteless like a stew with out salt.”)

As it is the case for the whole Oromo tribes, the elders assured that proverbs are most often used (said) by male elders in the West Arsi Oromo. As it can be observed from the table below, the majority of the respondents of the selected schools (65.8%) also agreed that fathers and community elders usually use proverbs while 30.7% said both fathers and mothers use proverbs. These groups also indicated that though mothers also use proverbs, they are the male elders (fathers) who enjoy the frequent use of proverbs both at home and outside the home.

Table2. Teachers’ and students’ belief about the frequent use of proverbs in West Arsi

2. In your area, who often says (uses) proverbs (father, mother, or children)? What do you think is the reason behind this?			
Items	Students	Teachers	Total

		NMS	%	NFS	%	NT	%	Grand total	%
a	Fathers (male elders)	379	63.3	141	73.1	12	75	532	65.8
b	Mothers and fathers	192	32	52	26.9	4	25	248	30.7
c	Fathers, mothers and children	28	4.7	-	-	-	-	28	3.5
Total		599	100	193	100	16	100	808	100

According to the respondents, this is due to the reason that men have a bulk of experience that they gained from their daily involvement in different social, political and economic issues of their community where as women have no such chances except for their daily routines in their socially determined domain - the kitchen. The other reason they mentioned is that most elders have longer ages that enabled them to accumulate much of the wisdom of the society. Here, though it is not wrong to say longer age contributes to one's knowledge of the wisdom of the society, since it is possible for both men and women to live long, long age should have enabled women to use the proverbs in the same way men do. But women who are old enough were observed unable to say a single proverb. Therefore, the prevalent use of proverbs only by the male individuals in the community must be attributed to the less involvement of women into the external world where there are variety of issues that promote the use of proverbs in diversified contexts, as opposed to men.

4.2 Images of women in proverbs and sayings of West Arsi Oromo

4.2.1 Image of women as mothers

Just as it is true for all African societies in general (stated by Abreham, A. 2007 and Ndungo, C. in Mesfin, A. and Abiye, D. 2006) and the Oromo people in particular, being a mother is a source of great respect and satisfaction for the Arsi Oromo women. Of course, the primary role of a woman in the Arsi is to give birth to children and raise them, and by the same token, the social status and acceptance of women in their community is also determined by her ability to

give birth to children, especially baby sons. Therefore, it is unlucky for a woman to be barren as she will be forced to face the difficulties that come from her in-laws and the society as a whole (Kuwe, K. in Asafa J. 1997). For example, a barren woman who was disappointed by being called by her first name for long years after her marriage said, “*Waan Waaqaa hin beekanii, haadha waaqoo naan jedhaa.*” (Refer to me as “*Waaqoo’s Mother*”, for no one knows how *Waaq* makes out things.”) From this proverb one can understand that being called as somebody’s mother is of a great value and is a sign of respect for a fertile woman. So, it is not easy for a barren woman to live her life long being deprived of such a valuable mental satisfaction and the socially respected status. Here are some of the proverbs that refer to motherhood.

- a. “*Haadha duutee mannaa haadha maraatte wayya.*” (“A mad mother is better to a dead one.”)
- b. “*Haatiif bishaan battii (badduu) hin qaban.*” (“A mother and water have no evil.”)
- c. “*Haadha dhabuu mannaa haadha dhabduu wayya.*” (“To have a destitute mother is better than not having a mother at all.”)
- d. “*Namni haadha qabu nama Waaqa qabu.*” (“To have a mother is to have God.”)
- e. “*Michuu haadha ormaarra badduu haadha ofii wayya.*” (“A worthless (bad) mother of one’s own is better than a friendly (good) step-mother.”)
- f. “*Haati harma guuti malee harka hin guutu.*” (“It is a mother’s breast which weans, not her hands.”)
- g. “*Abbaan gindo’o, haati gingilcha’a.*” (“A father is like a flat winnowing basket (impermissible/firm), and a mother is like a sieve (tolerant).”)
- h. “*Haati ofii Kafana ofiiti.*” (“A mother is one’s own dress (shelter).”)

All the above proverbs talk about the kindness of a mother. Proverbs (a), (b) and (c) show that let alone a healthy and wealthy mother, even the existence of a destitute and a mad mother is better than not having a mother at all and proverbs (e), (g) and (h), express that no one is like one’s own mother, even a father, that a worthless mother is preferred to a friendly step-mother and, a father is depicted as an opaque material to show the firmness and cruelty of fathers as compared to mothers. The kindness of a mother is expressed in various ways in proverbs. Some show a mother as a loving human kind, some others show the material support and the incomparable and unbearable suffer of a mother during pregnancy, delivery and child rearing. Moreover, some

other proverbs communicate the fact that a mother is a universal symbol of protection as it is stated in proverb (f) which means though a mother may stop to feed her breast, she never stops to prepare her children other types of food; (g) and (h) which send a message that a mother is tolerant (according to the elders) that she forgives (passes) many of her children's mistakes; covers their guilt and therefore, is compared with a sieve and one's own dress. However, metaphorically, proverb (g) is also used to mean women are not honest (dependable) because they do not keep secret, whereas men are serious, impermeable and dependable. In general, the idea of the above proverbs is concluded by proverb (d) where a mother is with God – a creator: “*Namni haadha qabu nama waaqa qabu.*” (“To have a mother is to have God.”)

As we can observe from the above proverbs and their discussion, image of a woman as a mother is extremely positive and even a sacred one. In fact we rarely find (or do not find) proverbs that negatively depict mothers. However, when we critically look at these proverbs, it is not difficult to recognize that the responsibility of child bearing and bringing up is totally left to women thereby defining the domain of women to be the home (kitchen). Moreover, these proverbs can also impose this stereotyped sex – roles that women's duty is always to procreate and perform household chores up on the society, the new generation, and up on women themselves so that these stereotyped sex- roles are felt and accepted as normal social conditions to which they have to conform. Generally, despite the fact that such proverbs play their own role in the process of the socialization of the biased attitudes of a given society towards the image of women as mothers is positive and the people also use them exactly to mean what the proverbs say about mothers. This idea goes in line with the works of Abreham, A. (2007), Jaylan, H. (2004, 2005), and Ndungo, C. in Mesfin, A. and Abiye, D. (2006).

4.2.2 Women as housewives and co-wives

In the proverbs and sayings of the Arsi Oromo, women are depicted both positively (but rarely) and negatively (very often) as wives, and almost negatively as co-wives and step-mothers. In more than half of the proverbs and sayings that are collected from the elders, the image of wives exactly adheres to the image of women as wives in *Gikuyu* oral narratives by Kabira, W. M. She indicated that, “In the *Gikuyu* Oral narratives, wives are generally portrayed among other things as: unreliable, disobedient, irresponsible, disloyal, disagreeable, adulterous, cunning, senseless, easily cheated, forgetful, not dependable, evil, tricksters, lazy, etc.” (Ibid, in Bukenya, and (et al.)

(Eds.) (1994). “As co-wives, they are ogres, cruel and malicious.” (Ibid). Below are a number of proverbs that depict women negatively and few of those which depict them positively. Let us start by the positive ones.

- a. “*Dubartiin faaya dhiiraati.*” (“A woman is a jewel of a man.”)
- b. “*Dubartiin gaachana dhiiraati.*” (“A woman is a shield of a man.”)
- c. “*Namni niitii hin qabne raasaadhaa galee yoo qe’eetti dhiyaatu na’a.*” (“One who does not have a wife is unhappy any time he approaches his compound.”)
- d. “*Nyaanni soogidda malee, manni dubartii malee hin bareedu.*” (A house without a woman is like a diet (meal) without salt.”)

All of the above proverbs show how much women are the spinal cord of men (or a house hold). In the first two proverbs, women are depicted to be very important members of the community, especially for their husbands. As far as the skill of house keeping and feeding a family is solely the duty of women in many patriarchal societies, it is not surprising if women expertise in this area and are praised and appreciated for their good performances. The next two proverbs (c) and (d) still strengthen the same idea with the first two. Proverb (d) compares a house without wife with a diet without salt (tasteless), as a result of which in proverb (c), the person feels unhappy every time he comes back to an untidy and lifeless house. From these proverbs it is possible to deduce that every one performs well, things (activities) at which she/he has an experience for a longer period of time. That is, women, as they were trained to perform reproductive works at home, they are excellent at the field while men were trained to perform productive works outside the home, they are excellent or very good at their field too. Therefore, had it not been for the biased desire of the patriarchal society to put women under subjection of men, the above fact by itself should have led them to the construction of the attitude that women and men are two complementary elements of a community, not inferior or superior to one another.

Besides, these proverbs are considered to be the positive portrayals of women only when they are seen from the angle of their literal meaning and under the conditions where this improper and biased work division is internalized as a normal one. Otherwise, like that of the motherhood, all the four proverbs show women’s identity not as an individual, but in terms of their importance to

men and, they still facilitate the conditioning of women's character to internalize the socially constructed domain and status of women. In fact, except for some of the elders, almost all of my respondents labeled these proverbs as examples of a positive portrayal of women. Of course they are right as far as the proverbs were used by the people to praise a good performance and to reward the behavior for a further motivation being unconscious of its adverse effects on the other extreme.

- a. "*Dubartiin faaya manaati.*" ("A woman is a jewel of a house.")
- b. "*Mana onaa mannaa niitii ontuu wayya.*" ("It is better to have a deserted wife than an empty house.")
- c. "*Niitiin utubaa manaat.*" ("A wife is the pillar of a house.")
- d. "*Maasaan haati manaa hinto'anne hin atootu.*" ("A farm that is not handled by a woman (a wife) does not last longer.")
- e. "*Mootiin dhagaa maali, soogidda; mootiin namaa eenyu, dubartii.*" ("The king of stones is a common salt; the king of human beings is a woman.")
- f. "*Kaamettiin waan bona keesse ganna nyaatti.*" ("A wise woman consumes in the summer, what she reserved during the winter.")
- g. "*Kan dubartiin ergite du'a hin sodaatu.*" (He who is sent by a woman do not fear death.)

In these proverbs also the Arsi projected women's strongest sides in managing things in the house and the garden. Proverbs (a), (d) and (f) reflect the strength (ability) of women that in proverb (a), the women's ability to beautify her house is glorified while in proverbs (d) and (f), their ability to control, save and reserve the seasonal harvest is indicated. The people are therefore, reasonable when they say that a wife is the pillar of a house, ("*Niitiin utubaa manaati.*") (c); a woman is the king of human beings ("*Mootiin dhagaa maali, soogidda, mootiin namaa maali, dubartii.*") (e); and that it is better to have a bad wife than living in an empty house ("*Mana onaa mannaa niitii ontuu wayya.*") (b). As a matter of fact, in their focus group discussion, the elders have underlined the fact that nothing goes properly at the absence of women and that nothing happens if they are not willing. Generally, they referred to them as "our kings; kings of all human kind" ("*Mootiin dhiiraa, mootiin ilmanamaa dubarti.*"). This exactly coincides with what Kuwe quoted from Holcomb's argument in her article, 'The Siingee

Institution' in Asafa Jalata's (ed.) (1997) 'Journal of Oromo Studies') that, "It is not the way men talked,... it is the way they behaved towards their women that told how much they respected them. If women did not agree, nothing would work; nothing would happen." (Ibid: 136) The following proverb also illustrates the decidedness and strong stand women have in order to achieve (get done) their objectives (plans). - "*Kan dubartiin ergite du'a hin sodaatu.*" (g) ("He who is sent by a woman do not fear death.")

The interesting point in these proverbs is that, though the elders used them to show the strong side of women, the proverbs and sayings still reflect the hidden social ideology that is embedded in them. For example, the elders used the term '*Mootii*' (a king) to show that women are extremely powerful in making decisions in their house, where they could use the parallel term '*giiftii*' (a queen) that refers to women. Moreover, all the proverbs perpetuate the socialization of stereotyped sex-roles that the domain of women is the home.

To sum up, it is hardly possible to find proverbs in which women are absolutely portrayed in the positive way. However, these are some of the relatively positive images of women in the proverbs and sayings of the West Arsi Oromo. Of course, the negative image is the hidden one and is not recognized by all the respondents. By this, let us now proceed to the negative images.

According to the information found from the teacher and student interviewees and the focus-group discussion of the elders from two *woredas* of West Arsi zone, at the earlier times, when the Oromo were ruled by the *Gadaa* system, Oromo women were much respected and the Oromo never undermined them. The elders have indicated how much women were respected like this: "*Oromoon dur dubartii isaatiif hamaa hin turre; Oromoon dur dubartii isaa hin tumu; yoo tume lunna deetti jedhu. Oromoon dur dubartii dura farad hin yaabu, daadhii hin dhugu, aanan hin dhugu, foon hin nyaatu. Kun hunduu kabajaa isaaniitiifi; isaan malee eessaa dhaquu hin dandeenyu.*" (G/Amlaak Guyyee and Huseen Badhaasoo) "In the earlier times, the Oromo men were not bad (cruel) to their women; they never beat their wife for it is believed that if one beats his wife, she will give birth to a coward; the Oromo man never ride a horse before women; they never drink mead before them; they never drink milk before them; they never eat meat before them. This is all for their respect; with out them, we cannot go any where."

In addition to this, the elders mentioned that the Oromo made work-division publicly to relieve women from the difficulty of fighting with and escaping from wild animals; carrying huge stones to kill animals for food and so forth, at the time of their pregnancy and delivery. The elders asserted that the saying, “*Intalaafi ijoolleen (meeshaan) gara golaa*” (“A woman and children (or a house furniture) reside to the kitchen.”) was said after this role division based on the fact that women worked at home and children stayed there with their mothers. The elders therefore attributed the existence of the undermining proverbs and sayings in the Oromo to the cultural adoption and mixing that came to them with the rule of Minelik II. Gebre Amlaak Guyyee and Huseen Badhaasoo have justified their idea of cultural mixing using this proverb: “*Dubartiin furdoo malee guddoo hin qabdu.*” (“Women may be plump, but not great (respectable).”)

They said that, it is the adulterous non-Oromo man who succeeded in seducing a wife of the respectable Oromo man that uttered this proverb to show that women are not faithful to their husband, regardless of their high status in the society. So, this proverb was considered by the elders to be appropriate for such women. Here, the elders have stressed the point that, even after such negative proverbs were socialized and became popular, the Oromo commonly use them in order to discourage such characters and to advise their children and women with analogy, but not to undermine them.

At last the elders and other subjects of the study remarked that since the status of women and the environmental condition of the people at the then times and this generation are ever changing, it is better to modify or leave out the proverbs that do not go with the context of the present time by teaching the society the effect of these proverbs and sayings and by educating women so that they can question violation of their rights. Thus, in order to take this action, it is necessary to examine which ones are harmful and which ones are not. Below are proverbs and sayings of this kind which are gathered from the elders.

- a. “*Dubartiin dhiira deessi malee dhiira hin geettu.*” (“A woman gives birth to a man, but she is not equal to him”)
- b. “*Dubartiin deessuu malee beektuu hin qabdu.*” (“A woman may be fertile, but not knowledgeable.”)

- c. “*Beerri dhirsa du’e dhiisii sa’a gu’eyyuu hin beektu.*” (“A woman does not notice the death of her husband and when her cow becomes dry.”)

In these proverbs, it is reflected that the primary duty of a woman is to procreate and are not equal to, and as knowledgeable as men, whom they bore by themselves. For example, the last proverb (c) depicts women as the one who does not distinguish between a husband who is dead and felt asleep. Similarly, in the dependant clause of this proverb, women are depicted as silly minded and ignorant members of the society, who are unable to learn from experience. But when we look at these proverbs from the elders’ point of view; since women were willingly made to stay at home, and their experiences were also limited to only the reproductive works, it will not be surprising if they fail to compete with men for the productive works of the external world of men. For that matter, men are also not competent at house chores. However, the extremely exaggerated exemplifications with which women are compared in proverbs must be used as such deliberately to hinder (discourage) such behaviors. Therefore, it was argued by the elders that these proverbs were appropriate to the previous generation and that it is up to the present generation to improve them according to the existing social reality.

Women are also portrayed as inferior to men in other proverbs like:

- a. “*Fuudhaniif niitii hin taatu; nutiin tama dhirsaafta naatu.*” (“Being married cannot assure a good wife; a good wife is the one who gets scared of her husband (who respects him”).)
- b. “*Kan hanga ofii beektu dhiiraan maqoo hin teettu.*” (“She who knows her level (status) would not sit beside a man”).)
- c. “*Dubartiin hin firristu.*” (“Women do not come (make) first.”)
- d. “*Dhalaan fardaafi beerri ulfina hin beektu.*” (“A female horse and a woman do not know when one respects them.”)
- e. “*Kasaraa fi dubartiin jilbaa gaditti.*” (“A hook (a carved walking stick) and women are better when they are handled below the knee.”)

From proverbs (a), (b) and (c), one can easily understand that, to be considered as a good wife, women must respect (even get scared of or fear) their husbands and at any occasion, they should not come or act first (ahead) of him. Whereas proverbs (d) and (e) are used to scorn women who failed to abide by this rule (law of patriarchy), where only men are favored and are powerful.

The contribution of these proverbs and sayings to the construction of a negative images of women is that, being used repeatedly, they condition women themselves to accept as normal, the biased attitude the society have towards them and to act accordingly. In this case, they are trained to accept that they are inferior to men and should take a lower and an inferior position in their community.

The following proverb (saying) is a typical example of women's submission to (acceptance of) their inferior position in their community.

“*Muramtee dhiiraaf didee, gumaa sagalii mammaaksumaan fixe.’ jette jaartiin.*” (“I could not give decision because it is against our custom; however, I have ended the vengeance of many people only by using a proverb (*mammaaksa*).”)

The interesting point here is that, the elders brought this proverb as an example of proverbs that depict women as intelligent and assertive ones. In fact, the proverb is about an assertive and bright minded woman who attended a meeting with male elders and solved a problem that the elders could not solve. But if we look at the proverb in another way round, we can understand that even the wise, intelligent and confident women were made to accept and internalize their inferiority, in this case, the social attitude that women never make decisions during dispute settlement and legal proceedings. This result is similar with Nhungo's (op.cit) finding of the image of wives in Gikuyu proverbs.

Women are also portrayed as weak and dependent members of their community. Here are few proverbs that illustrate this idea.

- a. “*Harreen moonaa hinqabdu, moonaa loonii gali; dubartiin mana hin qabdu mana dhirsaa gali.*” (“A donkey does not have a corral, it shares with the cattle; a woman does not have a house, she lives in a man's (husband's) house.”)
- b. “*Isiinuu horii horiihin qadhaabbattu.*” (“She does not own a wealth as she is a wealth by herself.”)
- c. “*Nadheeniif faradoon galgala baddi.*” (“Women and a horse are helpless at the old age.”)

The first proverb (a) shows the fact that in many patriarchal society, women do not have their own house because they stay at their parents' home up to their marriage and leave for their

husband's home because of the inevitable marriage. According to the focus- group discussion of the elders, in the West Arsi zone, as it is true for all Oromo society, women cannot be heiress their parents for it is believed that women will take their parents' property to the alien family to whom they marry. This is stated by one of the elders as follows: "*Dubartin waan heeruntuuf akka alagaatti ilaalamti. Akka seera keenyaatti, dubartiin maatii hin dhaaltu. Sababiin isaas, intalli yoo heeruntu qabeenya isii alagaaf fudhattee waan deemtuufi. 'Dadhabullee ejersumatu dongora.' jedha oromoon; hagamuu dadhabaa yoo ta'e dhiirumatu warra dhaala.*" ("Women are considered as aliens because they will get married to the alien family. According to our custom, women don not inherit property from their parents. This is because they take their property with them when they marry. The Oromo say: 'However weak he might be it is a man who puts the basement; however feeble he might be it is the male who inherits his family.'). (Nageessoo Jaarsoo Soonchoo, the "*Abbaa Gadaa*" (*Gadaa* leader) of Arsi Negelle.) So, it is unlikely for the Oromo women in general and the Arsi women in particular to claim property ownership. Consequently, women will become economically dependent on their husband. The next proverb, (b) literally, shows that women themselves are worthless and lazy, that they cannot produce and own property. Whereas metaphorically, it reflects that women are the commodity that their husbands claim to possess. This is so due to the bride price which the male pay (give to) her parents during marriage. The last proverb indicates the fate of women who have been loyal servants of their husband and family at old age. Just as a horse is simply left on the field for scavengers, women, especially the barren ones have no one to help them at their old age. Even though to become an old person is inevitable for both males and females, it is the property ownership that makes the two different. The one who owns property (a man) can hire a servant and help himself, but this is not possible for the old woman who was a property of other person by herself. For example, the following proverb is used by the society to hinder women's property ownership and the over action and mobility of a beautiful woman. "*Ka tafa qabduuf ka lafa qabdu hin teessu.*" ("A gorgeous woman and a woman who owns a plot of land would not be easily handled.") Here, the use of such proverbs, suppresses women's right to property ownership and promotes their dependency on men.

According to my respondents, the problem of powerlessness of women at old age is solved among the Arsi by the marriage of second wife. Since it is believed that the second wife is a help (an assistant) of the senior wife, the Arsi women do not openly oppose their husband's second

(or third ...) marriage. However, even if the senior wife does not oppose the marriage, there is an implicit (hidden) sense of competition and jealousy between (among) the co-wives. Let us see few examples in the following proverbs.

- a. *“Irbaa duraa, gursommeettiin mooyyee qoraafti.”* (“A re-married divorcee fumigates a mortar at the early days of her marriage.”)
- b. *“Dhadhaa jedhanillee keennee, ilma jedhanillee deennee, raasuu hanqadhemoo, kaayuu hanqadhemoo, qayyachuu hanqadhe?” jette haati manaa hangafti.* (“I have reserved enough butter, I have also born a son; did I fail to churn; did I fail to reserve; or am I unable to incense myself?” said a senior wife.”)
- c. *“Gamureettii kottee; gursommeettii kokkee” jetteenii jennaan, “Ciicoo golaa fuudhanii, situffannaan na fuudhani’ Jetteen.”* (“When the senior wife says ‘A re-married young horse’ to her new coming fellow, the younger one also responded, ‘He married me because you are worthless (the despised one)’”).

The first proverb is about the showdown (competition) between the co-wives in order to keep their husband’s attention towards themselves. Hence, the proverb shows the effort the new coming wife made to get more acceptance than the senior wife by doing things in different ways that she was criticized as fumigating a mortar which is not normally done and necessary. When seen from another angle, the same proverb indicates the society’s comparison of the female genital organ with a mortar and that the re-married lady fumigates her sex organ, not a real mortar. This is still the indication of the effort co-wives make to get much acceptance from their husband. The second proverb (saying) (b) on the other hand shows when the senior wife questions (opposes) her husband’s need for a second wife not straight forward, but through a proverb. As far as she is questioning her failure and what makes the second wife different and preferable, this situation later on leads to prejudice where the two women (co-wives) start to attack each other (especially at the absence of their husband), just as it is shown in the last proverb (c). In this proverb, the senior wife insulted the new fellow saying “a re-married young horse”. Here, the term ‘re-married young horse’ is a metaphorical expression which the woman in the proverb used to indicate that the young divorcee is a prostitute who often has sex with every one like an animal (a horse). However, this is not the only case; the woman might have used the proverb to annoy her fellow only because she is jealous of her being chosen. At the

same time, the new comer also told the senior wife that she is chosen because the later was not a competent (a good) wife. Generally, women as co-wives are depicted as jealous and malicious creatures in these proverbs of the Arsi.

This feeling of hatred and jealousy between (among) the co-wives later on leads to cruelty and malicious actions on step-children because it is considered as a revenge on the mother of the children. This case is illustrated in the following Arsi proverb. “*Michuu haadha ormaarra badduu haadha ofii wayya.*” (“A worthless (bad) mother of one’s own is better than a friendly step-mother.”) From, this proverb, it is possible to deduce that the society communicated their fear that, however friendly the step-mother might be, no one knows when she turns an ogre, from their experience. Kofale elders also indicated in their focus- group discussion that step-mothers are cruel to their step-children due to their hatred to their co-wives and that they are always trying to hurt (even poison) the step children. Here is the proverb stated by the elders about a step-child:

“*Aayyaan buutii raaftee, aabboon buutoo bitee, yaa rabbi, sa’a kiyya ‘Cim’isiif sabaree kiyya ‘Cinqisi.*” (“My step-mother is churning a viper, my father has bought a problem (the viper); oh my God, spare me with my cow ‘*Cim’isii*’ and my gourd (jar) ‘*Cinqisi*’.)

Hence, the step-mother ordered her husband to buy a viper in order to kill the step-child when the viper bursts as she churns it with the milk. The elders explained however, that, the step-child foreknown her plan and disappeared with his cow and gourd before the viper exploded. What is surprising here is that, the step-mother did not notice the fact that she will also be poisoned by the viper as she was churning it herself. This indicates how the society portrayed the magnitude of the step-mother’s cruelty.

In the following proverbs, women are depicted as quarrelsome (trouble makers).

- a. “*Ibiddi dubartiin qabsiifte hin dhaamu.*” (“A fire lit by women cannot be extinguished (never quenches)”.)
- b. “*Beeraaf ijolleetu walitti nama buusa.*” (“Women and children are cause of contradiction.”)

- c. *“Ta qaawwa qabdu qaaqa hin dhabdu.”* (“One who owes a female genital is always troublesome (talkative).)”)
- d. *“Ani maaf dubartii ta’e ka badduu hin hojjanne; ati maaf dhiira taate ka badduu ani hojjaddhe naa hin obsine?”* (“Why am I found to be a woman if I do not make a blunder; and why are you found to be a man if you do not endure (tolerate) my blunders?”)”)

Proverbs (a) and (b) show that women and children always set (pit) men against one another, and even the quarrel that occurred because of them touches every one and never ends. Here, women are contrasted with children who know nothing about social life and who did not reach the age of logical thinking. In other words, it indicates that women are poor in reasoning and are illogical. In the third proverb, women in general are depicted as trouble makers or talkative. And in the last proverb (saying), we observe when women themselves accept and refer to them selves as trouble makers. That means, women’s use of such proverbs and sayings implies that making a mistake is inevitable for women. This shows how much women are made to internalize the society’s biased attitudes to wards them. Therefore, these proverbs serve not only to reflect women as trouble makers, but also to socialize their images for further acceptance and usage.

In addition to their image as trouble makers, women are also portrayed as unreliable, unpredictable, unreasonable (irrational), and as an irresponsible group of the society in many other proverbs and sayings of the Arsi Oromo. Below are few examples.

- a. *“Beeraaf ijooleetti icitii hin himani.”* (“A secret should not be told to women and children”)
- b. *“Tiruun kan jaalatantu nama hudha.”* (“It is the liver that you like which chokes you.”)
- c. *“Beerri yookaa nyaattee garaa qabdi; yookaa olkaa’attee golaa qabdi.”* (“The reason that women do not share a meal with their husband is that: one, they must have eaten; or they must have reserved in a kitchen”)

In the first proverb the unreliability of women is reflected. That is, it is believed by the society that if one tells a secret to a woman, she will tell it secretly to her concubines. Here, women are depicted not only as unreliable, but also as ignorant and irresponsible ones. In the next proverbs (b) and (c), women are introduced as unpredictable, that in proverb (c) men are warned (advised) to suspect even their partners (lovers), giving the analogy that a liver chokes a person while

he/she likes it; and in proverb (c), women are suspected to eat in the absence of their husbands. As we have already discussed in the previous section, women take the responsibility of feeding their family. According to my respondents (elders), it is for this responsibility that women lag behind to eat, in order to make sure whether the family had (ate) to their fill or not. It is pitiable that women's kindness turned out to spoil their personality. Such practices, really, are not good to the psychology of the subjects as far as they are negatively criticized instead of being praised for their kindness. It rather confuses them not to differentiate between what is good and bad.

Women are also considered as unreasonable and irrational in the following proverbs of the Arsi.

- a. "*Mootummaan dubartii bishaan ol yaafti.*" ("The government of women makes water flow upward.")
- b. "*Dubartiin yoo dhugaa argattes yoo dhabdes ni boossi.*" ("Women weep both when they are denied of justice and when they are given justice.")
- c. "*Ollaa hedoo dhirsa heexoo obaafta.*" ("Having seen from her neighbors, she forced her husband to drink "*heexoo*" (a traditional medicine for tape-worm).")

In these proverbs similarly, women are portrayed as the one who does not know what she/he is doing and why she/he is doing it. For instance, in proverb (a) women are shown as uncritical members of their society who request their people (try for themselves) something that is impossible in their rule, that they are proved incompetent and irrational to rule a country. The next proverb (b) also indicates that women are unreasonable that they weep both when they are happy and sad. However, it is important to ask the reason behind their weeping. According to the elders, as it is the case for many patriarchal societies, in the Arsi Oromo also, women are not encouraged to publicly speak and explain their feelings. And since they are considered as inferior to men, their issues are not given due consideration, and they are trained through experience to conceal their feelings and therefore, weeping will be their only means of expression of their feelings, both happiness and sorrow. The elders added that though the proverb shows what used to exist in the society, women have developed a behavior that was being cherished by the community and therefore, they were right. In their focus-group discussion the elders (both that of Arsi Negelle and that of Kofale) agreed up on that the proverb does not represent women of this generation and that things are being changed now. The third proverb also strengthens the same idea that women do not know well what they are doing and why they are doing it that the woman

in the proverb has forced her husband to drink the medicine only because she saw her neighbors doing it. This is however, the literal meaning of the proverb. The proverb communicates a hidden message that the lady has embittered her husband being so eager to get (do) whatever she sees from her neighbors. This, similarly, depict women as foolish, unreasonable and irresponsible. This point is also discussed by the elders and they said that by now, the proverb is used as an example with which the family is taught not to develop such characters. For instance, the following proverb is used to discourage adultery.

“Ofiifuu ciniinsifiattaa, achumaan loon kiyyallee naa eegi.’ jedhe namtichi haadha manaatiin.” (“While you are in labor, please keep my cattle also on your way’ said the husband to his wife.”)

At first glance to this proverb, one can understand that women are so dependable that they are trusted to keep the cattle even when they are in difficulty (birth pang). However, according to the elders’ explanation, this proverb is about a woman who is in labor to give birth to her concubine’s baby. And he is the husband who asked her to keep the cattle while she is in a birth pang for he knows that she is pregnant from another person. Here, it may seem that it is cruelty to give her such an order, but from this proverb it is important to notice how much the people are tolerant towards their women that the person has lived with her having known that she is pregnant for another man.

In the same way to the above proverbs (a), (b) and (c), women are revealed as nonsense and easily cheated individuals in the following proverbs.

- a. *“Dubartiin marqaa miidhagsiti malee dubbii hin miidhagsitu.”* (“A woman may make good porridge, but she cannot make a good speech.”)
- b. *“Dubartiin qalbii tokkittii qabdi; sunuu yoo dhungatan harkaa baddi.”* (“A woman has a single sense (mentality), and she loses it when one kisses her.”)
- c. *“Qalbiin beeraa akkuma harma ishee rarraati.”* (“Women’s mentality (thought) suspends just as their breasts hang in the air.”)
- d. *“Gargaarsa argannaan garbittiin majjee dhoksiti.”* (“A foolish woman (maid servant) hides the callus of her grinding mill when one offers her a help.”)

Through these proverbs, the image of women as senseless and illogical (as in (a) above); as mentally weak (foolish) who get spoiled (conditioned) easily (as in (b) and (c) above), and as an extremely foolish person who even does not know (like) when some one offers him/her a help, will be perpetuated. But it is unlikely that all women do not make good speech. Besides, the people use two contradicting proverbs regarding this point. In these proverbs, they refer to women and their speech as foolish, senseless and illogical, where as in other proverbs they refer to them as wise and dangerous (deceivers). For example, in a proverb (saying) which says, “*Malli mala dubartii, humni human bishaanii siif haa ta’u*” (Be wise as a woman, and forceful as water.”), women are depicted as extremely wise ones who know ways to every thing. Therefore, though one cannot dare to say the society is confused about women, the images of women in proverbs and sayings are sometimes confusing that the image in one proverb contradicts with that in the other.

In general, the image of women as a wife is so time taking and a wider portion that it is difficult to cover all within such a narrow topic. However, from the proverbs discussed above, we can deduce that the image of women as a house wives is a negative one, where they are portrayed as unintelligent, weak, unreasonable, unreliable, unfaithful, trouble makers, dependent, irresponsible etc. And they are depicted as jealous, cruel and malicious as co-wives and step-mothers and this is quite similar with the findings of Ndungo, C. in Mesfin, A. and Abiye, D. (eds.) (2006) and Kabira, W. M. in Bukenya and (et al.) (Eds.) (1994), on the images of women in Gikuyu oral narratives.

4.2.3 Image of women as girls

The result of the interview and the questionnaire from the selected teachers and students and that of the elders’ discussion confirmed that the Oromo in general and the Arsi in particular are patriarchal society. And in any patriarchal society, as it is already discussed in chapter two, there is no equality of men and women. The male is considered a symbol of power in the society, whereas women do not have self identity and are described in terms of their husband. This inferiority starts at the very first day of her conception. Below are some Arsi proverbs and sayings that reflect this patriarchal ideology.

- a. “*Maaf callistan akka mana intalti itti dhalattee?*” (“Why are you quite like the house to which a girl is born?”)
- b. “*Amma teenyu intala haa dhalchinu.*” (“Let us father a daughter than sitting idle.”)
- c. “*Gara laafettiin intalaa, obboleessarraa ulfoofti.*” (“A soft heartened girl conceives from her brother.”)
- d. “*Intala qaraate fi farad maraate jalaa nu baraari.*” (“May God save us from an educated girl and a mad horse.”)
- e. “*Intalti barattee of lukkuun balaliite eessa geessi,*” (“A learned girl and a flying chicken do not go far (show progress).”)
- f. “*Anuu badee intala ta’ee, badii lammaffoo intala da’e.*” (“Being a female my first mistake; begetting a daughter my second mistake.”)
- g. “*Osoo akka kootii intalti hin daa’imtu, hardhuma kaatee deemtimelee.*” (“As to my wish, a baby girl will not crawl; she gets mature as soon as she was born.”)
- h. “*Du’a beeraa gaafattaa, dhiirattuu lubbuun dhuftee.*” (“How do you enquire about the death of a woman while a man is at the verge of death?”)

Proverb (b) shows that devaluing women starts even before they are conceived by preference to a male baby. Fathering a daughter as we can see in this proverb is preferred to only sitting idle. It is fortunate that the sex of baby is not determined by the parents. Had it been so, no one would prefer to have a female. Similarly, the first proverb shows the indifference the society shows to the birth of a female baby. If the baby is a son, the people who were eagerly waiting for what might come out the sex of the baby will be very happy. The father fires a bullet and the women ululate **six times** to show their happiness to the baby’s family. However, if the baby is a female, every one is indifferent (silent) and the women (neighbors) also ululate **only four times**. Even though the number varies, this discrepant expression of feeling towards the birth of male and female baby is similar with Abrams finding where the Jimma Oromo women ululate **three times** for girls and **five times** for boys. The interesting point here is that women themselves prefer to have a son and will not be happy if the baby is a female. This shows how much the society imprinted in women’s mind the society’s low value to women and the superiority of men over women. Proverb (f) is a typical example of women’s self image where a mother regrets not only

for bearing a female, but also for being a female for herself. This is an identical socializing effect of proverbs and sayings, which causes stereotypes to be accepted as right and normal.

In the same way, proverbs are used to shape girls up to the society's expectations as in proverbs (d) and (e) which were used to discourage girls' education since their primary duty is to get married and become a good wife (mother). An educated girl was compared with a mad horse, (which must be due to the assertive nature of educated girls), and the unsuccessful attempt of a chicken to fly. This indicates that girls are not encouraged to be independent, brilliant and assertive. Rather, they are trained by their mothers and the community as a whole, to be humble, dependent, fragile and submissive in order to make them marriageable. That is why they warn them using proverb (c). This proverb shows the society's belief that girls (like the wives discussed earlier), are ignorant and are easily cheated unless they are warned like this.

In (g) above, the society's desire to own women, both for their sexual desire and for the service they give in the house is reflected. In other words, parents need girls for two things: one, for their help in house chores and the other for the bride-price they get from the in-laws when girls get married. And similarly, their husbands need them to handle all the domestic works and to bear and bring up children. The elders also added another version of the proverb that, it is used to indicate the fact that her genitals are all seen naked by every one and this is considered as a shame for her. Here, the females' genital organ by itself has served as a sign of their inferiority while that of a little boy has not.

Therefore, undervaluing women begins at the time of their birth and goes to the last day of their life. Here is a proverb that reflects the high value of men, where a sick man is pitied than the dead woman. That is, a woman's life is not enough to be compared with the illness of a man. According to the elders, the reason behind this male preference is that a daughter gets married and leaves home where as a son stays with his parents offering them all the necessary help up to the end. The main reason is however, the fact that a son marries and gets children so as to perpetuate the father's lineage while a daughter perpetuates the name of the family to whom she marries.

To wind up, the image of women as mothers is found to be positive and that of wives is both positive (in a sense that they are good house makers) and negative when they are compared to

men who are dealers in the external world. The image of women as co-wives and step-mothers is all in all negative. The image of girls also approaches that of the wives as they are being trained to join the world of wives. However, the positive images of a mother is also questionable for the reason that a woman cannot be a mother of all people and therefore, shares the image of women as wives as well. In addition to this, one has to bear in mind that the proverbs in which women including mothers are depicted positively, have their own role in socializing the society's biased and stereotyped attitude towards women and this in turn plays a great role on distorting women's self image.

4.3 How are these images of women in proverbs and sayings of these people related to the day to day life experiences of women?

As it is attempted to indicate in the preceding sections, in the previous four to five decades (1300s-1880s), when *Gadaa* system was in function, the Oromo women were extremely respected and the work division according to sex was made in order to protect them from the hardships they face during pregnancy and nursing. Before this work division, the Oromo women used to participate in every issues of their community, including the decision making and law making on big issues of the society. However, after the work division, women stayed at home with their children and practiced only domestic work. In other words, they are totally detached from the external world and the house became their typical domain. Therefore, according to the elders and some of the teachers that are interviewed, majority of the Oromo proverbs and sayings perfectly expressed (reflected) the reality that was found in their society. Hence, they noted that the images of women in those proverbs were exactly related to the women's day to day life experiences. When asked whether the proverbs that the Arsi Oromo use today towards their women are also related to the women's actual way of life, the elders remarked that the previous

equilibrium was disturbed by the aforementioned cultural mixing after the fall of *Gadaa* system; the people's way of life is changed and the reason why women were at home, lost its original intention and it served as a sign of women's inferiority. So, the elders and the majority of the respondents from the schools asserted that there are proverbs and sayings that reflect the day to day life experiences and as well, there are proverbs and sayings that are never related to their actual way of life. They added that, these days, women are becoming scholars, and are serving in different fields of life and at the same time; they are mothers and wives as before, that it necessitates the use of proverbs and sayings that reflect this fact.

The above point can be proved right by looking at some of the proverbs that are discussed in the previous section. For example, all the proverbs that praise women as mothers still work for today's mothers since they always love their children and care for them. The proverbs that praise wives as good home makers and as wise and tolerant members of their family also reflect the fact that really exists in the society. There are also jealous co-wives, cruel step-mothers and easily cheated girls. The problem here is that, the negative images of women reflected in most of the collected proverbs and sayings are very much overgeneralized that the image of many educated, logical, reliable, competent, faithful, and diligent women and girls is hidden, undervalued and even forgotten.

Hence, it is really difficult to say the images of women in these proverbs and sayings are exactly related to women's day to day life experiences since they do not reflect all the roles women play these days. The next section takes us to the awareness of the people about the effect of these proverbs and sayings on women.

4.4 How do these people react to these images of women in their proverbs and sayings?

Three tools were used to assess the awareness of the people about the effect of their proverbs and sayings on women: questionnaire and interview for both teachers and students, and a focus-group discussion with the elders from two woredas of the zone. Accordingly, all the elders agreed up on that since the status of women of the earlier times and that of this generation are not constructed in the same environmental situations, some of the proverbs that directly descended from the past may not fit with the actual life condition of women. (Eg. "*Dubartiif ijoolleen gara*

gola” (“Women and children reside in the kitchen.”) Therefore, according to them, such proverbs have a demoralizing effect on women and moreover, they socialize the wrong (distorted) images of women while the positive ones have motivating effect on them. The result of the interview with teachers and students also showed a similar idea that such proverbs demoralize women and hinder their success in the future where as other proverbs have positive effects as they are often used to advise, warn, give cautions and so on. In general, the respondents agreed up on the elders’ point of view that their proverbs and sayings affect women both negatively and positively.

The information gathered from the total of 792 students and 16 teachers through questionnaire is also not different from what is discussed above. The following table illustrates their responses clearly.

Table3.Respondents’ belief about the portrayal of women in the proverbs and sayings of the Arsi

8. Think about the proverbs and sayings you know about women. How do you think women are depicted in these proverbs and sayings? Do they have any role towards the existing status of women and their daily life practices? If yes, how?									
Responses		Students				Teachers		Total	
		NMS	%	NFS	%	NT	%	Grand Total	%
a	They are depicted negatively and this causes lack of interest and courage, moral and psychological destruction and make females feel (internalize) inferiority.	219	36.6	59	30.6	7	43.75	285	35.3
b	They are depicted positively. Each of these proverbs is used to bring behavioral change and to improve (correct) misconduct.	132	22	17	8.8	-	-	149	18.4
c	They are depicted in both ways. The bad ones may carry biased attitudes and backward practices (on women) to the new generation and let the previous distorted images of women last forever, while the	210	35.1	104	53.9	9	56.25	323	40

	good ones also continue to play their positive roles.								
d	No response	38	6.3	13	6.7	-	-	51	6.3
Total		599	100	193	100	16	100	808	100

As it is already demonstrated in the above table, 40% of the total respondents said that women are depicted both positively and negatively and therefore, the bad ones carry the biased attitudes and backward practices (on women) to the new generation while the good ones have a continued effect of teaching and encouragement. Whereas 35.3% of them responded that women are negatively depicted in their proverbs and sayings and that this causes a moral deterioration and psychological destruction on women and it makes them feel (internalize) female inferiority. Only 18.4% of the total respondents said that women are not negatively portrayed in their proverbs and sayings. They said that the proverbs are used to bring change in behavior correct misbehaviors and therefore affect women positively. But this third idea is not shared by the teacher respondents.

Therefore, based on the above discussion of the results it is possible to conclude that the society has a meaningful (though not enough) awareness of the effects of their proverbs and sayings on women.

4.5 Are there any gendered sex-role constructions and socio-cultural attitudes that are embedded (hidden) in the proverbs and sayings of the Arsi?

As it is already discussed in the preceding sections, in the Oromo of the earlier times, proverbs and sayings were emanated from the peoples' actual life experiences thereby reflecting their true socio-cultural attitudes. Unfortunately, this true socio-cultural attitude of the community could not reach the new generation (this generation) due to the cultural disruption that followed the fall of *Gadaa* system during the conquest of the region by Minelek II. According to the *Gadaa* leaders of Kofale woreda, after the conquest of the king, Oromo women lost both their social power through which they used to fight the violation of their rights - "The *Siinqee* Institution" and the high respect they had from their society. As a result, the people were gradually

assimilated to the new social attitude towards women where women are considered as inferior to men. Through socialization, this biased societal attitude towards women is accepted as a normal status of the two sexes. Therefore, similar to any other genres of oral arts, proverbs and sayings of these people served to reflect this biased and stereotyped socio-cultural attitude of the time. Some of these proverbs and sayings like “*Dubartiif ijoolleen gara golaa.*” (Women and children reside to the kitchen) and “*Dubartiin deessuu malee beektuu hin qabdu.*” (“A woman may be fertile but not knowledgeable.”), and the like have lost their original intention and are being used to impose the current gendered sex-role stereotypes on women.

Therefore, though it is adopted, as far as the people have internalized male dominance and women inferiority, their proverbs and sayings are also expected to reflect this fact, since the elders themselves have indicated that a proverb is a mirror in which one observes him/herself. In fact the student and teacher interviewees have also witnessed that proverbs and sayings reflect both the positive and negative socio-cultural attitudes of the people.

Regarding the hidden sex-role construction through the use of proverbs and sayings, it is so simple to deduce this from the elders’ response about the functions of proverbs and sayings. In the very first section of this chapter, the elders were quoted saying that the major function of a proverb and a saying in the Oromo in general and the Arsi in particular is its advisory function where a proverb or a saying is most often used to advise, to give caution, to let the person learn from his/her mistakes (correct misbehavior) and to praise and reinforce successful deeds and good behavior. However, in most of the proverbs and sayings they used to praise, advice and correct misconduct, including the proverbs that refer to mothers, the fact that women are responsible only for house chores are reflected thereby indicating that women are unfit to the productive works outside the home. For instance, in the following proverbs, the fact that women are the instruments of a house and that they should be the honest servants of their husband as well as their children, is reflected even if the proverbs (sayings) were used to praise, advice and to discourage misconduct through analogy.

- a. “*Dubartiin faaya manaati.*” (“A woman is a jewel of a house”)
- b. “*Kaamettiin waan bona keesse ganna nyaatti.*” (“A wise woman consumes in the summer what she reserved during the winter”)

- c. *“Gadi galtoon saree guyyaa dutti, gadi galtoon nadheenii aanan dhirsaa keesse dhugdi.”*
 (“A useless (worthless) dog barks at the day time; a useless (worthless) woman drinks the milk that she kept for her husband.”)
- d. *“Haati harma guuti malee harka hin guutu”* (“It is a mother’s breast which weans, not her hands.”)

Besides the appreciation and the comment they express literally, all of these proverbs serve to impose up on the women that they have to act according to the society’s expectations, even though the proverbs were not used to mean this.

Thus, in the proverbs and sayings of the Arsi Oromo, there are hidden sex-role constructions that the people do not recognize during their use of the proverbs. The next section deals with the effect of transmission and transformation of these proverbs and sayings, on the continuation of the existing images of women to the future.

4.6 Do the transmission and transformation of these proverbs and sayings facilitate the continuation of the existing images of women to the coming generation?

All the elders who have participated in the focus-group discussion have asserted that the transmission of these proverbs and sayings facilitate the continuation of the existing gender bias of the society to the new generation. At the same time, the elders have pointed out that it is not only the negative images of women that is facilitated by the transmission of these proverbs and sayings, but also the positive ones, and that it is the duty of the society as a whole to avoid the use of those proverbs which undervalue women and socialize their inferiority, and to promote the positive ones. As to the elders view, if it is handled properly, the transformation of these proverbs also enables the society to get rid of the stereotyped proverbs and sayings and to add meaning to and modify them in accordance with the context of the time in which they are being used. Majority of the interviewees also responded similar answers to this question with the elders. While one of the teacher interviewees and two student interviewees argued that neither the transmission, nor the transformation plays any role in the continuation of the negative images

of women to the future as far as the current generation is getting educated and the proverbs will also be used in accordance with the educated person's way of thinking.

The result of the questionnaire is also not different from this that 67.1% of the 808 respondents took the elders' side and 21% of them argued that transmission does not have any facilitating role on the negative images of women since the new generation is shaped according to the modern view of life and ethical education, while 11.9% of them did not respond to the question. Here is the tabular representation of this idea.

Table4. The respondents' view on the effect of transmission of proverbs and sayings on women

9. Do you think the transmission of these proverbs from one generation to the other affect women positively or negatively? Justify your answer.									
Responses		Students				Teachers		Total	
		NMS	%	NFS	%	NT	%	Grand Total	%
a	It affects both negatively and positively; it facilitates sex- role stereotypes and lets the negative attitudes the previous generation had towards women to continue as it is. Since it reflects the real situation in the society, it also affects positively, specially, in shaping one's behavior and correcting misconduct.	384	64.1	142	73.6	16	100	542	67.1
b	No, it has no negative effect. Because the new generation will be shaped according to the modern view of life and ethical education.	134	22.4	36	18.6	-	-	170	21
c	No response	81	13.5	15	7.8	-	-	96	11.9
Total		599	100	193	100	16	100	808	100

Similarly, 56.2% of the respondents said that transformation may cause change of the original meaning and intention of the proverbs that leads to wrong interpretation which on its part results in the distorted history of the society, while 31.8% of them took the side of the two students and

a teacher who argued that transformation does not have a role in making the previously existing images of women continue to the future as it is. 12% of the subjects did not respond to this question. Here is the tabular illustration of this idea.

Table5. Respondents' belief on the effects of transformation of proverbs and sayings

10. Does the transformation of these proverbs and sayings have any influence on the present generation?									
Responses		Students				Teachers		Total	
		NMS	%	NFS	%	NT	%	Grand Total	%
a	Yes, when the proverbs change, their original meaning and intention, they may be wrongly interpreted and misused and thereby communicating the distorted history of the society (It loses its original purpose).	322	53.8	121	62.7	11	68.8	45	562
b	Since proverbs and sayings reflect the society's day to day life encounters, if they are handled properly, the meaning change is rather essential for additional meaning and modification in accordance with the tangible reality of the present.	198	33	54	28	5	31.2	257	31.8
c	No answer	78	13.2	18	9.3	-	-	97	12
Total		599	100	193	100	16	100	808	100

In addition to these, from the evaluation of the proverbs collected from 792 Oromo students it is found out that the proverbs and sayings of the people is being transmitted without any change in shape or meaning that all the proverbs mentioned by the elders and the teachers were written by the students with many additional proverbs to what is collected from the main subjects. Hence, unless certain corrective measure is taken to change (modify) the proverbs and sayings that reflect the negative images of women, it will also pass on to the coming generation with its biased attitude of the society and distorted images of women as it is already indicated by

majority of the subjects of this study. In the following section, the possible solutions on how to improve the distorted (negative) images of women that are suggested by the respondents will be discussed.

4.7 What are the possible solutions to improve the negative images of women in the proverbs and sayings of the Arsi?

All the respondents including the elders have suggested commonly that:

- Women's rights should be protected.
- The society should be given awareness creation sessions about women's equality with men.
- Women (girls) should be sent to school so that they can question and defend a violation of their rights.
- Women's participation should be facilitated (increased).
- The use of such proverbs and sayings should be discouraged or the proverbs and sayings should be modified and used according to the current situation, etc.

In general, teaching one another about the problem, educating women and discouraging the use of the proverbs and sayings that show the inferiority of women were indicated by all the respondents as typical solutions for the problem. In addition to teaching one another, the elders have also mentioned that the society as a whole should make a law (rule) that hinders the use of such proverbs and sayings. They also indicated that their community has already promulgated a new law that the use of such proverbs and sayings has to be considered as old traditional practices and banned at all. Therefore, such an effort of the society can be the indication of the concern they have to their women and their strong stand to solve the problem. And though it does not bring a complete and immediate change, to discourage the use of proverbs and sayings that are against women can hinder their frequent use and the proverbs may be forgotten gradually.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

In the preceding chapter, it is endeavored to show: the general overview of the use of proverbs and their functions in West Arsi Oromo; the portrayal of women in the proverbs and sayings of these people; the awareness of the people about the effect of these proverbs and sayings on women; the socio-cultural attitude of the people and the gendered sex–role constructions that are hidden in the proverbs and sayings of the Arsi; and the role of transmission and transformation of these proverbs and sayings in perpetuating the existing images of women. Accordingly, the following conclusions are made on the basis of the discussions and analyses made.

- In West Arsi Oromo, proverbs and sayings are rarely used by women. While men in general enjoy the frequent use of proverbs and sayings in every context. And the fact that proverbs and sayings are used by men - the powerful members of the society, has also its own role in the imposition and socialization of the images of women that are portrayed in the proverbs and sayings.
- Among the Arsi Oromo, proverbs are primarily used to advise; to motivate; to reinforce; to give warning and caution against danger that one faces in life; to criticize; to praise; etc. That is, proverbs are used for their educative functions where proverbs are used to teach children and one another the wisdom a given society; and for their aesthetic functions where proverbs are used to add color to speech; to bring a case; to explain the case through analogy; and to facilitate decision making during legal proceedings.
- Women are portrayed both positively and negatively in the proverbs and sayings of the West Arsi Oromo, and the image of a mother is more positive than that of wives and girls. The images of women as a wife including the positive ones show the male dominance and the inferior position and the low status of women. In these proverbs, women are revealed as dependent, weak, ignorant, irresponsible, senseless, illogical, irrational, unpredictable, unreliable, adulterous, unfaithful, jealous, and as inferior members of their community. Positively, women are portrayed as excellent house makers and obedient servants of their family. Here, it is important to note that almost all the positive images of women are about

their efficiency in the home and one rarely finds the positive images of women in fields external to the home. Besides, it was found out that women themselves have accepted the inferior position they were given in their society and they honestly act according to the social code of conduct. The women's negative self image on the other hand results in women's low participation in every public affair. In fact, this was exactly observed on female elders of my research area that they were found to be shy and unable to say proverbs because of the wrong traditional belief that it is the male elders who are appropriate to use proverbs publicly.

- However, the negative attitude of the society towards women is said by the elders to be the result of the cultural disruption and the loss of the egalitarian institution of the people after the conquest of Minelek II.
- The people are aware of the effects of their proverbs and sayings that they are trying their best to change the biased socio-cultural attitudes towards women and stereo-typed sex-roles that are reflected in their proverbs and sayings. Here, it is important to indicate that the sex-role stereotypes and the gendered socio-cultural attitude are only adopted as a trend and are therefore, not consciously established by the society.
- The transmission of these proverbs and sayings has a contribution for the perpetuation of the negative images of women and this causes women's negative self image and their low participation in different social affairs in their community. The transformation of these proverbs and sayings affect the images of women in two ways. The first effect is that the proverbs may lose their original intention thereby producing a distorted image of women. The second effect of transformation is its flexibility that enables the adjustment of the proverbs and sayings through which images are socialized according to the real context of the time.
- Giving awareness creation trainings about women's equality to the society, educating women, increasing women's participation and discouraging the use of the proverbs and sayings that socialize the inferior status of women, are mentioned to be the main solutions to present a positive image of women in the society under discussion. Here, since the main effort of feminists as it is discussed in 3.9 above is to change the old

history of women through awareness creation and to revise women's images in the past, the respondents of this study suggested is almost similar with feminists view.

5.2 Recommendations

Even though it is clear that the problems identified could not be solved overnight, based on the above conclusions, it is recommended that:

- Gender equality should be extensively taught throughout the study area. Not only teaching the theory, but women should also be treated equally with men starting from their early childhood and there should be gender education in line with the ethical education at all school levels so as to imprint gender equality in their mind at their very childhood.
- The effect of oral arts in perpetuating the negative images of women should be openly discussed among the family and even at schools, in order to bring the use of the undermining oral arts to an end. And women should be taught and encouraged to assertively defend the violation of their rights.

APPENDIX – A

BARGAAFFII (Questionnaire - Afan Oromo Version)

Kabajamoo hirmaattota, kaayyoon bargaaffii kanaa, mata-duree “Akkaataa dubartootni makmaaksa Oromoo itti ibsamana” jedhu irratti qorannoo gochuudha. Fiixaan ba’insi hojii kanaa garuu gargaarsa keessan irratti hundaa’a. Gargaarsi isin irraa eegamus, deebii dhugaa ta’e akka naa kennitaniifi dha. Kanaafuu, gaaffiilee armaan gadiitiif deebii dhugaa ta’eefi kan dhugaadha jettanii itti amantan akka deebistan, kabajaa waliin isin gaafadha.

Hub: - Gaaffiileen hundinuu barbaachisoo waan ta’niif akka irra hin dabarre.
- Waraqaa deebii irratti maqaa keessan hin barreessinaa.

Saala: dubara_____

dhiira_____

1. Makmaaksi maali?
2. Naannawa keessanitti eenyutu makmaaksa yeroo mara makmaaka; (haadha, abbaa moo ijoollee)? Maaliif isinitti fakkaata?
3. Hawaasa keessan keessatti makmaaksi tajaajila akkamii kenna? (Maaliif makmaakama?)
4. Makmaaksi nama itti makmaakame irratti dhiibbaan inni fidu jira jettanii yaadduu? Yoo jiraate dhiibbaa akkamiiti?
5. Makmaaksonni dubartootaaf makmaakamaniifi kan dhiiraaf makmaakaman garaagarummaa qabuu? Yoo qabaatan, garaagarummaa akkamii qabu?
6. Makmaaksota dubartootaaf (haadhaaf, haadha manaatiif, obboleettiifi, kkf.) makmaakaman, kanneen gaarii ta'anis ta'ee kanneen badaa ta'an ka beektan hundaa barreessaa.
7. Makmaaksonni kunniin dubartoota irratti maaliif makmaakaman jettanii yaaddu?
8. Makmaaksota kanneen keessatti dubartootni haala gaariini moo haala badaadhaan ibsamani jiru? Haala jiruuf jireenya dubartootaa murteessuuf gaheen haalli kunniin taphatan jiraa? Yoo jiraate akkamitti?
9. Dhalootaa gara dhalootaatti lufuun makmaaksota kanaa itti fufiinsa haalleen badaafi gaarii dubartootni itti ibsaman irratti gaheen inni qabu jiraa? Yoo jiraate mee fakkeenyaan nuu ibsaa.
10. Yeroodhaa gara yerootti jijjiiramuun hiikaafi haala makmaaksotaa, dhaloota amma jiru irratti dhiibbaan inni fidu jiraa? Yoo jiraate, maalfaadha?
11. Gaaffii 9^{ffaa} haalli badaan dubartootni itti ibsaman akka itti fufu ni taasisa yoo jettan, rakkina kana furuuf maaltu godhamuu qaba?

Gargaarsa Keessaniif Guddaa Galatoomaa!

APPENDIX – B

QUESTIONNAIRE - (English Version)

Dear participants, I am conducting a research on “The Images of Women in the Proverbs and Sayings of the Oromo”. But, for my study to be successful, your cooperation in giving reliable information has a due value. Hence, you are kindly requested to give real information in front of the questions below. Please attempt all the questions and make them short and precise. There is an answer sheet at the back. You do not write your names on the paper.

1. According to your society, what is a proverb?
2. Who often says (uses) proverbs in your area, (father, mother, children)? What do you think is the reason behind this?
3. What functions do proverbs serve in your community?
4. Do you think proverbs and sayings have any negative effect on the person to whom it is used? If yes, what do you think they are?
5. Is there a meaning polarity between the proverbs and sayings referring to women and men in your society?
6. 6. List as many proverbs and sayings as you can that refer to women both the negative and positive ones
7. Why do you think the society use these proverbs towards women?
8. Think about the proverbs and sayings you know about women. How do you think women are depicted in these proverbs? Do they have any role towards the existing status of women and their daily life practices? If yes, how?
9. Do you think the transmission of these proverbs and sayings from one generation to the other affect women positively or negatively? Justify your answer.
10. Does the transformation of these proverbs and sayings have any influence on the present generation?
11. If you responded for question number 9 both positively and negatively, how could the negative effect be improved (changed)?

Thank You Very Much for Your Due Cooperation!

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APPENDIX – C

List of Proverbs

Proverbs and sayings that undermine and despise women (motivating through rejection of bad behavior)

1. Dubartiin furdoo malee guddoo hin qabdu.
A woman may be plump but not a great (respectable).
2. *Dubartiin lama hin beektu, tokko hin wallaaltu.*

Women are best at one thing (women are good only at one thing).

3. *Harree fi dubartiin ulee jaallatti.*

A woman and a donkey like a stick (to be beaten).

4. *Dubartiin dhiira deessi malee dhiira hin geettu.*

A woman gives birth to a man, but she is not equal to him.

5. *Dubartiin deessuu malee beektuu hin qabdu.*

A woman may be fertile, but not knowledgeable.

6. *Beerri beekaa deessi malee beekaa hin geettu.*

A woman is not intelligent, but she gives birth to the intelligent ones.

7. *Dhalaan fardaafi beerri ulfina hin beektu.*

A female horse and a woman do not know when one respects them.

8. *Harree fi dubartiin hanga tokko.*

A woman and a donkey are alike (the same).

9. *Of beektu soddaa lagatti.*

A woman who knows her culture never calls the name of her in-laws.

10. *Intalli baratteefi lukkuun balaliite eessa geessi?*

A learned girl and a flying chicken do not go far (show progress).

11. *Dubartiin qalbii tokkittii qabdi; sunuu yoo dhungatan jalaa baddi.*

A woman has a single thought (mentality), and she loses it when one kisses her.

12. *Mootummaan dubartii bishaan ol yaafti.*

The government of women makes water flow upward.

13. *Kasaraa fi dubartiin jilbaa gaditti.*

A hook (a curved walking stick) and women are better when they are handled below the knee.

14. *Beerri (dubartiin) dhirsa du'e dhiisi sa'a gu'eyyuu hin beektu.*

A woman does not notice the death of her husband and when her cow becomes dry.

15. *Dubartiin hudduu malee lubbuu hin qabdu.*

Women have bottom, not soul.

16. *"Beekumsa beeraa, aayyaanuu ijibbaadhe" jedhe namtichi.*

"I am tired of women's knowledge at home with my mother" said the man.

17. *Isiinuu hori horii hin qadhaabbattu.*

She does not own a wealth as she is a wealth by herself.

Proverbs and sayings that show the importance of women in the society

Mother

1. *Haadha ofii maaltu namaa gaha?*

No one is equal to (like) one's own mother.

2. *Haadha duutee mannaa, haadha maraatte wayya.*

A mad mother is better to a dead mother.

3. *Haatii fi bishaan badduu hin qaban.*

A mother and water have no evil.

4. *Haati harma guuti malee harka hin guutu.*

It is a mother's breast which weans, not her hands.

5. *Haatiifi gabaan waan harkaa qabdu namaa kenniti.*

A mother and market offer (give) whatever they have.

6. *Michuu haadha ormaarra badduu haadha ofii wayya.*

A worthless (bad) mother of one's own is better than a friendly (good) step-mother.

7. *Haati dhiiraa fi bishaan badduu hin qaban.*

A mother of a man (a male person) and water have no evil.

8. *Haadha dhabuu mannaa haadha dhabduu wayya.*

To have a destitute mother is better than not having a mother at all.

9. *Haadha ambaayyuu awwaallee, keenya lafa jala dabarsina.*

We have buried the alien's mother well, so, we have to bury ours' very deeply (very well).

10. *Namni haadha qabu, nama Waaqa qabu.*

To have a mother is to have God.

11. *Haati nama deessi; abbaan wadala harreeti.*

A mother is a child bearer; a father is simply a he-donkey.

12. *Haati ofii kafana ofiiti.*

A mother is one's own dress (shelter).

Wife

13. *Mana onaa mannaa niitii ontuu wayya.*

It is better to have a deserted wife than an empty house.

14. *Dubartiin gaachana dhiiraati.*

A woman is a shield of a man.

15. *Maasaan haati-manaa hinto'anne hin atootu.*

A farm that is not handled by a woman (a wife) does not last longer.

16. *Mataan yaada hin qabne goda; manni dubartiin hin jirre ona.*

A mind without thought is a ravine; a house without a woman is the deserted one.

17. *Finni haadha male, dhirsii haadha-warraa malee, manni kabaa malee hin bareedu.*

18. A child without a mother, a husband without a wife and a house without wall (roof) are not good (magnificent).

18. *Namni niitii hin qabne raasaadhaa galee yoo qe'eetti dhiyaatu na'a.*

One who has no wife is unhappy any time he approaches his compound.

Proverbs and sayings of male preference and women's self image

1. *Anuu badee intala ta'ee, badii lammaffoo intala da'e.*

Being a female my first mistake; begetting a daughter my second mistake.

2. *Maaf callistan akka mana intalti itti dhalattee?*

Why does everyone keep silent like the house to which a girl is born?

3. *Amma teenyu intala haa dhalchinu.*

Let us father a daughter than sitting idle.

4. *Ani maaf dubartii tahe ka badduu hin hojjenne; ati maaf dhiira taate kan badduu ani hojjedhe naa hin obsine?*

Why am I found to be a woman if I do not make a blunder (mistake); and why are you found to be a man if you do not endure my blunders?

5. *"Muramtee dhiiraaf didee, gumaa sagalii mammaakumaan fixe." jette jaartiin.*

I could not give decision because it is against our custom; however, I have ended the vengeance of many people only by using a proverb ('mammaaksa').

6. *Du'a beeraa gaafattaa, dhiirattuu lubbuun dhuftee.*

How do you enquire about the death of a woman while a man is at the verge of death?

A Proverb that depict women as hopeful

“*Waan Waaqaa hin beekanii ‘Haadha Waaqoo’ naan jedhaa.’ jette dhabduun.*”

“Refer to me as ‘Waaqoo’s mother’ for no one knows how Waaq makes out things.’ said the infertile woman.”

Proverbs and sayings of advice for caution

1. *Gara-laafettiin intalaa obboleessarraa ulfoofti.*
A soft heartened girl conceives from her brother.
2. *Dhiyaatteef qilee hin utaalani, bareeddeef intala haadhaa hin fuudhani.*
However shallow it is, one cannot jump a ravine; and however beautiful she is, one cannot marry his sister.
3. *Tiruu kan jaalatantu nama hudha.*
It is the liver that you like which chokes you.
4. *Olkaa’aan malee olkaatanii hin fuudhani.*
You consume what you have reserved.
5. *Beekaan baar-gamattuu, wallaalaan ofjalattuu.*
A wise can see at miles whereas an ignorant cannot recognize something which is at an arm length.
6. *Akka arbaan utaalaatti illeettiin fattatte.*
The hare straddled while trying to jump like an elephant.
7. *Yaa soogiddaa ofii jettu mi’aayi yookaan dhakaadha jedhanii si gatuu.*
If a salt becomes tasteless, people will throw it like a stone.

Proverbs and sayings of imposition as an advice

1. *Amiiniin intalaaf ilkaan lukkuu garaa keessa.*
A girl’s ‘Amen’ and the chicken’s teeth are in their stomach (hidden).
2. *Dubartiin faaya manaati.*
A woman is a jewel of a house.
3. *Dubartiin faaya dhiiraati.*
A woman is a jewel of a man.

4. *Kan haga ofii beektu dhiiraan maqoo hin teessu.*
She, who knows her level (status), would not sit beside a man.
5. *Udaaniif dubartiin xiqqoo hin qabdu.*
A faeces and a woman (a girl) are never be little enough.
6. *Dubartiin xiqqoo hin qabdu.*
A woman is never little.
7. *Fuudhaniif niitii hin taatu, niitiin tama dhirsaa naatu.*
Being married cannot assure a good wife, a good wife is the one who gets scared of her husband (respects him).
8. *Intala qaraatefi farda maraate jalaa nu baraari.*
May God save us from an educated woman and a mad horse!
9. *Beeraa fi ijoollee icitii itti hin himan.*
A secret should not be told to women and children.
10. *Intalaa fi Ijoolleen (meeshaan) gara golaa.*
Women and house furniture reside to the kitchen.
11. *Nadheeniif faradoon galgala baddi.*
A woman and a horse are helpless at old age.
12. *Dubartiin shandhee, kuun cabdu kaanitti nyaatani.*
A woman is like a dish/plate, if one dies, you will marry to another.
13. *Dubartiin marqaa miidhagsiti malee dubbii hin miidhagsitu.*
A woman may make a good porridge, but she cannot make a good speech.
14. *Osoo akka kiyyaa intalti hin daa'imtu hardhuma kaatee deemti malee.*
As to my wish, a baby girl will not crawl; she gets mature enough as soon as she was born.
15. *Namni niitiif nahe irbaanni isaa akaayyii dha.*
One who cares for a wife, his dinner will be a parched grain.
16. *Dubartiin qalbii tokkitti qabdi, sanuu gabaan baati.*
Women have only one wit/wisdom, and they take this single wit/wisdom to a market with them.
17. *Beekumsi dubartii alatti osoo hin taane manatti tola.*
Women's knowledge is good when it is at home.

18. *Shamarraafi harree bonnuu hin danda’u.*

Even drought could not stop a young girl and a donkey.

19. *Dubartiidhaa dhugaan hin kennamu.*

Women do not deserve justice.

20. *Ta tafa qabduu fi ta lafa qabdu hin teessu.*

A gorgeous woman and a woman who owns a plot of land would not be easily handled.

21. *Dubartiin hin firristu.*

Women do not come (make) first.

22. *Abbaan Waaqa; haati lafa; gosti gaaddisa; ilmi gaachana; intalti faaya.*

A father is God; a mother is an earth; a clan is a shade; a son is a shield; a daughter is a beauty.

23. *Tan dhirsa mo’atte gaba ceelaate.*

A woman, who dominates her husband, will despise all people at market.

Proverbs and sayings of jealousy

1. *Ollaa hedoo dhirsa heexoo obaaftu.*

Having seen from her neighbor’s, she forced her husband drink ‘heexoo’- (a traditional medicine for tapeworm).

2. *“Dhadhaa jedhanillee keennee, ilma jedhanillee deennee, raasuu hanqadhe moo, kaayuu hanqadhemoo, qayyachuu hanqadhe?” jette haati manaa hangafti.*

“I have reserved butter; I have also born a son; did I fail to churn; did I fail to reserve; or I am unable to incense myself?” said a senior wife.”

3. *“Gamureettii kottee, gursommeettii kokkee!’ jetteenii jennaan, ‘Ciicoo golaa fuudhanii, situffannan na fuudhan.’ jetteen.”*

When the senior wife says “A re-married young horse!” to her new coming fellow, the younger one also responded, “He married me because you are worthless/despised one.”

Proverbs and sayings of praise and appreciation

1. *Malli mala dubartii; humni humna bishaanii siif haa ta’u.*

Be wise as a woman; and forceful like water.

2. *“Dhiira Amaaraa fi dubartii Oromoo garaa isaanii osoo hin argin biraa bane.’ jedhe*

Xaaliyaaniin.”

“‘We could not get the heart of the Amhara men and the Oromo women.’ said the Italians.”

3. *Mootiin dhagaa maal? Soogidda; mootiin namaa eenyu? Dubartii.*

The king of stones is a common salt; the king of human kind is a woman.

4. *Dubartiin lama: tuun tama deesse; tuun tama beekte.*

Women are of two kind: one is the fertile woman; the other is the wise(the knowledgeable) one.

5. *Namni afur gola tokko galu: abbaa murtii, shiftaa, hattuu fi maraattuu; kana hundaa kan horattu haadha.*

Four kinds of people dwell in a room: a lawyer, a bandit, a thief and a crazy; she is a mother (wife) who manages all.

6. *Abbaan gindo'o; haati gingilcha'a.*

A father is like a flat winnowing basket (impermissible/firm), and a mother is like a sieve (tolerant).

7. *Dubartii malee bultiin hin hoo'u.*

Life is not comfortable without a woman (wife).

8. *Kaamettiin waan bona olkeesse ganna nyaatti.*

A wise woman consumes in the summer what she reserved during winter.

9. *Niitiin utubaa manaati.*

A wife is the pillar of a house.

10. *Manni dubartii malee, nyaanni soogidda malee hin bareedu.*

A house without a woman is like a diet (meal) without salt.

11. *Dubartiin jajjaboon hirkoo dhiiraati.*

Diligent women are pivotal to their husband.

Proverbs and sayings of advice through criticism

1. *Haati hattuu ilmoo hin amantu.*

A thief mother does not trust her children.

2. *Ibiddi dubartiin qabsiifte hin dhaamu.*

A fire lit by women cannot be extinguished (never quenches).

3 .*Beeraafi ijoolleetu walitti nama buusa.*

Women and children are cause of contradiction.

4. *Haadha ilaalii intala fuudhi.*

Evaluate the mother and marry to her daughter.

5. *Qalbiin beeraa akkuma harma ishee rarraati.*

Women's mentality (thought) suspends just as their breasts hang in the air.

6. *Bor hin beeknee qoda-bukoon ishee sagal.*

A gluttonous woman has nine dough-containers/ she who does not know tomorrow has nine dough containers.

7. *Argaa toleef (guddateef) goromsi hin ottoomu.*

A good physical appearance of a heifer does not assure its good breed.

8. *Gargaarsa argannaan gowwittiin majjee dhoksite.*

A foolish woman (maid servant) hides the callus her grinding mill when one offers her a help.

9. *Gadi galtoon saree guyyaa dutti; gadi galtoon nadheenii aannan dhirsaa keesse dhugdi.*

A useless (worthless) dog barks at the day time, a useless (worthless) woman drinks the milk that she kept for her husband.

10. *Irbaa duraa gursummeettiin mooyyee qoraafii.*

A re-married divorcee fumigates a mortar at the early days of her remarriage.

11. *Dubartiin mana hin ijaartu gola jaalala; nama hin awwaaltu booya jaalala.*

Women do not build a house for they love a kitchen; they do not attend a funeral because they like weeping.

12. *Waa beekaaf Waaqni bofa miilla dhoowwate.*

It is for a reason that a snake is forbidden a leg.

13. *Gursummeettii fuuti nama hin geettu; galchaan nama hin hanqattu.*

A widow re-marries hidden and divorces publicly.

14. *"Ofifuu ciniinsifattaa achumaan loon kiyyallee naa eegi." jedhe namtichi haadha manaatiin.*

"While you are in labor, please keep my cattle also on your way." said the husband to his wife.

15. *Garagalii intalti ciniinsuu haadha barsiifte.*

A daughter taught her mother how to labor.

16. *Ta qaawwa qabdu qaaqa hin dhabdu.*

One who owes a female genital is always troublesome (talkative).

17. *Dubartiin yoo dhugaa argattes, yoo dhabdes ni boossi.*

Women weep booth when they are denied of justice and when they are given justice.

18. *Kan dubartiin ergite du'a hinsodaatu.*

He who is sent by a woman do not fear death.

19. *Laafaa reebi jennaan jaartiin tiruu reebde.*

When she is told to beat a weak, the old woman has bitten a liver

20. *Dubartiin ija duute; ijji duute hin rifattu.*

A woman is a dead eye; dead eyes never be scared.

Proverbs and sayings of advice through suspicion

1. *Beerri yookaa nyaattee garaa qabdi, yookaa olkaa'attee golaa qabdi.*

The reason that women do not share a meal with their husband is that: one, they must have already eaten; or they must have reserved in a kitchen.

2. *Daddaftee na dhungatteef dhirsa naaf hin taatu.*

Early kissing could not assure your being my husband.

APPENDIX - D

Results of a Questionnaire

Responses		Students				Teachers		Total	
		NMS	%	NFS	%	NT	%	Grand total	%
1., What is a proverb according to your society?									
a	It is one of the Oromo oral arts (folklore) that expresses the reality that takes place in the society using very limited words (expressions) within a short time.	203	33.9	63	32.6	6	37.5	272	33.7
b	It is a branch of Oromo oral arts, which elders use to bring a case, send a message and end up a case in judicial areas and at different peacemaking places.	94	15.7	49	25.4	5	31.7	148	18.3
c	It is a typical feature of Oromo speech, which the people use to beautify their speech and	131	21.9	59	30.6	3	18.8	193	23.9

	communicate secrete issues hiddenly. (It is compared with a salt in a stew).								
d	All of the above	68	11.3	22	11.4	2	12.5	92	11.4
e	A and B	54	9.0	-	-	-	-	54	6.7
f	B and C	49	8.2	-	-	-	-	49	6.0
Total		599	100	193	100	16	100	808	100
2. In your area, who often says (uses) proverbs (father, mother or children)? What do you think is the reason behind this?									
a	Fathers (male elders)	379	63.3	141	73.1	12	75	532	65.8
b	Mother and father	192	32	52	26.9	4	25	248	30.7
c	Father, mother and children	28	4.7	-	-	-	-	28	3.5
Total		599	100	193	100	16	100	808	100
3. What functions do proverbs serve in your community?									
a	It makes one's speech clear, short and precise	113	18.9	51	26.4	6	37.5	170	21
b	It adds color to a speech, enables one to communicate a secret with the company of anyone.	77	12.9	53	27.5	2	12.5	132	16.3
c	Helps to present an idea (issue) through analogy, for better understanding and eases decision making at the time of public meetings and judicial proceedings.	82	13.7	-	-	-	-	82	10.1
d	It serves a corrective function by exactly indicating a failure and illustrating the existing social, political and economic reality; it also facilitates conflict resolution.	111	18.5	62	32.1	5	31.25	178	22
e	To express their feelings about people.	32	5.3	-	-	-	-	32	4
f	A and B	32	5.3	-	-	-	-	32	4
g	B and C	39	6.5	27	14	-	-	66	8.2

h	A and C	37	6.2	-	-	-	-	37	4.6
i	D and E	8	1.3	-	-	-	-	8	1
j	All	68	11.4	-	-	3	18.5	71	8.8
Total		599	100	193	100	16	100	808	100

4. Do you think proverbs and sayings have any negative effect on the person to whom it is used? If yes, what do you think they are?

a	Yes they have. They disgrace, demoralize and despise the person to whom they are used if they are the bad ones specially, when the person could not understand their meanings.	324	54.1	123	67.3	16	100	463	57.3
b	They can have both negative and positive effects depending on the situation and purpose.	95	15.9	44	22.8	-	-	139	17.2
c	They do not have any negative effect; rather, they correct misbehavior and help to learn from one's own mistakes.	180	30	26	13.3	-	-	206	25.5
Total		599	100	193	100	16	100	808	100

5. Is there a meaning polarity between the proverbs and sayings referring to women and men in your society?

a	Yes, there is meaningful polarity due to attitudinal difference towards the two sexes, where men are mostly depicted positively and women are depicted negatively.	243	40.6	-	-	14	87.5	257	31.8
b	Yes, while that of women mostly undermine, demean, despise and show their inferiority that of men usually encourage, glorify and show their superiority.	172	28.7	136	70.5	-	-	308	38.1
c	Since human beings are equal, there is no meaningful polarity; it is the purpose and	110	18.4	51	26.4	1	6.25	162	20

	the occasion that determines the meaning of the proverbs that are used towards both sexes.								
d	Since the use of proverbs is one's own activity (behavior), there are good and bad proverbs for both sexes.	63	10.5	-	-	1	6.25	64	8
e	No responses	11	1.8	6	3.1	-	-	17	2.1
Total		599	100	193	100	16	100	808	100

6. List as many proverbs and sayings as you can, that refer to women both negative and positive ones.

7. Why do you think the society use these proverbs towards women?

a	To advise with analogy to correct misbehavior; to give precautions and to let them learn from their mistakes.	169	28.2	71	36.8	-	-	240	29.7
b	To build their morale(confidence) and to appreciate them	81	13.52	17	8.8	3	18.75	101	12.5
c	Because the society has internalized male superiority and female inferiority as a trend, they use proverbs to suppress assertive female individuals and to promote femininity.	172	28.71	66	34.2	5	31.25	243	30
d	To criticize their work and character.	82	13.7	31	16.1	3	18.75	116	14.4
e	A, B and C	14	2.33	-	-	5	31.25	19	2.4
f	B and C	7	1.2	-	-	-	-	7	0.9
g	All of the above	51	8.5	-	-	-	-	51	6.3
H	No response and unrelated responses	23	3.84	8	4.1	-	-	31	3.8
Total		599	100	193	100	16	100	808	100

8. Think about the proverbs and sayings you know about women. How do you think women are depicted in these proverbs? Do they have any role towards the existing status of women and their daily life practices? If yes, how?

a	They are depicted negatively and this causes lack of interest and courage, moral and psychological destruction and make females feel and internalize inferiority	219	36.6	59	30.6	7	43.75	285	35.3
b	They are depicted positively. Each of these proverbs is used to bring behavioral change and to improve (correct) misbehavior.	132	22	17	8.8	-	-	149	18.4
c	They are depicted in both ways. The bad ones may carry biased attitudes and backward practices (on women) to the new generation and let the previous distorted images of women last forever, while the good ones also continue to play their positive roles.	210	35.1	104	53.9	9	56.25	323	40
d	No response	38	6.3	13	6.7	-	-	51	6.3
Total		599	100	193	100	16	100	808	100

9. Do you think the transmission of these proverbs from one generation to the other affect women positively or negatively? Justify your answer.

a	It affects both negatively and positively; it facilitates sex role stereotypes and lets the negative attitudes the previous generation had towards women continue as it is. Since it reflects the real situation in the society, it also affects positively specially, in shaping ones behavior and correcting misconduct.	384	64.1	142	73.6	16	100	542	67.1
b	No, it has no negative effect. Because the new generation will be shaped according to the modern view of life and ethical education.	134	22.4	36	18.6	-	-	170	21
c	No response	81	13.5	15	7.8	-	-	96	11.9

Total		599	100	193	100	16	100	808	100
10. Does the transformation of these proverbs and sayings have any influence on the present generation?									
a	Yes, when the proverbs change their original meaning and intention, they may be wrongly interpreted and misused, and thereby communicate the distorted history of the society (It loses its original purpose).	322	53.8	121	62.7	11	68.8	45	562
b	Since proverbs and sayings reflect the society's day to day life encounters if handled properly, the meaning change is rather essential for additional meaning and modification in accordance with the tangible reality of the present.	198	33	54	28	5	31.2	257	31.8
c	No answer	78	13.2	18	9.3	-	-	97	12
Total		599	100	193	100	16	100	808	100
11. If you responded for question number 9 both positively and negatively, how could the negative effect be improved (changed)? (What is expected from the society in order to solve this problem?)									
a	Women's rights should be protected; the use of such proverbs should be discouraged, they should be used(modified) in accordance with the current context; the society should be given awareness creations about the women's equality; women should be sent to school so that they can defend violation of their rights, etc.	354	59.1	132	68.4	16	100	502	62.1
b	No answer	245	40.9	61	31.6	-	-	306	37.9
Total		599	100	193	100	16	100	808	100

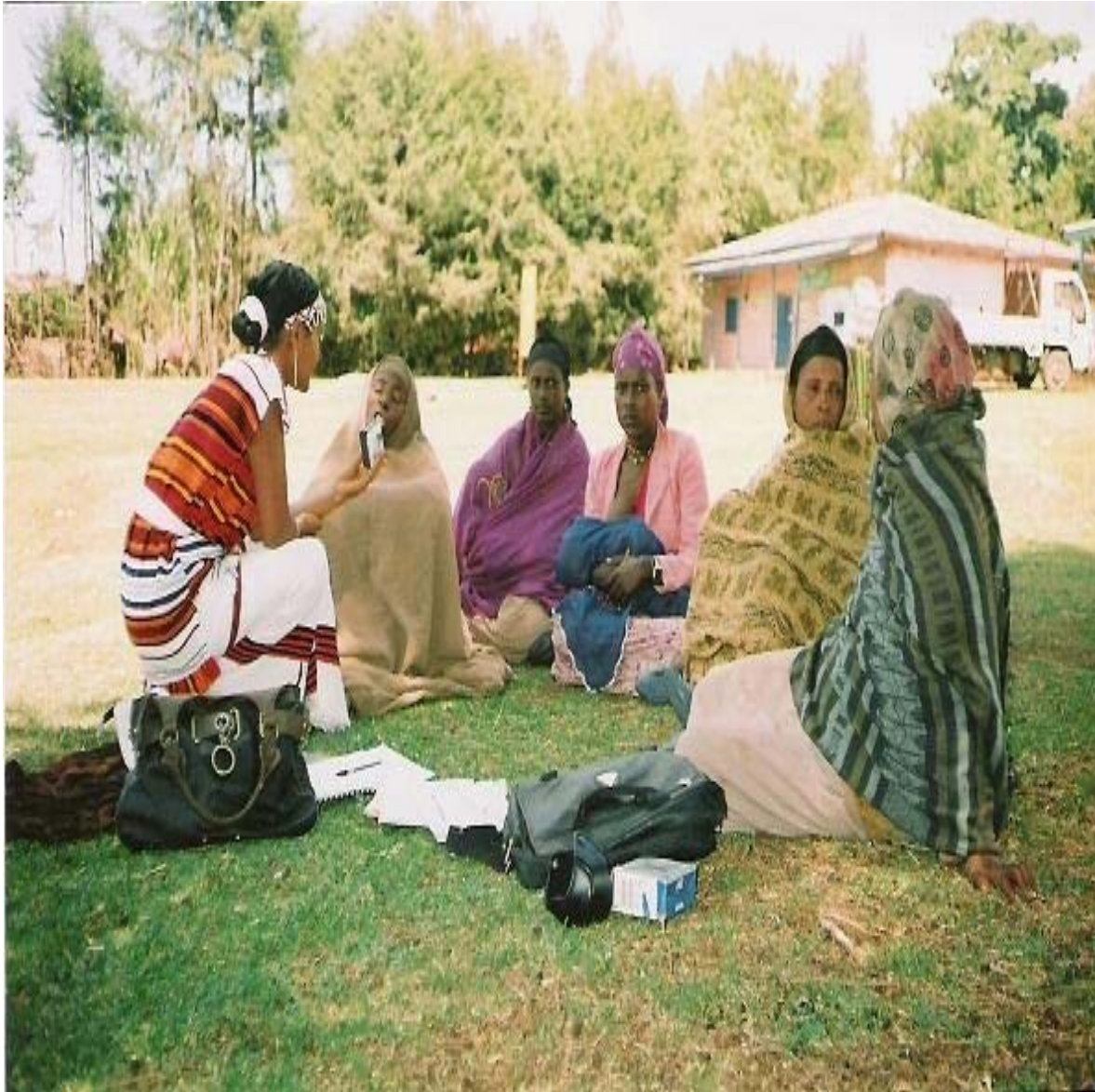
APPENDIX – E

List of Elders who Participated in Focus-Group Discussion



Name of male participants from Kofale, left to right:

- 1. Obbo Gabra Amlaak Guyyee Shuuttaa**
- 2. Obbo Bariisoo Soondhii Lukkee**
- 3. Obbo Abdulqaadir Haaji Baatii Qumbii**
- 5. Obbo Huseen Badhaasoo Ciqaaqii**
- 6. Obbo Waarituu Diboo Bakee**



Name of female participants from Kofale, left to right:

- 2. Aaddee Gannoo Ganamoo Lawwoo**
- 3. Aaddee Faaxumaa Tibbuu Nuuraa**
- 4. Aaddee Nuurituu Goobanaa Guchii**
- 5. Aaddee Lookoo Gammadii Bunnoo**
- 6. Aaddee Kamsoo Musxaaa Ribbisaa**



Name of male participants from Arsii Negelle, left to right:

- 1. Obbo Damissee Kabbadaa Lataa**
- 2. Obbo Duuloo Guyyee Bulaa**
- 3. Obbo Nageessoo Jaarsoo Soonchoo**
- 4. Obbo Ushuu Luggoo Baachoree**
- 5. Obbo Hinseenee Dhaqqaboo Hajjisoo**



Name of female participants from Arsi Negelle, left to right:

- 1. Aaddee Guddattuu Gammachuu Waaqoo**
- 2. Aaddee Aliimaa Kadiir Siidoo**
- 3. Aaddee Madiinaa Abbulee Fungaayee**
- 4. Aaddee Nugusee Gammadii Laceyboo**
- 5. Aaddee Faaxumaa Hirkisoo Jeedoo**
- 6. Aaddee Moominaa Bariisoo Waaqoo**



Yaa'ii *Gadaa* Uummata Kofalee (The *Gadaa* Council of Kofale People)