

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

RELIGION AND EVERYDAY LIFE:

***NEGEDE-WOYTO* MUSLIM COMMUNITY OF BAHIR DAR TOWN, ETHIOPIA**

BY:

WOINSHET LEGESSE

December 2013

ADDIS ABABA

RELIGION AND EVERYDAY LIFE:

NEGEDE-WOYTO MUSLIM COMMUNITY OF BAHIR DAR TOWN, ETHIOPIA

BY:

WOINSHET LEGESSE

***A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES OF ADDIS
ABABA UNIVERESITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY***

ADVISOR: LIZA DEBEVEC (PhD)

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

December 2013

ADDIS ABABA

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

RELIGION AND EVERYDAY LIFE:

NEGEDE-WOYTO MUSLIM COMMUNITY OF BAHIR DAR TOWN, ETHIOPIA

BY:

WOINSHET LEGESSE

***A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES OF ADDIS ABABA
UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY***

APPROVED BY BOARD OF EXAMINERS

Advisor

Signature

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents	Page No
Table of Contents.....	I
Acknowledgment.....	IV
List of Tables and Figures	V
Acronyms.....	VI
Glossary of Local Terms.....	VII
Abstract	X
Chapter One: Introduction	
1.1. Background of the Study.....	1
1.2. Statement of the Problem.....	4
1.3. Objectives of the Study	9
1.3.1. General Objective.....	9
1.3.2. Specific Objectives.....	9
1.4. Research Questions.....	10
1.5. Research Design and Methodology	11
1.6. Data Collection Techniques.....	11
1.6.1. Primary Data Collection Techniques	11
1.6.1.1. Systematic Observation.....	12
1.6.1.2. Interview	12
1.6.1.3. Group Discussion	13
1.6.1.4. Case Study.....	14
1.6.2. Secondary Sources of Data Collection.....	14
1.7. Fieldwork Account.....	15
1.8. Rationale for the Selection of the Study Area.....	17
1.9. Scope and Limitation of the Study.....	17
1.9.1. Scope of the Study.....	17
1.9.2. Limitations of the Study	18
1.10. Significance of the Study.....	19
1.11. Ethical Concern.....	20

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

2.1. The Anthropology of Religion.....	21
2.1.1. Approaches towards the Study of Religion	24
2.1.2. Religious Rituals and practices	26
2.1.3. Lived Religion: Discourse and Practice.....	30
2.2. The Anthropology of Islam	33
2.2.1. Islamic Traditions and Religious Practices	37
2.2.2. Religiosity and Piety within Islamic Tradition	38
2.2.3. Syncretic Elements within Islamic Tradition	40

Chapter Three: Description of the Study Area

3.1. Geographic Features of the Study Area	44
3.2. Brief Overview of the <i>Negede-Woyto</i> Community.....	46
3.2.1. Historical Background of the <i>Negede-Woyto</i> Community.....	46
3.2.2. Demographic Features of the <i>Negede-Woyto</i> Community	49
3.2.3. Social Organization of the <i>Negede-Woyto</i> Community	50
3.2.4. Settlement Pattern and Household Structure of the <i>Negede-Woyto</i> Community	52
3.2.5. Economic Activity/Mean of Subsistence of the <i>Negede-Woyto</i> Community	54

Chapter Four: Religious Behaviors and Practices of the *Negede-Woyto* Community

4.1. Religion Identity and Its Controversy	58
4.2. Core Islamic Thoughts and Practices among the <i>Negede-Woyto</i> Community	61
4.2.1. Belief in One God/Allah.....	61
4.2.2. Prayer/ <i>Salat</i>	62
4.2.3. Fasting	63
4.2.4. Annual Alms/ <i>Zakah</i>	64
4.2.5. Pilgrimage to Mecca.....	65
4.3. Major Islamic Holidays among the <i>Negede-Woyto</i> Community.....	65
4.4. Customary Practices of the <i>Negede-Woyto</i> Community	68
4.4.1. <i>Nuriya</i> Celebration.....	68
4.4.2. Commemoration of <i>Abinaz</i>	70
4.5. Towards the Syncretic Elements of the <i>Negede-Woyto</i> Community	76
4.6. Relationship Between the <i>Negede-Woyto</i> Community and the Neighboring Society	78

4.6.1. Relationship with the Amhara Christians	78
4.6.2. Relationship with the Amhara Muslims	79
4.7. Contributing Factors for the Non-Pious Behaviors of the <i>Negede-Woyto</i> Community.....	81
4.7.1. Poverty	82
4.7.2. Means of Subsistence/Economic Activity	85
4.8. Change and Continuity	87

Summary and Conclusion

Summary of Major Findings	96
Conclusion	98

Bibliography 100

Annexes 105

Annex I: Guiding Questions (For Elders of the <i>Negede-Woyto</i> Community)	105
Annex II: Guiding Questions (For Youth Members of the <i>Negede-Woyto</i> Community)	106
Annex III: Guiding Questions (For the Neighboring Society).....	107
Annex IV: Guiding Questions (For Officials).....	108
Annex V: Profile of Research Participants.....	119
Annex VI: Map of the Study Area	111

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to express my deepest gratitude for my advisor Dr. Liza Debevec for her careful guidance, constructive comments, and continual corrections she made to this thesis. Without her unlimited support, this thesis would not have been finished.

Second, I would like to thank my host families from members of the *Negede-Woyto* community, especially family members of W/ro Ansha Arega, who were willing to share their home with me. W/ro Ansha dedicated all of her time to find the right individuals to participate in the study and make them willing for interview. In addition, I would like to acknowledge individuals who work in Amhara Culture and Tourism Bureau and Amhara Media Center in Bahir Dar town. They assisted me to get my hands on written and recorded materials about this community, especially Ato Dereje and Ato Getachew from Amhara Mass Media Center were very collaborative. These two individuals helped me to get the right individual from the *Negede-Woyto* community who is responsible to give initial information about the community.

Third, I would like to acknowledge Addis Ababa University for the financial grant. Finally, I would like to say thank you for all individuals who contributed their part for the accomplishment of the thesis.

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

List of Tables and Figures	Page No
Table 1: Population of Bahir Dar town by religion and ethnic group.....	45
Figure 1: <i>Negede-Woyto</i> women making ‘ <i>mesob</i> ’	55
Figure 2: Handicrafts made by women of the <i>Negede-Woyto</i> community on the market near Mulualem Culture Center	56
Figure 3: ‘ <i>Wefchos</i> ’ -traditional stone mills which are prepared by men members of the <i>Negede- Woyto</i> community	57
Figure 4: <i>Al Nur</i> Mosque- one of the mosques of the <i>Negede-Woyto</i> community which is found in Tana <i>Kebele</i> (<i>Kebele</i> 16).....	63
Figure 5: The current place where the <i>abinaz</i> celebration takes place	71
Figure 6: Women washing the slaughtered chickens with the water of Abay River	72
Figure 7: The food leftovers near the Abay River	74
Figure 8: The food left overs near the river after the end of the celebration.....	75

ACRONYMS

A.D	Anno Domini
B.C	Before Christ
CSA	Central Statistical Authority
E.C	Ethiopian Calendar
EOTC	Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
JeCCDO	Jerusalem Children and Community Development Organization
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations

GLOSSARY OF LOCAL TERMS

AMHARIC TERMS

Abay- Local name of Blue Nile River

Abinaz- The name given for the spirit of Abay River by the *Negede-Woyto* community

Abiy Tsom- Lent

Agelgil- A basketry which is used to hold different materials

Birr- Local currency of Ethiopia

Buqri- Non- alcoholic local drink which is commonly made from sorghum

Chat (also known as '*Khat*')-Evergreen shrubs whose flowers and leaves have a narcotic effect

Dengel- Papyrus reed that grows at the edge of Lake Tana and Abay River

Derg- A military regime that ruled Ethiopia between 1974- 1991

Dibankie- Burial place of Muslims in Bahir Dar town

Doro Wot- Traditional food item of Ethiopians which is made of chicken and different spices

Enjera- Thin unleavened bread which is commonly made from *teff*

Fasilo- The name given for the place which consist *kebele* 3 and 13 in Bahir Dar town

Hidar 12 (November 21) - The first annual celebration of St. Michael in EOTC

Idir- A traditional social institution in which members help each other during times of difficulties as well as during the time of death

Iqub- A traditional saving institution in which members have a chance to get money through rotation by using lottery method

Kebele- The lowest level administrative unit

Kolle- A spirit which is believed as it has protective nature

Mesob- A basketry which is mainly used to hold food items like *enjera*, bread, and so on

Neged- An Amharic equivalent term for the word tribe

Qilis- The small hut of the *Negede-Woyto* community which is made from *dengel* and woods

Sene 12 (June 19) - The second annual celebration of St. Michael in EOTC

Shum Abo- The original settlement place of the *Negede-Woyto* community in Bahir Dar

Silet (votive) - A promise or an oath to a higher power in order for something to be fulfilled

Tabot- Arc of the Covenant

Tankuwa- A small canoe which is made from *dengel*

Tej- Local alcoholic drink which is made from honey

Tella- Local beer which is made from different grains

Wefcho- Grinding mill

W/ro- A title placed before the name of a married woman

ARABIC TERMS

Allahmdulillah- Means 'all praises are due to Allah'

Asur- Mid- afternoon prayer which begins right after the end of the noon prayer time and extends to sunset

Hadith- A text that states the behaviors and practices of Prophet Mohammad

Halal- Something which is acceptable and needs to be followed by Muslims

Haram- Something which is forbidden to do or say among Muslims

Hijab- A fabric which Muslim women use to cover their hair

Isha- Evening prayer which is the last and fifth prayer of the day that takes place at 8:00 pm

Jum'a- A congregational prayer that takes place every Friday

Kedu'a- The compensation of the missing prayer

Maghrib- Sunset prayer which takes place around 6: 30 pm

Nikah- A contractual marriage agreement

Niya- Intention of an individual to do something to fulfill the requirement of Allah or his own wish

Nuriya (which means light) - The name given by members of the *Negede-Woyto* community for the day of *Hidar 12*

Qur'an- The holy text of Islamic religion

Salat- Prayer

Sheikh- A man who has a better knowledge of the religious texts of Islam and can give an explanation on that; Muslim cleric

Subhi- An early morning prayer which may be offered after dawn and before sunrise

Sunnah- Behaviors and practices of Prophet Mohammad which are written in the Hadith and recommended to be followed by all Muslims

Zakah- The annual amount in kind or money which a Muslim must distribute among the poor/ needy

Zihur- The noon prayer which takes place between 12:30 am and 1:00 pm

ABSTRACT

Religion is one of the most significant components within the discipline of anthropology. The case of the *Negede-Woyto* community of Bahir Dar town was taken as an example to explain the relation between religion and everyday life. The study area was selected due to the fact that this community is considered as distinct from the rest of Amhara society; and due to the fact that the case of this community could be evident for the thematic research on everyday religion.

The main objective of the study was to describe and analyze the religious behaviors and practices of this community so as to understand its relation with other everyday activities. The research was also intended to examine the relationship between this community and the surrounding Amhara society. In addition, explaining the mutual relationship between religion and other socio-cultural settings was also another objective of this study.

In light of this, therefore, the study attempted to address questions like the religious identity and customary practices of the *Negede-Woyto* community as well as the relation between members of this community and the surrounding Amhara society. The main techniques of data collection used in this study were systematic observation, case study, interviews, and informal group discussions. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants from the *Negede-Woyto* community and the neighboring Amhara society.

The findings of the study indicate that the past socio-cultural activities of this community play an important role for the unpleasant relations that exist between members of this community and their Amhara neighbors. In addition, the non-pious behavior of the community is also dealt with in this study in line with Islamic religious experiences. As the findings of the study indicate, poverty and the tiresome nature of their economic activities have been given as main factors behind the non-pious behaviors of the *Negede-Woyto* community. In general, the religious identity of the community, the change and continuity of the religious behaviors and practices of the community, the attitude of the surrounding Amhara Muslims towards this community, and the main factors behind the religious performance of this community are incorporated within the study.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

As one component of culture, the study of religion constitutes one part of the discipline of anthropology. Having a range of themes within it, anthropology of religion has been dealing with religion of small-scale society up to world religions. A number of researchers and scholars, as a result, contributed their part in the study of religion from different perspectives.

Based on Southwold's idea of the characteristic features of religion, Morris (2006:2) argued that as part of social institutions, religion is not made up of a single variable rather it comprises several 'attributes' like rituals, oral traditions, beliefs, religious doctrines, and patterns of social relations focused around a ritual congregations. Though all religions have such attributes based on their contexts, they differ from one another based on the social contexts which they are embedded in. These variations might arise from the traditions and customs passed down from generation to generation and the lived experiences of individuals, which brings us to the notion of 'everyday religion'.

Putting their intention in their book entitled "*Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes*", Schielke and Debevec (2012:1) argued that "a key issue for the anthropological study of religion – especially of large world religions with long-lasting textual and institutional traditions has been how to account for the complex duality of religion as an everyday practice and a normative doctrine". Hence, focusing on everyday religion, in every religion, it is possible to look for dichotomies

between ‘official’ and ‘popular’ religion depending on the religious doctrine and what followers of that religion actually demonstrate or perform in their daily encounters. Thereby, variations within religion and religious practices can be accounted to the difference between the ‘official’ and ‘popular’ religion and what is explained as ‘lived religion’, which is the experience of religion by individuals in their daily activities. Islam, as one of the most widespread religions of the world, is not far from such internal differentiation.

The main reason for this variation can be explained from observing the ‘five pillars’ of Islamic religion. “The core of Muslim religious life revolves around one central belief and four religious practices. Together these are called the five pillars of Islam” (Gulevich 2004:34). These are “to bear witness to the oneness of God, to perform the five daily prayers, to fast during the month of Ramadan, to pay annual alms and, if possible, to go on pilgrimage to Mecca at least once” (Holy 1991:1). Besides these core elements that offer a common ground for all Muslims, they differ in the lived experience of each individual.

In line with this, Schielke and Debevec (2012:3) noted that “the elusive nature of religion as part of a complex ordinary life can be better understood through the notion of the everyday and through an existential, phenomenological perspective that grants primacy to the complexity and openness of practices and experiences”. In order to understand the meanings attached to a given belief and custom, phenomenological presentation provides anthropological studies of religion, to borrow Jackson’s word, “practical relativism” (1996:10).

It is with such understanding that I set out to examine the Muslim community of *Negede-Woyto*. As a member of a society which comprises individuals with diversified religious affiliations, I have got the chance to observe variations among adherents of a single religion. But, to me, such

differences seem to be found, most of the time, at individual level and uncommon to be discernible at the level of community. However, the case of the *Negede-Woyto* community of Bahir Dar town says otherwise. Because of their customary practices and traditions embedded within Islam, people from this community are not considered as ‘true’ Muslims by Amhara Muslims inhabiting the surrounding area. As a result, unlike most cases where variations in religious practice are noticeable at individual level, what is of interest on this community is the existence of such variation at a community level. Though members of the *Negede-Woyto* community are followers of Islam, they are not considered as such by the surrounding Amhara Muslims in regard to their religious behaviors and practices. For instance, the preparation of annual feast for the water spirit is one of the religious practices, among others, which is thought to be outside of Islamic traditions.

Though such practice is considered by the surrounding society as idolatry practice as opposed to the preaching of the Islamic tradition, the *Negede-Woyto* believe that the spirit will keep them safe and sound throughout the year and kept preparing the feast annually on the Abay River.

In order to grasp such concrete knowledge about what Meredith McGuire (2008) noted as “lived religion” or everyday religious practices besides the normative doctrines, this research dealt with questions such as ‘How does it make sense in the life of the individuals who have retained and performed it?’ and ‘How individuals explain being a ‘true’ religious person (in this case, being a ‘true’ Muslim)?’.

As Morris argued “interpretive anthropology puts an emphasis on religion as a cultural or symbolic system, as essentially a system of meanings that both express and shape social reality, as well as people’s dispositions and sense of identity” (2006:4). Jackson in his part also

suggested the importance of phenomenological explanation, which offers the base for understanding how people experience the world they live (1996: 12). Therefore, following both interpretive (Geertz) and phenomenological (Jackson) approaches and so as to understand peoples' perceptions and the logic behind their actions, the main intent of this research revolved around explaining and analyzing the subjective meaning of religious beliefs and practices within the *Negede-Woyto* community as well as their relationship with their adjacent Amhara Muslim neighbors.

Following this, the main focus of this research is to explore, identify, and elucidate the religious behaviors and the customary practices of the *Negede-Woyto* community. In addition, understanding and analyzing their relation with neighboring Muslims as belonging to the same religion is also the focus of this research.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Religion, as it offers the opportunity to feel a sense of belonging and unity with the adherents of a particular religion, creates some kind of variation within group of followers of the same religion.

This difference might emanate between groups of individuals who strictly follow their religious rules and those who do not. In addition, this might exist because of those customs and traditions which are practiced by individuals side by side with their acclaimed 'official' religions. Rather than understanding the rationale behind such differences, people from outside regard them as 'irrelevant' or 'blasphemous'. In explaining such differences further, several writers also used the dichotomy of 'official'/'popular' religion or 'great' and 'little' tradition in which they judge the one on the bases of the other.

In the words of Schielke and Debevec (2012:4) “in past decades, it has become widely accepted in the anthropology of religion that the notions of great and little tradition, and of official and popular religion, are problematic by default because they are based on an implicit recognition of a hierarchy”. Following Redfield’s notion of labeling the urban and metropolitan centers as ‘great traditions’ and the rural one as ‘little tradition’ (Holy 1991:2), many writers acclaimed the ‘formal’ and ‘popular’ dichotomies of religion for the two traditions respectively. In this instance, McGuire (2008:45) argued that what scholars commonly called ‘popular’ religion losses the recognition of being treated as real. This is because of the fact that the other end of the dichotomy, ‘official’ religion is seen as ‘standard’ religion. That is why ‘popular’ religions are always judged based on this ‘standard’ religion.

Though members of the *Negede-Woyto* community are Muslims, they are not integrated or get along with the surrounding Amhara Muslim society as part of the same religious affiliation. This is mainly the result of the belief that in early times, members of this community ate the flesh of those animals which are non-ritually slaughtered. This practice is strictly prohibited in the sacred texts of both Islam and Christianity. In addition to this belief, the other factor which contributed to the separation of this community and the other Muslims is that the former do not follow some of the Islamic prescriptions, such as those which insist that women should cover their hair and that any Muslim should not drink alcoholic drinks like *tella*. These activities are unacceptable in the eyes of other Ethiopian Muslims, but considered as one part of the tradition of the *Negede-Woyto* community

McGuire writes that:

Because religion as lived is based more on religious practices than on religious beliefs, it is not necessarily logically coherent. Rather it requires a practical coherence: it needs to make sense in

one's everyday life, and it needs to be effective, to "work" in the sense of accomplishing some desired end (such as healing, improving one's relationship with a loved one, or harvesting enough food to last the winter). This practical coherence explains the reasoning underlying much popular religion which may otherwise appear to be irrational and superstitious (2008:15).

There is a problem of distinguishing between religious belief and practice. Most of the practices of the *Negede-Woyto* community are seen as irreligious by outsiders. Therefore, this research revealed the importance and benefits of these practices for those who own it.

Moreover, it is very helpful to understand the meanings and interpretation of a given religion from the side of both religious fathers and from the part of laymen since both of such groups have their own perceptions and understanding. In light of this, Debevec argues that "while there is a general recognition that men of religious learning will be the ones able to give a 'correct' account of Islam, the same people who would refer to those men of learning also have their own accounts and definitions. But these accounts can be rather different from what the men of religious learning are expected to tell" (2012:35). Although considered as non-Muslim by the rest of Amhara Muslims, the *Negede-Woyto* community has its own meanings and outlooks on what it means to be Muslim. In this research, pointing out and analyzing the meaning of being a 'true' Muslim, both from the view of members of this community and the surrounding Muslims, is the other point of investigation.

Furthermore, as a community, the *Negede-Woyto* people have their own religious men who are expected to preach the correct Islamic thoughts. In this respect, unfolding the differences between the religious men of this community and other Amhara Muslims, not on their personal differences but rather on what they actually preach as religious men of Islam will be the concern of this research. This will help to understand the dichotomies that members of the *Negede-Woyto* community are expected to follow and perform their customary activities regardless of the fact

that what Islamic religion preaches of the sacred world is the same with the rest Muslims living in surrounding areas. By doing so, it is possible to understand the actual reasons of not considering them as Muslims.

The other issue I explored and analyzed in this research is the notion of sacrifice. Following Levinson's argument that sacrifice is the means to strengthen the bond between people and the supernatural and the animals sacrificed are the means to please the supernatural so as to maintain the status quo (2004:379), the same idea can be suggested in the case of the *Negede-Woyto* community. Although considered as irrelevant by the surrounding societies, the *Negede- Woyto* community celebrates the annual feast which takes place on the Abay River on the eve of the beginning of lent. Members of the *Negede-Woyto* community are also still devoted to prepare this annual feast and give a sacrificial offering to the water spirit. This celebration is accompanied by slaughtering animals and pouring out blood on the water besides preparing different kinds of food and drinks. Such activities are seen as odd and blasphemous when one refers to the rules of 'formal' religious prescriptions. So, this research tried to find out the rationale behind such customary practices of the *Negede-Woyto* community, and to trace out what will happen to them if they fail to accomplish it regularly.

As Holy (1991:6) argued " if what people believe and practice is the only ideal they themselves know, then in terms of their knowledge of the world it is only the only reality". In line with this argument, the religious behaviors and practices of the *Negede-Woyto* community are the right things for themselves. Related with historical antecedents of the community, there is a belief that members of this community were formerly traditional religion followers. And through time, they assumed themselves as adherents of Islamic religion. However, their religious affiliation of being Muslim does not give them the chance to incorporate themselves with other Muslims of adjacent

areas. Rather the activities of the *Negede-Woyto* community are seen by the surrounding Muslims as ‘irrational’ and against the religion which they consider as ‘true’ and ‘perfect’. Their religious practices are the ‘only reality’ for members of the *Negede-Woyto* community. But such things do not take into consideration by the surrounding society rather they prefer to condemn for what members of the *Negede-Woyto* community are doing.

Focusing on the issue of postponing piety among Muslims of urban Burkina Faso, Debevec argues that “rather than designating the different moments of speaking about religious practice to specific groups and categories, it is more helpful to understand them as different modalities of speech and practice, different in their contents and consequences, but united by the practice of living a life” (2012:35). The implication of this argument can also be operated in elucidating and examining the religious beliefs and practices of members of the *Negede-Woyto* community.

Despite all these, so far little research has been done on the religion of the *Negede-Woyto* community. The existing studies focused on their ethno-historical aspects (Teclehaimanot Gebresillasie 1984), their tradition and change (Zelalem Anteneh 1986), socio-cultural and economic marginalization (Melake Mihiret 2010). These works give little emphasis to the religious issues. Other relevant issues about the customary religious activities of this community need further explanation and analysis. In addition to this, the subjective feelings of individual members of this community belonging to Islam religion while they are not treated as ‘true Muslims’ by others should also be examined. This is because the religiosity of an individual as well as a community is dichotomized by what ‘official’ religion preaches based on the sacred texts and the daily practices of lived religion.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1.3.1. General Objective

The general objective of this research is to describe, examine and analyze the religious behaviors and customary practices of *Negede-Woyto* Muslim community living in Bahir Dar town of Amhara Regional State with a special focus on their relation with the surrounding Amhara Muslim community as a portrayal of the meanings attached with ‘official’ and ‘popular’ religions.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

In line with the above mentioned general objective, the specific objectives of this research are:

- To explore the general socio-cultural features and historical background of the *Negede-Woyto* community. The main reason for the need to understand these elements of the community is related to the assumption that their current religious and customary practices might be embedded within and emanated from the historical background and socio-cultural features of these community;
- To explain the religious affiliation, religious behavior and customary practices of the *Negede-Woyto* community so as to identify their basic similarities and differences with the rest of Amhara Muslim communities;
- To examine the changes and continuity related to the religious activities and customary practices of the *Negede-Woyto* community;

- To point out the main factors that play a significant role in the religious life of the *Negede-Woyto* community; and
- To examine the mutual relationship between religion and different socio- cultural situations.

1.4. Research Questions

Regarding the importance of formulating research questions, Bryman (2004: 31) argued that “if you do not specify clear research questions, there is a great risk that your research will be unfocused and that you will be unsure about what you are collecting data for”. In line with this argument, research questions are considered as basic elements of a research that enables researchers to be focused on what they really want to investigate.

Along with its specified objectives what this research aims to examine revolves around the following research questions, which served as a guideline for this research.

1. What customary practices and religious tradition does the *Negede-Woyto* community have?
2. How do men and women members of the *Negede-Woyto* community take part in such customary practices?
3. What motivations forced members of the *Negede-Woyto* community to engage themselves in such customary practices unlike other Amhara societies?
4. Which religious behaviors and practices make this community different from the rest of Amhara Muslim societies?

5. What is the perception of the outside Amhara society towards members of this community and their customary practices?

1.5. Research Design and Methodology

Unlike the quantitative research strategy which focuses on assessing social reality as an external and objective reality, the qualitative research strategy addresses the subjective reality of the social activities as emanated from individual actions. It is proposed that this research is conducted based on the principle of the qualitative research strategy. This strategy is helpful to gather information in the language of the subjects of this research and information which is actually experienced by the subjects in their routine daily tasks.

1.6. Data Collection Techniques

There are several forms of data collection techniques which are considered as the backbone of every research work. Actual and real data on the subject of the research is collected through primary techniques which are supplemented by other secondary sources in order to substantiate what is collected from the field with an already existing written literature. Therefore, to conduct this research, various kinds of data sources and collection techniques were used. Primary and actual data were gathered through different methods. In addition to this, secondary sources of data also had their own contribution for the collection of significant data that supplement the primary information.

1.6.1. Primary Data Collection Techniques

Among the many kinds of techniques which are used to collect primary data, the following techniques were employed in this research.

1.6.1.1. Systematic Observation

Through the use of this kind of primary data collection technique, I tried to get information on the daily activities of members of the *Negede-Woyto* community. In addition to the ideas and beliefs of informants, this method also helped me to observe the actual daily activities of this community. In order to come up with reliable and sufficient data on the subject matter, I stayed in the field for almost two months. Within this time in the field, I observed all the four *kebeles* where members of the *Negede-Woyto* community reside. By residing in one of the four *kebeles*, I tried to grasp information on the general livelihood features of members of this community.

1.6.1.2. Interview

Under this data gathering technique, I conducted two kinds of interview based on the information they generate. These are:

- Unstructured Interview

Basically, unstructured interview is more preferable for the researcher than other forms of interview like the structured one. Since structured interview limits the chance to get more detailed information on the subject of the research, unstructured interview will enable to get sufficient data. Because the questions are not already limited to specific concerns, the researcher had the chance to ask further questions based on what the informants said.

In this research, this method has been used to collect data concerning the religious activities and practices of individual members of the *Negede-Woyto* community. In addition, this method also employed to gather information from the surrounding societies. As a result, identifying the basic socio-cultural differences and similarities between the *Negede-Woyto* community and other

Amhara society as well as the attitude of other Amhara Muslims towards this community is possible. (See Annex V)

- **Key Informant Interview**

This kind of interview was employed to get information on the historical background of the *Negede-Woyto* community. It also enabled to get information on the religious activities that make this community different from the rest of Amhara Muslim society. The data that were collected from key informants also made it possible to understand the changes and continuity of the religious practices of this community. Key informants were selected from within the *Negede-Woyto* community themselves and the surrounding Amhara society, especially Muslims. The selection of these key informants was based on gender, age, status and knowledge of the informants. (See Annex V)

1.6.1.3. Group Discussions

Initially, it was proposed to carry out Focused Group Discussions with a group of at least five individuals. However, due to several factors, I could not conduct formal group discussions. Rather, I tried to conduct few group discussions with a group of three or four individuals. The first factor that made situations uncomfortable for formal group discussions was the problem of willingness on the part of participants. They preferred to answer my questions alone rather than discuss it in groups, believing that it is a waste of time getting into arguments with a group of individuals. The other factor was a problem of time. Even though some individuals agreed to participate in the discussion, I could not manage to get all of them at the same time in the same place so as to conduct the discussion. Because of these reasons I changed to make some group discussions. I conducted three group discussions. The first discussion was comprised of a group

of three young men, the second discussion held with a group of four young women; and the last discussion was conducted with three elders which comprises two men and a woman. (See Annex V)

1.6.1.4. Case Study

“Case study entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case. Cases are often chosen not because they are extreme or unusual in some way but because they will provide a suitable context for certain research questions to be answered. As such, they allow the researcher to examine key social processes” (Bryman 2004:48ff).

In line with the above statement, for a better understanding of the subjective elements of religious behaviors and practices, case study, as a primary data collection mechanism, was employed. This technique was very important to understand the subjective reasons behind performing every religious activity as well as to analyze individual cases on the relationship between members of the *Negede-Woyto* community and the rest of Amhara society of Bahir Dar town, especially Muslims.

1.6.2. Secondary Sources of Data Collection

Secondary sources of information were conducted in order to articulate related literature materials to examine the religious behaviors and customary practices of the *Negede-Woyto* community in relation to the surrounding Amhara Muslim society. In this regard, both published and unpublished materials such as books, articles, journals, and research papers were used.

1.7. Fieldwork Account

The data for this research paper was collected in two field trips. The first trip was from January 21 to February 16, 2013 and the second was from February 22 to March 18, 2013. During my field work, I experienced both challenges and good situations. Staying with people that I am not familiar with was one of the challenges that I faced in the early phase of the fieldwork together with the feeling of loneliness. Identifying key informants and research areas by myself was also among the difficulties that I faced during my field endeavors. Finding individuals who are willing and capable of assisting me in the fieldwork was also another problem.

Before getting introduced with the *Negede-Woyto* community, I tried to discuss (informally) with other members of the surrounding Amhara society. Initially, the information that I got from these individuals was terrifying, telling me that members of the *Negede-Woyto* community are not welcoming to outsiders to the extent that they might hit individuals. They are considered to be repulsive of getting in touch and mingling with other communities since their life is regarded as wicked and full of morally bad behaviors which are unhealthy to anyone to observe or follow. However, when I met with some members of the community, which is not the case I came to observe. After basing my ground as an MA student working on this thesis, they were welcoming and hospitable, almost as if I am a member of the community.

Given that I was alone in the field and unfamiliar with anyone in Bahir Dar town, they were concerned for my wellbeing and insisted to share everything with me, including meal. This sense of family that they established with me was the first and foremost thing that enabled me to persist on the fieldwork with excitement.

Another fieldwork encounter worth mentioning is gathering genuine information from informants, which was difficult to attain. Informants kept providing data on what they think is right (ideal conception) rather than what is actually there in reality. It was through observation that I was able to balance such discrepancy. Unwillingness from informants in providing information was another limitation that I faced in the field. Some community members were fed up with research questions and interviews that were previously undertaken by NGOs and other independent researchers. They believed that participating in such researches was a waste of time and the information they provide has brought them nothing significant yet. The promises they were provided by researchers were in vain. But, through time, informants came around and were more than willing in assisting me with the data I wanted to gather. However, convincing them that I am working on academic research was the most challenging aspect of the fieldwork.

One of the most prominent aspects of my fieldwork was attending the annual celebration that took place on the Abay River on March 10, 2013. To attend this celebration, I reached at the right place around 8 AM in the morning. I stayed there until they finished their celebration, which they prepared for thanking the water spirit. As an anthropologist, being part of such kind of celebration was very interesting for me. Although the celebration made me excited, participants of the celebration saw me with suspicion. Since such practices are prohibited by various governmental and religious institutions nowadays, the people assumed that I came from a government office to observe and report on what they are doing. They did not allow me to take some pictures and videos, which was a disappointment in some respect.

The other thing that was frustrating field experience was getting in contact with concerned officials from various offices. It was really difficult to get these individuals. Nonetheless, once I got them, their assistance was supportive and fruitful by providing available materials and

pointing out potential informants for the research and personally contacting members of the community which might be able to assist me in my introduction to the whole community.

1.8. Rationale for the Selection of the Study Area

Even if members of the *Negede-Woyto* community are found in different parts of the Amhara National Regional State, like Dembia and Fogera, the place which is selected for this research is Bahir Dar town, which is mainly because of the fact that majority of the members of this community are found in Bahir Dar town. Dispersed in different *kebeles* of the town, like *kebele* 3, 11, 14 and 16, it is also in this town that they celebrate their annual festival on the Abay River. In this regard, even if the main subjects of this research are the *Negede-Woyto* community of Bahir Dar town, it was possible to get and make a discussion with other *Negede-Woyto* members who live in other places mentioned above. This is mainly because most members of this community came to Bahir Dar for celebrating their annual festival. So, because of these reasons, the *Negede-Woyto* community of Bahir Dar town was selected as the subject of this research.

1.9. Scope and Limitation of the Study

1.9.1. Scope of the Study

Besides financial and time constraints, which are frequently given by many researchers as the main reasons for restricting one's research both in time and place, this research is thematically and geographically bound in scope since bounding a given research in a specific topic and area of study will offer the ability to concentrate in an outlined topic and manage the data gathered. In line with this, the main focus of this research was confined in studying the religious and customary practices of the *Negede-Woyto* community of Bahir Dar Town of Amhara National

Regional State. Though members of the *Negede-Woyto* community also live in Dembia and Fogera area, in order to manage the data without any difficulty, the main scope of the study concentrates on the ones living in Bahir Dar town. Therefore, by making its focus the town of Bahir Dar, this research addressed all the *kebeles* where members of this community reside.

Furthermore, the main focus of this research is limited in discussing one of the world religions, Islam. Here in also, it is not to deal with the meaning of Islam, rather on the dichotomies made within this single religion the so called ‘official’ and ‘popular’ religion. Other aspects of the *Negede-Woyto* community such as ethno-historical accounts and the socio-cultural marginalization are discussed by other researchers with little emphasis on the religious behaviors and practices of this community. The religious behaviors and practices as well as their relationship with the rest of Amhara Muslim society is the main agenda of this research. Prior to this research, other socio-economic and political aspects of this community are studied and written by various researchers. So, I only focus on this concept in order to give a detailed account on the religious aspects of this community. In addition to this, I also tried to look the dichotomy of ‘official’ and ‘popular’ religion based on the case of this community. The religious behaviors and practices of this community can show us these dimensions of religion at a community level. Mainly, it is their religious behaviors and practices that kept them away from the surrounding society, especially from Amhara Muslims. That is why the main theme of this research is focused on the religious aspects of the *Negede-Woyto* community.

1.9.2. Limitation of the Study

Having chosen to conduct the research among the *Negede-Woyto* community of Bahir Dar town, I faced some problems while entering into the field. The initial challenge was introducing myself

to the community. There was a strong feeling of suspicion on the side of the community. The other problem was unwillingness to give me the right information on the topic of this study, religion. Since it is religious notions, among other things as well, that make this community undermined by the surrounding society, they were not open to explain topics which are focused on religious issues.

The inability to grasp information based on the intended data collection techniques also could be taken as the other problem. I could not conduct focus group discussions since participants could not come into the discussion place at the same time. Being female researcher also hinders my participation in some practices, for instance, on the celebration that takes place on the Abay River. I could not observe the whole process what the men do across the river.

1.10. Significance of the Study

Due to the fact that every research work contributes its part on the area of its focus, this research will provide some intuition on religious behaviors and customary practices of the *Negede-Woyto* community of Bahir Dar town. Moreover, it will also provide information on the differences between ‘formal’ or ‘official’ religious teachings and the actual daily religious behaviors and practices of individuals taking the *Negede-Woyto* community as a practical example. It will also offers the opportunity to understand the rationale behind every activities and practices of individuals in the *Negede-Woyto* community in association with the perception of the surrounding society.

Previous researches on this community have given slight emphasis on the religious aspects, particularly on the variation between lived religious experiences and Islamic tradition. With the

aim to fill this gap, this research will also throw some light on the changes and continuities that are evident within the community.

Rather than condemning customary practices of a given community as superstitious, it is required to understand the logic behind such practice. In line with this, this research will also unfold the reasons behind the customary activities of the *Negede-Woyto* community besides their intention as akin to Muslims. Furthermore, it will also be an additional ethnographic input to the scholarly endeavors to understand the dichotomies of ‘official’ and ‘popular’ religion.

1.11. Ethical Concerns

In order to respect the rights of individuals who are chosen to be participants of a given research, several ethical issues are outlined in the scholarly realm. Likewise, in this research, these ethical issues were executed starting from explaining the main purpose of the research to the participants up to keeping the privacy of the information they provided.

In my first day arrival among the *Negede-Woyto* community, I made clear to them the main theme and objectives of my research. Then after, individuals’ willingness to be part of the research was asked. After getting their permission, they were treated equally without any kind of discrimination throughout the course of this research work; be it in terms of gender or age. Hence, every participant of the research was treated equally given that all individuals have their own knowledge and worldviews, which makes them unique.

In taking photos and videos, permission was asked from participants once again. Regarding the use of data they provided, anonymity was met through pseudo names. The use of alternative names has also been explained for the participants of the research so as to make sure of the confidentiality.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. The Anthropology of Religion

Societies possess a kind of belief in some sort of supernatural power beyond the capacity of human beings. Several disciplines examine the concept of religion from their own point of interest. In terms of its inherent characteristic, religion could be taken as one of the universal features of human beings. However, scholars across a range of disciplines are not able to find an all-inclusive and single definition and meaning for religion.

In their attempt to study the religious aspects of various societies of the world, anthropologists were, and still are striving to answer the question ‘what a society believes?’ (Eller, 2007: xiii).

More specifically, the anthropology of religion investigates questions like:

- What is the range of diversity of religion? How many different kinds of religions and religious beliefs, practices, institutions, etc., exist?
- What commonalities or even universals are there between religions? Are there any things that all religions do or believe?
- What relationships exist between various parts of any single religion, or between a religion and its social and even natural environment? Are there any regular patterns that we can discern across religions? (Ibid, 2).

Some scholars centered their definition on different religious concepts like ‘ritual’, ‘divine’, ‘supernatural’, ‘sacred’ and the like. Others make functions of religion the main concern of their

definition. In this instance, though questionable, the simple definition of religion was given by the 19th c. evolutionary theorist Edward Burnett Tylor (1871) who viewed religion as ‘as a belief in supernatural beings’.

As quoted in Eller’s book entitled ‘*Introducing the Anthropology of Religion*’ (2007:7-8), several anthropologists offered their own definitions concerning different issues:

James Frazer: “a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and human life” (1958:58–9).

William James : “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (1958: 34).

Émile Durkheim: “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set aside and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them” (1965:62).

Paul Radin: “it consists of two parts: the first an easily definable, if not precisely specific feeling; and the second certain acts, customs, beliefs, and conceptions associated with this feeling. The belief most inextricably connected with the specific feeling is a belief in spirits outside of man, conceived as more powerful than man and as controlling all those elements in life upon which he lay most stress” (1957: 3).

Anthony Wallace: “a set of rituals, rationalized by myth, which mobilizes supernatural powers for the purpose of achieving or preventing transformations of state in man and nature” (1966: 107).

Among many other definitions, the most famous and frequently cited definition of Clifford Geertz offered the meaning of religion as:

A system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (Geertz 1993[1973]: 90).

In addition, focusing on the debatable nature of religion, Saler (2009:24-25) believed that “rather than think of religion in terms of “distinctive features,” I prefer to think of it in terms of typical features. These are features that, in our conceptualizations, are deemed typical of what we mean by religion. They are typical, and therefore usually to be expected. Religion, in my view, cannot be clearly demarcated from all else. It is an analog phenomenon in a world that is mostly analog, and it has no clear boundaries”. According to Saler, it is problematic to describe religion based on its unique characteristics. Rather it is better to outline the common standards which could be expected from each religion since it has no clearly set of limits.

In prompting the role of anthropologists who mainly focus on religion, Glazier and Flowerday (2003:5) suggested that:

While social scientists everywhere wrestle with these dilemmas, anthropologists of religion in particular examine a subject for which form and content, ritual and myth, magic and religion, can only be provisionally separated—a subject for which the concreteness of origins, rituals, demographics, and social hierarchies can be explored, but its essence as experienced by its participants must increasingly be approached both inductively and deductively. Anthropologists of religion confront not only a landscape that has shifted fundamentally, but a landscape that is still shifting.

Geertz argued that the task of anthropologists in the study of religion should focus on searching the meaning of the symbols which are part of the religion; and associate the meanings with the context of the society including socio- structural and psychological processes (Geertz 1993[1973]:125)

In conclusion, earlier anthropologists were focused on searching an agreed upon definition for the concept of religion. They intended for comprising the main issues and topics which they think vital and essential to explain the concept of religion. It is undeniable that some anthropologists may still strive in searching definitions and meanings. However, the focus of contemporary religious studies shifted towards describing and analyzing what is meant by

religion in practice, what is the everyday religious practice of individuals in accordance with what religious prescriptions thought to be?

2.1.1. Approaches towards the Study of Religion

Several studies, which focus on religion as their main area of interest, assert the difficulty of giving a single meaning for the concept what we call religion (for instance, Eller, 2007; Morris, 2006; Saler, 2009). In addition, they also argue that approaching religion based on a single concept is a waste of time; instead it is very crucial to apply the different approaches proposed by earlier scholars in their attempt to understand the meaning of religion. In this instance, Morris outlined seven different approaches in the study of religion. Here is the table below:

Approaches	Central Ideas	Personalities
Intellectualist Approach	Religion can be understood as a way of explaining events in the world.	Sir Edward B. Tylor, Sir James Frazer
Emotionalist Approach	Religion is a response to emotional stress and thus serves to alleviate fears and anxieties.	Bronislaw Malinowski, Sigmund Freud
Structuralist Approach	System of thought, especially mythology, magic, symbolism, and totemic classification, are analyzed in terms of binary oppositions in order to reveal their underlying and often hidden, symbolic logic.	Claude Levi- Strauss

Interpretive Approach	Religion as a cultural or symbolic system, as essentially a system of meanings that both express and shape social reality as well as people's dispositions and sense of identity.	Clifford Geertz, Mary Douglas, Marshal Sahlins, Victor Turner, Stanley Tambiah
Cognitive Approach	Religious systems can be explained in terms of basic or pan- cultural human psychological characteristics. All religion is a kind of anthromorphism- anthromorphism being the attribution of human characteristic.	Max Muller, Pascal Boyer, Stewart Guthrie
Phenomenological Approach	Assumes that the origins of religion are in the private experiences of awe or mastery. Looks religious phenomena from the view point of the people themselves.	Rudolf Otto, Carl Jung, Gerardus Van Der Leeuw, Mircea Eliade
Sociological Approach	Religion is essentially a social phenomenon- a 'human construct', and thus can be understood only when it is placed within its socio- historical context.	Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emilie Durkheim, A.R. Radcliff Brown, Raymond firth, John Middleton

(Morris, 2006: 3ff)

2.1.2 Religious Rituals and Practices

Regarding the origin of the concept ritual, Olson (2011: 206) described that “it originates with the Latin terms ‘*ritus*’ and ‘*ritualis*’ that are connected to the structure of a ceremony and the text that defines the structure. The concept is revived around the 1890s in conjunction with the quest for the origins of religion when it stands for repetitive and symbolic action”.

Following what has been discussed by prior scholars; contemporary scholars offer a detailed and an elaborate meaning of ritual. They also suggest the characteristic feature of ritual activities and the benefits this ritual activity offers for the people who are performing it. Such detail explanations are acquainted with several ethnographic examples (Coppet, 1992: 2). For instance, Rappaport assumes ritual as it is “the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers” (2006:24); Baumann (1992: 98) conceptualize ritual as “an act internal to the category or group that celebrates itself through it”.

Through ritual activities, the groups who shared and experienced that action can express themselves. Ritual has the power for the “construction of the self and others, and of personal and collective identity” (Rippin, 2005[1990]; xv). In addition, through performing ritualized activities, individuals can increase the sense of belongingness and membership within that group.

Like any other phenomenon which rests upon a given social setting, understanding the meaning of ritual also needs an understanding of the society in which the ritual activity takes place. In order to examine the ritual actions of a given society, we need have to be comparative (Coppet, 1992: 9).

This is mainly due to the reason that the actions that we categorized under ritual depends on how a given society perceive the meanings attached with that action. Similar with other societal activities which need understanding of the context where they are embedded in, understanding and analyzing the concept of ritual also needs consideration of its context.

Baumann outlined three propositions:

- Rituals are performed by competing constituencies,
- Rituals may speak to aspirations towards cultural change,
- We recognize the frequency of participation not only in plural but also in non-plural societies (1992: 98-99)

The three propositions suggested by Baumann explain that rituals may play an important role in bringing change in a given society. Through ritual activities, individuals may express their motivations towards change. Because the message that expressed through rituals means a lot to the people who are part of it, individuals may frequently participate in the activity. As Baumann noticed this is not only the case of societies that hold several ethnic groups but also of a society who belong to the same racial background.

When we come to the meaning of rituals in religious sense, they encompass various activities and holds several manifestations which can distinctively indicate the identity of a given religious followers as Muslims, Christians and the like. As Rippin pointed out that “ritual activities and their attendant buildings, clothes and assorted paraphernalia provide the emblems of a religion and become, for the members of the religion themselves, modes for the expressions of their

identity” (2005[1990]:103). The materials that accompany the ritual activity also serve as an indicator of the religious identity of individuals who own it.

“Ritual, as we shall be arguing here, is best approached through what it does rather than through what it may mean, although a focus on meaning has characterized much of the social scientific literature on ritual in the past” (Seligman et.al, 2008:15).

The crucial point of studying rituals is analyzing the meaning they express rather than explaining the actions of the rituals themselves. In this regard, Seligman also suggested that it is the framework that surrounds the action that makes it ritual; it is not the action itself (Ibid: 5).

The primary phenomenon of religion is ritual. Ritual is religion in action, it is the cutting edge of the tool; myth, although its recitation may be a part of the ritual, or a ritual in its own right, serves in its meaningful content to explain, to rationalize, to interpret and direct the energy of the ritual performance (Wallace, 1966:61).

For Wallace, ritual is the most important part of religion. It serves as a mechanism that enables myths come into play. Myths, according to Wallace, are the bases of any religion which serves as a reason behind the ritual activity. Myths could be used as a directive force towards ritual performances. As a result, one could argue that religion has meaning since it is accompanied by ritual activities.

For it is in ritual... that this conviction that religious conceptions are veridical and that religious directives are sound is somehow generated. It is in some sort of ceremonial form—even if that form be hardly more than the recitation of a myth, the consultation of an oracle, or the decoration of a grave—that the moods and motivations [i.e., ethos] which sacred symbols induce in men and the general order of existence [i.e., world view] which they formulate for men meet and reinforce one another. In a ritual, the world as lived [i.e., ethos] and the world as imagined [i.e., world view] fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms turn out to be the same world” (Geertz 1973:112).

Rituals comprise both the imagined and the actual picture of individuals about the world which they are living in. Rituals enable individuals to express their motivations and desires. Individuals could express the world through the use of several forms of symbols. These symbolic expressions could be used in a ceremonial form in order to be taken as rituals.

Here I want to stress the activities which are practiced in a ritual manner: sacrifice and offerings.

These two concepts are also the focus of this research.

- **Sacrifice and Offerings**

The practice of sacrifice and offerings are found in every religion, including the so called world religions with their own particular reasons. Levinson (2004:379-380) explains that:

In Christianity the meaning of sacrifice is attached to the death of Christ, which in the early years of Christianity was seen by some interpreters as having superseded traditional Jewish sacrifice. Eventually Christ's death, seen as voluntary and of value to humanity, came to be seen in many denominations as the ultimate sacrifice and the Eucharist (communion) as a ritual reflection of the centrality of that event. Where as In Islam the major sacrifice is conducted during Id al-Kabir, the Great Feast, and marks Abraham's sacrifice of a ram in place of his son. As with many other peoples, Muslims see sacrifice as a way of becoming closer to God, and sacrifice often marks a birth.

The term sacrifice is derived from the Latin word *sacrificium* (*sacer* means holy and *facere* means to make), which suggests that it implies a consecration, transforming something previously profane into something sacred (Olson, 2011:215).

Based on his research findings, Carl Olson outlined three phases of sacrificial procedures as follows: consecration, invocation–immolation, and communion–purification.

- The first phase- **consecration**- involves making sacred the location of the sacrifice, its time, the victim, and all participants

- The **invocation–immolation** phase suggests that the sacrificer speaks to god, and he states the intention of the sacrifice. Immolation is the saint actual killing of the victim by cutting its throat, cutting its chest open, decapitation, or suffocating
- The **communion–purification** phase begins with the sharing of the victim’s flesh, which confirms the spiritual bond between the sacrificer and divine being. Communion also reinforces the moral and social bonds of the participants. A final purification of the participants enables them to return safely to society and normal social interaction (2011, 216-217).

Although both of them are used for the same purpose, there is a difference in the materials used and the practices performed in sacrifice and offerings. In line with this, Levinson (2004: 379) writes that “the basic difference between sacrifice and offering is that in sacrifice an animal is killed, whereas in offering a plant, foodstuff, or inanimate object is destroyed or consumed. Also sacrifice is usually an organized ritual conducted in public by ritual specialists. Offerings are more likely to be either public or private and can be more informal than is sacrifice”.

The following are some of the intended benefits of sacrifice and offerings: maintaining social order, creating strong ties with the spirits for whom the sacrifice is prepared, resolving conflicts, decreasing the intenseness of one’s guilt by appealing the spirits through offering sacrifices and avoid punishment, help to increase a sense of belongingness among the peoples who are part of the ceremony of the sacrifice and many others (Ibid).

2.1.3. Lived Religion: Discourse and Practice

David Hall is accredited for the introduction of the term “lived religion” in the United States in order to understand what ordinary people do in their religious lives (Neitz, 2011: 47).

According to McGuire the term ‘lived religion’ is useful for distinguishing the actual experience of religious persons from the prescribed religion of institutionally defined beliefs and practices. [...]. Although lived religion pertains to the individual, it is not merely subjective. Rather, people construct their religious worlds together, often sharing vivid experiences of that inter subjective reality (2008:12).

The institutionally prescribed religious rules, the so called “official religion”, are not compatible with what people do in their everyday life. Peoples’ everyday life is associated with other aspects of or issues of the society like economic activities, politics and other socio- cultural variables. In order to be the person what the official religious prescriptions preach, an individual must be perfect in all aspects. But this is not what we really observe in our daily lives. Other societal variables also need the commitment of every individual. People always strive to make their life good. In their attempt to achieve what they want to have, they might break those ideal rules of the official religion.

In relation to the confusing use of the term ‘lived religion’, Neitz wrote that:

While in many people’s practice, lived religion overlaps with spirituality, they are not the same, insofar as lived religion is not necessarily private or internal. It is often practiced in public or in collective acts and understandings. We want to be open to the ways that people are sacralizing their daily lives, and to understand the various ways that people now are using religious/spiritual practices in their daily lives to connect to traditions (even invented ones) (2011: 55).

McGuire argued that:

When we focus on religion as lived, we discover that religion- rather than being a single entity- is made up of diverse, complex, and ever changing mixtures of beliefs and practices, as well as relationships, experiences, and commitments. So in rethinking the institutional model of religions, a good starting point might be a better appreciation of the many and complex ways those religions

are the products of considerable human creativity, cultural improvisation, and construction from diverse elements, only some of which were inherited from the same tradition (2008:185).

When we deeply analyze the dichotomy of ‘official’ and ‘popular’ religion, we need to see the concept of discourse and practice. These concepts designate the relation between speech and action. When we see the case of ‘lived religion’, we can easily understand the incompatibility of these two terms. It is language which discourses, not individual speakers, and they only speak to the extent that they respond to (and correspond with) the conventional discursive forms of their language.

Harold Garfinkel (in Rapport and Overing, 2000:118) explored the ways in which everyday conversation was mediated by a set of common background expectancies which speaks shared notions; so that an engagement in habitual discourse maintained and re- enforced a common world view and a common set of social structures in whose terms speakers lived.

Most of the time, people put one religious activity as distinct from the other. To borrow the words of McGuire:

We seem to have uncritically accepted definitional boundaries that distinguish religious practices of one religious group from another’s, viewing them as mutually exclusive. We also assume that religious affiliation or membership is somehow a master category that determines an entire set of norms for an individual member’s entire faith and practice- allowing some practices as “good” or consistent with the organization’s religion and condemning others as “bad” or even heretical” (2008:186).

But this is not the case in practical sense. People may adhere themselves to one or more religious groups. Officially, they may be considered by others as having one religious affiliation. But in practice, they might engage themselves for another one.

We can understand religion through the overall routine activities of a given society. Since every socio- cultural features of a given society are related to one another, first we need to understand the nature of these relations that exist between these features. Then we can possibly understand how individuals in that society can give meanings to their world. Since religion is one component of the socio- cultural features, we can possibly understand what is meant by religion (Neitz, 2011:47).

2.2. The Anthropology of Islam

The anthropology of Islam has become a sub- field in the anthropology of religion few decades ago. It refers to the application of anthropological methods to the study of Islam as one of world religions (Tapper, 1995: 185). It studies the way Muslims construct themselves as Muslims through the use of various frameworks like diet systems(prohibition of alcoholic drinks, for instance) (Ibid, :192).

Anthropologists who are concerned in the study of Islam employ anthropological methods and orientations to explain the general characteristics of the religion. They could explain the religious practices and behaviors of Muslims that enables them to be presented as Muslims. In line with this, Talal Asad suggests the following for scholars who are dealing with the anthropology of Islam:

Anyone working on the anthropology of Islam will be aware that there is considerable diversity in the beliefs and practices of Muslims. One way in which anthropologists have attempted to resolve the problem of diversity is to adapt the orientalist distinction between orthodox and non-orthodox Islam to the categories of Great and Little Traditions, and thus to set up the seemingly more acceptable distinction between the scripturalist, puritanical faith of the towns, and the saint worshipping, ritualistic religion of the countryside (Asad, 1986:5- 6).

Asad's argument explains that the issue of orthodoxy is the major mechanism used by anthropologists to describe the internal differences within Islam. The notion of 'orthodox' and 'non-orthodox' are manifestations of the already set distinction between 'official' and 'popular' religion. In this sense those who are considered as orthodox are associated with the so called 'official' religion; and those who are considered as 'non-orthodox' are attached with what is called 'popular' religion.

The main reason of categorizing religion in such a way is based on the thoughts of sacred texts. Individuals need to follow the prescriptions of these texts so as to be considered as orthodox. Whereas others who are attached with saint worshipping could be categorized under 'non-orthodox' since other religious practices outside of what is thought to be 'true' are considered as 'popular'. Based on this intention, anthropologists use orthodoxy as the main tool to assert the internal differentiation of religion, in this case Islam.

“Orthodoxy is crucial to all Islamic traditions [...]. Where ever Muslims have the power to regulate, uphold, require, or adjust correct practices, and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace incorrect ones, there is the domain of orthodoxy” (Asad, 1986: 15). It is because of the notion of orthodoxy that individuals forced to judge others as imperfect. Groups of individuals that claim as they hold the right interpretation of holy texts condemn and undermine others as imperfect and non-orthodox. He also suggests that everything related with how these powers are implemented, the situations that make them executed and the forces they encounter are equally important in the anthropology of Islam (Ibid: 16).

“The main challenge for the study of Islam in its local contexts is to describe and analyse how the universalistic principles of Islam have been realized in various social and historical contexts

without representing Islam as a seamless essence on the one hand, or as a plastic congeries of beliefs and practices on the other”(Eickelman in Morris, 2006: 77). Describing Islam based on universal principles is not possible since it is said that it could interpret on personal basis.

As Tapper (1995: 192) argues many of the markers that are drawn between ‘orthodox’ and ‘non-orthodox’ Muslims are based on what has been written on the sacred texts. This textual nature of the base of the boundaries has been the focus of anthropological discussions in the study of Islam. This situation creates debates on the basic questions that should be asked in anthropological studies of Islam. These are “Is it a unity or diversity? Is it what professing Muslims say and do? Is it a Qur’an-based set of ideals, identified by theologians or by sociologists-that is, a Great Tradition? Is the anthropology of Islam the study of Muslim societies; or of Islam as a religion (texts, practice, beliefs, history)?”

For the above mentioned questions, Assad’s argument might give few explanations. He argues that scholars who are interested to work on the anthropology of religion should understand Islam as a discursive tradition which is related to the holy texts of Islam such as Qur’an and the Hadith (Asad, 1986: 14). Considering Islam as a tradition helps someone to understand the internal differences among its adherents.

Marranci also argues that “Islam, in other words, is not monolithic, as the mass media has often presented it, but variegated and heterogeneous, culturally influenced and shaped by the identities of those who interpret its sacred texts and practices. This opens the debate on whether we need to speak of Islam or Islams” (2008:29).

This argument asserts that Islam is not a religion that works exclusively around what has been said in the texts. It depends on the interpretation of individuals who own the holy texts. Since

individuals have their own interpretation, the words of the holy texts in Islam might appear in different intentions.

With regard to the question of what is meant by Islam, Asad suggests that Islam is “neither a distinctive social structure nor a heterogenous collection of beliefs, artifacts, customs, and morals. It is a tradition”(1986:14). Here we should ask what is meant by tradition. He also explains tradition as it “consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history” (Ibid).

“Islam cannot exist without a mind interpreting and making sense of it. So, the Qur’an and the hadith would remain mute and without meaning if there were no minds, emotions and feelings informing them and making them unique through the individual professing himself Muslim” (Marranci, 2008:29). According to Marranci, Islam always get meaning based on the notion of how individuals who categorize themselves as Muslims interpret its sanctified texts.

According to Marranci, as an anthropologist, Islam depends on how it is interpreted. Unlike other scholars, anthropologists study the way Muslims construct their social life in line with their religion. Anthropologists also give attention to understand the way individuals interpret their place in the context of the religion in which they are part of it (Ibid)

The general idea of the above mentioned arguments on the subfield of anthropology of Islam and related topics was that Muslims identified themselves as ‘Muslim’ based on their interpretation of the holy texts. The internal variations with in Islam religion followers arise from the fact that individuals could give personal meanings about their religion. So, individual interpretation of the

Qur'an plays an important role for the divisions that are made among Muslims as 'orthodox and 'non- orthodox'.

In addition, it was also suggested that anthropologists are always striving to study Muslim societies in order to understand Islam. Regarding the importance of anthropological studies of Muslim societies, Akbar Ahmed suggested that "the gap between the 'ideal' and the 'actual' is wide among Muslims. Anthropological studies of Muslim society can help to narrow that gap" (1986: 65)

2.2.1. Islamic Traditions and Religious Practices

"Islam is an Arabic word meaning "surrender, submission, or obedience". Thus the very name of this religion sums up its central message: that human beings must surrender themselves to God. Followers of Islam are called Muslims, meaning "those who submit". Since it was founded in the seventh century, many people consider Islam to be the youngest of the world's major religions. Muslims do not think Islam is a new religion, however (Gulevich, 2004:33). "Among populations of the world, Islamic religion followers comprise 1.3 billion or 21 percent" (Eller, 2007: 188)

Gulevich (2004: 34) argued that "the core of Muslim religious life revolves around one central belief and four religious practices. Together these are called the five pillars of Islam. Muslims may differ with one another on other matters, but the vast majority unites to proclaim the importance of these principles". These five pillars, thought of as the 'backbone of Islamic faith' (Kassim, 2004: 195), are briefly outlined below. Although, I substantiate Gulevich's idea with other scholars, I mostly quoted her explanation.

The first pillar is the most important religious teaching stands at the very heart of Islam and must be adopted by all Muslims. This is the belief that there is only one God (Gulevich, 2004: 34-35). Formal prayer, or *salat*, is the second pillar. These prayers are held: “before sunrise (*fajr*), at noon (*zuhr*), shortly before sunset (*asar*), immediately after sunset (*maghrib*) and before going to bed (*isha*)” (Kassim, 2004:196).

Zakah, or almsgiving, is the third pillar of Islam. Each year, all adult Muslims must give two and one-half percent of all their wealth (goods as well as income) to the poor (Gulevich, 2004: 36). Fasting, or *sawm*, is the fourth pillar (Ibid). Rippin adds on this statement as ‘from sunrise to just after sunset for the thirty days of Ramadan, adults are ordered to abstain from all food and drink (2005[1990]:112). The fifth pillar of Islam is pilgrimage to Mecca, in modern-day Saudi Arabia. Believers who can afford it are expected to make this journey, called *Hajj*, at least once in their lifetime (Gulevich, 2004:38).

Performing the above mentioned basics of Islamic religion indicate the submission of those Muslims to Allah. Furthermore, Rippin suggested that:

The only meaning which can be seen in these rituals, according to many classical Muslim thinkers and modern scholars of Islam alike, is the sense of being an expression of an individual’s piety and obedience to God’s command and as an indication of the person’s membership within the Islamic community (2005 [1990]:116)

2.2.2. Religiosity and Piety within Islamic Tradition

Considering an individual as a religious person is a contested notion like the concept of religion. Some might understand religiosity as knowing all the rules prescribed under the sacred texts-the Bible and Qur’an. But for others it may not be the case. Most of the time, individuals consider themselves and considered by others as religious if they know the words of the religious texts.

However, for scholars of religion, it is not the case in point. For instance, Geertz suggested that “religiousness is not merely knowing the truth, or what is taken to be the truth, but embodying it, living it” (Geertz, 1968 in Segal 2003:31).

Being a religious person is not based on the assumption of knowing what is written in the holy texts. Rather it needs to be part of those ideas and embodied those prescribed activities. In order to be considered as religious, an individual/ community should be able to live up to the commands which are written in the holy texts. Although this idea is taken as a must in order to be considered as being pious, different factors may cause individuals not be considered as religious.

In accordance with the above statement, I prefer to quote the argument of Bacchiddu. By taking the case of being a religious person among the Apiao people, Giovanna Bacchiddu (2012:77) argued that “those who practice religion in a way that is judged imperfect are peasants of indigenous origin who live in distant communities in marginal territories”.

As Bacchiddu argues distance from city could have an impact on the religious outlook of a given individual/ community. Those who live at the edge of the center may be considered as ‘non-religious’ or as they do not give much attention for the commands of their religion. However, it is not always the case. Sometimes people who live in the center might be considered as ‘non-religious’. Unlike Bacchiddu’s contention, the community where I conduct this research lives in one of the fastest growing towns in Ethiopia, Bahir Dar. However, they are considered as imperfect in performing their religion by the surrounding society.

As discussed in the above subtopic on Islamic religious tradition, it is explained that Islamic religion followers commonly share one central belief and four common religious practices. In

line with this, those who practice these five core Islamic beliefs might be considered by others as religious. But as Holy argued, “the degree of emphasis put on each one of them is, nevertheless, highly variable throughout Muslim communities, societies and traditions. Beyond these minimal and formal requirements, diversity reigns” (1991: 1)

When we talk about piety among Muslims, for some, it might mean proper dressing during the time of prayer; regularly performing the five daily prayers; not drinking and eating forbidden things; giving support to the needy according to the commands of the Qur’an. But these may not be the defining qualities of a religious person for others. This is mainly due to the fact that these categories of being religious or not are not distinct categories. Rather they are as debatable concepts as religion.

In conclusion, as quoted from Holy “in addition to the core beliefs and a number of common Islamic symbols, there are numerous ideological and practical accretions present in all Muslim societies which account for the actual diversity of Islam. Muslim societies thus differ not only in their political, economic and social-structural arrangements but also in their ritual practices and religious institution” (Ibid). Since they differ in their religious practices, who can give them the category of being religious or not. As Geertz (in Segal, 2003: 31) argued ‘being a religious person means not only knowing but also embodying what is thought’. So, if this is the case in point, who have the right to judge individuals as being pious or not.

2.2.4. Syncretic Elements within Islamic Tradition

The word syncretism is defined by several scholars. For instance:

Syncretism (from the Greek *syn* for “with” or “together with”) refers to an attempt to mix or blend elements of two or more cultures or belief systems to produce a new, third, better culture

or system” (Eller, 2007: 175); “hybridization or amalgamation of two or more cultural traditions” (Lindstrom, 2010[1996]: 680); “Syncretism’ is a contentious term, often taken to imply ‘inauthenticity’ or ‘contamination’, the infiltration of a supposedly ‘pure’ tradition by symbols and meanings seen as belonging to other, incompatible tradition (Shaw and Stewart, 1994:1).

As the meaning of syncretism in the above paragraph indicates two or more cultural elements might appear to serve as belonging to one society or community. The newly mixed traditions may not necessarily take a single, distinct form. Rather both of the old and the new cultural elements could be served side by side.

In syncretism, an individual or group devises a particular mixture of cultural elements and offers it to the wider society as the ‘new way’. In a very real sense, all culture, and certainly all religion, is syncretistic. It might even be argued that the most basic and universal cultural and religious process is syncretism: Humans are forever borrowing from various sources and combining them in ways to produce whatever it is we call ‘our culture’ or ‘our religion’(Eller 2007:175).

Since there is always cultural exchange between different societies, in this process, individuals are the main actors. Individuals may come up with a new tradition in a given society. The newly created traditions may easily be adapted by the whole society. The society then assumes the new tradition as it is their own. However, this is not always workable. Some may stick to the old traditions along with the new one; as in the case of the *Negede-Woyto* community.

Beside their officially assumed religion, individuals with different religious identity incorporate various elements from other religions. This creates a new form of religion which holds some feature from one religion and some from the other.

As Stewart and Shaw argued the so-called world religions like Christianity and Islam can serve as the best example of religious syncretism (Shaw and Stewart 1994:1).

In the case of Islamic religion, those officially prescribed religious beliefs and practices can be practiced alongside with other traditional religious activities. In order to substantiate this argument with examples, let me quote the words of Kenyon (1995:110) as follows:

At the turn of the twentieth century there were at least three distinct types of zar activities practiced in the Blue Nile Province. Today only two are found, referred to locally as zar-burei and zar-tumbura. Both are widespread throughout the country, although the former (henceforth called burei) is more popular, while the latter (tumbura) is mainly confined to urban areas and is regarded as being more difficult, strenuous, demanding. After Shari'a law was introduced into the Sudan in 1983, for example, I anticipated a decline in attendance at zar ceremonies as people generally feared reactions from the religious and civil authorities to activities which are sometimes regarded as anti-Islamic by its opponent.

The above case illustrates that with the introduction of formal religious thoughts, in this case Islam, people become forced to accept the new one. The society may not be fully willing to abandon the old tradition. Rather with the fear of responses from those who introduced the new religious thought, they might accept and follow the new tradition along with the old.

The other example illustrates Islamic Religious syncretism among the Hadiya of Ethiopia:

The name Fandano designates a socio-religious system having such dominant Islamic traits that its adherents were occasionally looked upon by neighboring groups and visitors as being true Muslim. The Islamic sediment among the Fandano-Hadiya and the assimilated Hadiya clans of the Oromo consists of various characteristics with sometimes different designations. A ritual prayer (*sagidda*), which is very similar in form to the original Arabic version, has managed to survive among only a few groups. A period of fasting (*somu* or *somdnu*) was much more common but differed from Ramadan in that it generally lasted only fifteen days (Braukamper, 1992: 199-200).

This case postulates the fact that formal religious thoughts and prescriptions could be adapted and used by a given society according to local contexts. Though they seemed to follow the

practices which are followed by their co- religionists, Muslims among the Hadiya have Islamic elements with little modification in line with their cultural setting.

In conclusion the above mentioned cases illustrate how the notion of syncretism works in different places. Both of the cases represent the syncretic elements of Islamic religions in southern Ethiopia and the Sudan. I chose to discuss the two cases since the main focus of this paper is on Islamic religion.

CHAPTER THREE

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

3.1. Geographic Features of the Study Area

Along the route to the north, the town of Bahir Dar is located around 563 km from Addis Ababa, the capital city of the country; and some 180 km away from Gondar town. Being the center for the second biggest and most populous regional states of the country, Amhara National Regional State, Bahir Dar was given a metropolitan city administration status in 1997 E.C(2005 G.C). Located within 11⁰28'49'' north and 11⁰38'29'' north latitudes and 37⁰23'28'' east to 37⁰36'34'' east longitudes, the altitude of the town is about 1801 m above sea level. The total area of the town also covers 16,000 hectares. Bounded by two large water bodies, Lake Tana and Abay River, Bahir Dar town is adjoined on the south by Yilmana Densa, on the southwest by Mecha, on the northwest by the Gilgel Abay River which separates it from Semien Achefer, on the north by Lake Tana, and finally on the east by the Abay River which separates it from South Gondar Zone (Amhara Culture and Tourism Bureau, 2013).

Demographically speaking, Bahir Dar town comprises an estimated population of 221,991 including urban and rural parts of the town based on the census conducted in 2007 (CSA, 2010: 139).

RELIGION	Both Sexes	Male	Female
Total	221,991	108,456	113,535
Orthodox	199,171	96,786	102,385
Protestant	3,589	1,842	1,747
Catholic	81	49	32
Islam	18,798	9,555	9,243
Traditional	47	34	13
Other	305	190	115
ETHNIC GROUPS	Both Sexes	Male	Female
All Groups	221,991	108,456	113,535
Amhara	213,624	103,325	110,299
Gurage	513	349	164
Oromo	2,449	1,578	871
Tigrie	2,463	1,409	1,054
Others	2,942	1,795	1,147

Table 1: Population of Bahir Dar Town by Religion and Ethnic Group (Source: CSA, 2010, Part I: 139-140)

Several people come from different parts of the country and reside in this naturally endowed town. Among these people, the one who are considered as indigenous inhabitants of the town are the *Negede-Woyto* community (Amhara Tourism and Culture Bureau 2013).

3.2. Brief Overview of the *Negede-Woyto* Community

The *Negede-Woyto* community members are known to live in different locations including in West Gojjam as well as North and South Gondar zone of Amhara National Regional State. It is estimated that all members of this community reached around 3,700. Among these, the majority reside in Bahir Dar town of West Gojjam zone, where 49% of the population from this community live in Bahir Dar, of which 62% live in *kebele* 16 (Wassie and Bayable 2010).

3.2.1. Historical Background of the *Negede-Woyto* Community

Most of the data concerning the origin of the *Negede-Woyto* community came from legends passed down from generation to generation. These legends indicate that members of this community came from Egypt following the Abay River. On the other hand, several researchers forwarded different arguments claiming that the community has some sort of relationship with some of the ethnic groups within the country. For instance, Teclehaimanot (1984:17) argued that this community had kinship relations with the Agaw and the Falasha people of northern part of Ethiopia.

Although researchers believe this to be a legend, members of the community strongly believe in such convictions that they came originally from Egypt following the banks of Abay River. Due to such fact, they argue that their life is highly attached to water bodies, such as the Abay River and the water spirits. Hence, with such belief at hand, the *Negede-Woyto* community members claim that they have no relationships or kinship attachments to any ethnic group in Ethiopia.

Regardless of the debates and doubts on the origin of the community, the data from informants asserted that members of this community are the first settlers of Bahir Dar town, before the occupation of other Amhara people. Besides this, they are also considered to be the pioneers of water transportation through the construction of '*Tankuwa*' (canoe) from '*Dengel*¹' (*papyrus*).

Concerning the etymology of the name *Negede-Woyto*, as that of the origin of the community, here also lays a number of assumptions. The name '*Woyto*', according to members of the community, is a name driven through time from the Amharic word '*wateto ader*' which means people who live by working tedious works. In due course, people changed the name unconsciously to '*Woyto*'. On the other hand, elders of this community also pointed that surrounding Amhara communities claim the name '*Woyto*' to be taken from the Amharic word '*Watto*', which means people who eat everything without any kind of preference. . Members of the surrounding Amhara community believed and still believe that the *Negede-Woyto* people ate those food items which are taboo for other Amhara societies culturally. For instance, they are claimed to consume the flesh of hippopotamus and different kinds of aquatic animals which are religiously prohibited. As a result of such diet, the community was given the name '*Watto*' and changed to '*Woyto*' through time. However, members of the community strongly disagree with this notion of '*Watto*'.

Whatever assumptions given for the origin of the name *Woyto*, in general, the name is associated with the exclusion and inferior status of the community accorded by the surrounding communities. Due to the fact that such naming created some kind of discomfort among the community members, after 1974, during the Derg regime, the name *Woyto* was preceded by the

¹ Dengel is a plant which grows at the edge of Lake Tana and Abay River. This plant is also widely used as a form of paper by the Egyptians in the earlier times.

word '*Neged*'. Then after, with the intention to avoid any kind of negative connotation to the community, adding the word '*Negede*', *Negede-Woyto* became representative of the community. (Ephrem 2002:190). Until recently, members of this community are offended and affronted when someone calls them solely by the name '*Woyto*'. Rather, it makes them contented when someone uses the word '*Negede*' or fully '*Negede-Woyto*'.

With regard to language, today this community speaks Amharic language only. Bruce (in Ephrem 2002:190) asserted that *Negede-Woyto* community members spoke their own language, which is different from the language spoken by the surrounding communities. Gamp also added that this community spoke Agaw language. Having discussed the idea of several researchers (like Asme, Cerulli and Grottanelli) about the language of the *Negede-Woyto* community, Teclehaimanot (1984:10-11) suggested two possibilities for the adoption of Agaw language by this community. The first argument forwarded is the adoption of the Agaw language through their interaction with the Agaw people, inhabiting the area along with the *Negede-Woyto* before the arrival of any other Amhara society. The second possibility assumes the *Negede-Woyto* as one ethnic branch of the Agaw people.

In the absence of written and recorded materials regarding the language of this community, the aforementioned researchers argued that this community had their own language which later became extinct. Through time, the *Negede-Woyto* community became a fully Amharic speaking community similar to the neighboring Amhara societies. However, elders from the *Negede-Woyto* community do not agree with this idea. Members of this community believe that they have been and still are speaking only Amharic language. They further asserted that they did not inherit any kind of different language from their fathers. If that was the case, they argue, one can easily find, even a word, which is different from the rest of Amhara society. They, therefore,

insist that they inherited Amharic language from their forefathers and continued throughout generations.

To borrow Teclehaimanot's idea on this topic, it is evident that they must have had a language in which they used to communicate with each other before the coming of the Amhara society (1984:8-9). I found this argument more persuasive. Since it was argued that they were original settlers of Bahir Dar town, they should have spoken any kind of language that enables them to communicate with each other. However, my quest for the question concerning the language of this community again falls under question mark since there are different accounts from researchers and community members.

3.2.2. Demographic Features of the *Negede-Woyto* Community

In order to understand the demographic feature of this community residing in Bahir Dar town, the optimal source of information for me was the '*idir*²', since members of this community in Bahir Dar have one common *idir* where all members participate. Compiled from interviews held with members of the community as well as observation, members of the community move back and forth from Bahir Dar town, either temporarily or permanently. In addition, relatives from other parts of the region might reside permanently in this area or move back and forth temporarily. As a result, it is difficult to count and compile the exact number of this community. Nonetheless, excluding these relatives, leaders from the *idir* of this community rather clearly registered the number of individuals in a single household including mother, father and children. The total number of this community in Bahir Dar, as a result, counts around 1735 among which men comprise 874 and women members are 861.

² *Idir* is a local institution that members help each other in times of death

3.2.3. Social Organization of the *Negede-Woyto* Community

3.2.3.1. Family and Kinship

The *Negede-Woyto* community has a bilateral kinship system in which a child can get inheritance equally from the father's as well as the mother's side. Zelalem (1986: 14) wrote that "most members of a village are kinsmen, and kinship tends to be bilateral. Obligations toward kinsmen are equal for father's and mother's kin. In times of divorce, a child is free to choose either his father's or his mother's residence".

However, the issue of inheritance is not practicable among this community. This is mainly due to the fact that they do not possess any kind of asset such as house, land, or money, in abundance, to be inherited. Likewise, Melake (2010: 35) also describes that "since the Wayto are economically impoverished and destitute and deprived from any means of property ownership, property inheritance is not a matter of consideration for kinship affiliation".

Coming to family structure, it is customary to find a nuclear family including a husband, wife and children in a household. However, in some households, relatives from other areas might be present residing as part of the family. Nonetheless, in general, the household structure of the *Negede-Woyto* community is nuclear.

3.2.3.2. Marriage

The institution of marriage, defined as 'the union of a man and a woman', among the *Negede-Woyto* community had gone through different phases as time passes on among generations. In previous times, arranged marriage was the most common type of marriage among the *Negede-Woyto* community. Such arrangement was set up by the groom's family. Such processes were instigated while the couples are in their early stages of childhood. In the early times, a boy had to

kill a hippopotamus to be suitable and have the hand of the bride. This practice was also considered as a sign of being strong (Teclhaimanot 1984). .

Nonetheless, at present, arranged marriage is changed to marriage through the consensus and willingness of the couple. It is no different from the rest of Amhara Muslim society. As is customary in many parts of the country, after couples decide to get married, the groom's family will send elders to ask the bride's family for their daughter's hand in marriage. With the acceptance and blessing of the family, an engagement process (*nikah*) will take place. In case of residence pattern, both uxorilocal (matrilocal) and virilocal (patrilocal) marriage are evident within the *Negede-Woyto* community. However, patrilocal residence is more common within the community.

Claude Lévi-Strauss has made his contribution to the study of the institution of marriage by “placing marriage alliance at the very heart of kinship” (Zonabend 2010:444). In this case, what I want to bring into the picture is marriage alliance among followers of the same religion. Accordingly, one might expect such kind of alliance happening among the *Negede-Woyto* community and the surrounding Amhara Muslims. However, this is not the case. Rather than considering it as a religious homogamy (marriage with the ‘same kind’), according to one religious father from the community, it is due to the negative perception of the surrounding Amhara Muslims towards the community members. In some exceptional cases, nonetheless, I found few individuals who married Christian women after being converted to Christianity.

3.2.3.3. Funeral Ceremony

Regarding the funeral ceremony, it is done in the same way as that of other Muslim communities. Similar to other Muslim communities, women do not go to the burial place; they

rather stay and prepare foods and drinks in the house of the deceased. All members of the community contribute money and give it to the families of the deceased.

Regarding how many days the *Negede-Woyto* community spends during the time of death, Zelalem explained that they celebrate a three-day ceremony for any kind of death, and a five-day ceremony for elders and for accident deaths. They do not show the depth of their sorrow for infants below five; perhaps they considered them as burdens (1986: 28).

In earlier times, the burial place of this community and the surrounding Muslims was not together. But at present, all Muslims, including the *Negede-Woyto* community, have two common burial places. The first is found in a place called *Abay Mado* (kebele 11) and the second is called *dibankie* located in kebele 16.

3.2.4. Settlement Pattern and Household Structure of the *Negede-Woyto* Community

Coming to the settlement pattern of the community, members are established in different areas, dispersed around Lake Tana, Elders from the community contended that after they came from Egypt, they settled in different areas around Lake Tana. The first settlement area is known as *Shum-Abo*, which is located in Bahir Dar town. After living in this area for a while, the coming of other Amhara societies into the area, their expansion as well as domination, forced the *Negede-Woyto* community to search for another option which led them to a place called *Fasilo*. Previously, this area was dominated by tall grasses with closely spaced trees, making it unsuitable for living. However, after clearing the place and making it favorable, members of the community argue that they were asked to leave the area by the government. Therefore, they were forced once again to resettle to another place.

After such trend of displacement and resettlement, they then reached to the current settlement areas, around Lake Tana. At present, members of the community are found dispersed in different *kebeles* of Bahir Dar town, where the majority of them live in what is locally known as Tana *kebele* (*kebele* 16).

Regarding the housing style of this community, in earlier times, they lived in a small hut called *qilis*, which is entirely built of *dengel*. In justifying the household structure, members of the community forward two main reasons.

1. The first reason is poverty. Since most of them lived in destitution, they did not have the capacity to build bigger houses like that of other Amhara societies.
2. The second one is their mobility. Since they were not permanent settlers, avoiding one fixed place, such kind of house is simple to move. The only thing they needed to build their house was to bring the raw materials, wood and *dengel*, from the original place. Besides their ease in transporting them to a new location, these materials were easily accessible for them.

However, nowadays majority of them build their house with a wood and a roof covered with corrugated iron. Even in cases where they could not afford to buy the steel for the roof, they cover it by *dengel*. As a result, it is becoming rare to find the *qilis* nowadays.

In relation the notion of mobility in search of settlement area, in order to feel secured, members of this community sent letters to the concerning government bodies to get legal recognition for the place where they are living. Nonetheless, the concerned government bodies could not give them response still now.

3.2.5. Economic Activity and Means of Subsistence of the *Negede-Woyto* Community

Economic activity or means of subsistence are the backbone of a given society that helps to sustain their existence. In this regard, the life of members of the *Negede-Woyto* community is mainly dependent on the income which they accrue from daily works. Men are engaged in making traditional mills from large stones and women produce handicrafts from *dengel*.

Making of handicrafts like ‘*mesob*³’, ‘*agelgil*⁴’ and others is the task of women. The raw material for making such household tools, *dengel*, is found at the edge of Lake Tana and to some extent near Abay River.

Previously, they were benefiting from this economic activity since their settlement was near the lake and because of the fact that it was only women from this community who were able to make the handicrafts. But today, because of the expansion of the city, members of this community are forced to settle far from the water bodies (especially those who live in *kebele* 03, 14 and 16). Moreover, the edge of the lake is fenced and authorized only for those organized individuals from the Amhara societies who are engaged in fishery. In addition, researches conducted on the nature of *denegel* have shown that it has the capacity to retain water by keeping itself green for a long time. As a result, the government began some activities to preserve it which makes it difficult to find *dengel*.

³ Mesob is a basketry used to hold food items like *Enjera*

⁴ Agelgil is a basketry that used to hold different materials, or to carry food (*Enjera*)



Fig 1: Negede-Woyto woman making 'mesob' (Photographed by the researcher, January, 2013)

All these factors present a big challenge for this community. They are forced to buy the *dengel* from other Amhara men with a cost of 50 Ethiopian *birr*. This makes them increase the cost of their products. Because of the increasing cost of the materials, customers are not willing to buy them. Before two or three years ago, they used to sell one 'mesob' from 50 to 100 *birr*. But today, the cost increased from 250 to 300 *birr*. Members from the community asserted that although increment in the cost of their products is inevitable because of the increasing cost of living, the main reasons are the above mentioned factors. If a woman wants to get *dengel* by herself, she needs to spend the whole day wondering around the lake. The place, which is not fenced for the purpose of construction or for the preservation of this plant, is far from their village. In addition, they told me that other Amhara women also learned how to make these items, which in turn contributed for the decreasing number of customers.



*Fig 2: Handicrafts made by Women of the Negede-Woyto community on the market near Mulualem Culture Center
(Photographed by the researcher, January, 2013)*

Likewise, men also have their own sphere of economic activity in this community. It is possible to say that almost all men are engaged in the making of traditional stone mills, i.e. *wefcho*, which are used to grind cereals. Previously, the cost of these stone mills was very expensive since there was no modern mill. But today because of the expansion of modern mills within the community, the traditional ones are going out of market. In addition to making of those stone mills, the *Negede-Woyto* community men were also engaged in selling dried *dengel* to the surrounding society for the purpose of fencing. But nowadays, because of the above mentioned factors that limit the access to *dengel*, they are unable to sell it.



Fig 3: 'Wefchos' which are prepared by men members of the Negede-Woyto community (Photographed by the researcher, January 2013)

In conclusion, as mentioned above, the nature of the economic activity of this community is tiresome, costs almost all of the time and energy they have. On the other hand, the money these economic activities generate is not comparable to the energy that is exhausted till the products are ready for market. However, members of this community are still striving to sustain their survival. As all of my informants from the surrounding Amhara society asserted, members of the *Negede-Woyto* community are hard workers. They spend much of their time in their work. However, they are still found in destitution. Furthermore, the above outlined limiting factors are making their life even worse.

Members of the *Negede-Woyto* community have a strong sense of cooperation and unity among themselves. One elder told me that because of the negative feelings of the surrounding society towards them, at every moment, members always cooperate. This collaborative nature is not only the idea of members of this community, but other Amhara societies also agreed on it.

CHAPTER FOUR

RELIGIOUS BEHAVIORS AND PRACTICES OF THE *NEGEDE- WOYTO* COMMUNITY

Starting from the time when members of the *Negede-Woyto* community became the focus of many researchers, every detail of their identity has become controversial. As described in chapter three of this paper, many researchers have attempted to give their own answers for questions like: Where did the *Negede-Woyto* community come from? How was the name ‘*Woyto*’ given to them? What does the name ‘*Woyto*’ mean? and many others.

Earlier researchers on the area have attempted to analyze the overall setting of this community by compromising the oral traditions of the community. Hence, the written accounts that I came across about this community do not indicate a single and clear cut description on this community in many respects. Among many other things the one which remains controversial is the religious identity of the *Negede-Woyto* community, which will be dealt in this section.

4.1. Religion: Identity and Its Controversy

The origin of the *Negede-Woyto* community religion is still a debatable issue among researchers. Various research works about this community indicate that members of the *Negede-Woyto* community were originally Muslims and through time forgot their religion. Tectlehaimanot (1984:94); Solomon (2006:67) suggested that early travelers in the nineteenth century described the *Negede-Woyto* community as traditional religion followers. They also argued that although there is no well-recorded information about their religious behaviors and practices, it is possible

to say that, from the current religious behaviors of this community, they were traditional religion believers before the adoption of Islamic religion.

Trimingham also argues as they are Muslims but undermined by their co- religionists (1952: 223). Another argument that comes from Mittwoch (in Trimingham, 1952:224) illustrates that they are not acquainted with the words of Qur'an but they used different Arabic words and celebrate Islamic holiday such as Arafa. "Their Islam is superficial and they have merely absorbed a few oddments from Islamic culture".

In this regard, Taye also argues that when the *Woyto* tribe moved to Ethiopia as a result of famine, half of them were left in Egypt and the Sudan. Then they came and settled with their tribe members around Lake Tana in 740 B.C. It was from the newly coming part of the tribe that the *Woyto* heard about Islam religion. Starting from that time they accepted and believe in Allah (1964:35).

Accordingly, we can reconcile the idea of Taye and Teclehaimanot on the religious identity of the community. After adopting Islam in 740 B.C., they gradually forgot their religion. It might be the result of the absence of well-educated religious leaders among themselves. Then they again adopt Islam with the coming of *Sheikhs* from Wollo in 1916. The main reason to say this is the full devotion of members of the *Negede-Woyto* community for the spirit of Abay River. If Islam is the religion that they followed starting from the early time; they could not be highly attached with the spirit of Abay.

When we observe the present religious behaviors and practices of the community, we can understand that they are not fully committed in following the commands of the Holy Qur'an. Although they invoke the name of Allah, they continue their traditional dietary habits of eating

hippopotamus and other aquatic animals (Solomon 2006:69). In explaining the traditional religious behavior of the *Negede-Woyto* community, Teclehaimanot (1984:98) argued that they did not make any kind of food separation between birds and aquatic animals. This food culture continued until 1942. Then after, they gradually stopped eating aquatic animals like hippopotamus in order to get acceptance from the surrounding Amhara Muslims.

Though it has been argued that all members of the *Negede-Woyto* community are Muslims, early members of the community did not have a detailed knowledge about the religion. Since they are not fully aware of Islamic religion, therefore, one could not expect the proper implementation of Islamic rules among this community (Ephrem 2002:192).

Regardless of such claims, information from key informants indicates that Islam is the original religion of the *Negede-Woyto* community. However, they did not have detail knowledge about the rules of their religion. Neither did they implement the ones they are aware of. They are not conscious of the things that are differentiated as *haram* and *halal* as prescribed in the Holy Qur'an. I asked one of the religious leaders of this community from Tana *kebele* what makes their original religion controversial. He replied:

We are Muslims since the early times. But our fathers were not fully aware of what it means to be a true Muslim. The surrounding society also doubts our religious affiliation. This is the result of the dietary habits of our fathers. Early members of our community used to eat animals such as hippopotamus. As a result, our Amhara Muslim and Christian neighbors consider as if we are eating everything without any taboo. That is why they always doubt Islam is our original religion. Whatever they say, the *Negede-Woyto* community does not know any other religion. We were and still are Muslims.

4.2. Core Islamic Thoughts and Practices among the *Negede-Woyto* Community

In every religion, there are commonly shared beliefs and practices that make its followers devoted to one and the same common ground. For Islamic religion, there are five common bases or pillars, which are commonly shared by all Muslims around the world. These are called the five pillars of Islamic religion, which holds one basic belief and four religious practices (Gulevich 2004:34).

Even though devotion and piety towards these religious beliefs and thoughts varies from one individual to another, every follower of Islamic religious doctrine are committed to the five pillars of Islamic religion. As Muslims, members of the *Negede-Woyto* community observe these five pillars, which are important to label oneself as a follower of Islamic religion. In this manner, the following subsection will deal with the five pillars and how they are observed by members of the *Negede-Woyto* community.

4.2.1. Belief in One Allah

This is the first and foremost important pillar of Islamic religion. This is the common rule that dictates every Muslim should believe, have faith in and accept the existence of one God, in Islamic term, Allah.

Not different from any other Muslims, members of the *Negede-Woyto* community also believe in the name of Allah. They bring up the name of Allah in many of their daily conversations. For instance, in their greetings, they say *Allahmidulilahi*, which literally means thanks to Allah. This and other Arabic terms are, in fact, frequently used among the *Negede-Woyto* community.

From the information gathered through interviews one can understand that members of the *Negede-Woyto* community believe in the oneness of Allah. They also believe in the spirit of Abay River, which has been passed down from generation to generation. Alongside the believe in Allah, they consider the celebration that takes place on the Abay River as only fulfilling the duty of their fathers and giving thanks to the spirit of the river for keeping them safe.

In explaining this, an old woman from *kebele* 16 noted that:

We are Muslims and we believe in Allah. In addition to this, we inherit different customary religious practice like the celebration of *abinaz*⁵. Giving thanks every year to the spirit of the Abay River is our duty that we took from our fathers. We should respect and fulfill this duty. It is a matter of promise that our fathers gave to the spirit in return of 'his' protection of their generations. But we believe that our creator is Allah.

4.2.2. Prayer/ Salat

Performing *salat*⁶ is the other common religious practice of Islamic religion. There are five daily prayers which are named as 'subhi', 'zihur', 'asur', 'maghrib', and 'isha'. All of these prayers (*salat*) have their own respective performing time: *Subhi* (6 am), *Zihur* (1 pm), *Asur* (3:30 pm), *Maghrib* (6:30 pm) and *Isha* (8 pm).

Ahmed (male, age 31)

Unless situations make it difficult, members of our community perform all the five daily prayers (*salat*). On every Friday (*Juma'a*), we pray at the great mosque which is found in *kebele* 4, together with other Amhara Muslims. On other days, we pray in our mosque which was built by ourselves.

⁵ *Abinaz* is the name given for the spirit of Abay River by the *Negede-Woyto* community

⁶ Salat is an Arabic term that represents prayer

Information from group discussions with young members of the *Negede-Woyto* community indicate that if someone misses one of the daily prayers, he/she should compensate that by praying twice more on the next *salat*. It is mandatory. Their duty (*kedu'a*) should be fulfilled. Individuals may miss their prayer due to several reasons such as illness. In addition to this reason, the *Negede-Woyto* community members may frequently miss their prayer due to other factors which will be discussed in the coming parts of the thesis.



Fig 4: Al Nur Mosque: One of the mosques of the Negede-Woyto community which is found in Tana kebele (Kebele 16) (Photographed by the researcher, February 2013)

4.2.3. Fasting

Fasting during the time of Ramadan is also another common religious practice among Muslims. Like any other Muslims, members of the *Negede-Woyto* community also fast during this fasting season. Individuals whom I discussed with asserted that all members of the community fast the whole month of Ramadan. Besides Ramadan, similar to Christians' weekly fasting days (Wednesday and Friday), the *Negede-Woyto* community members also fast every Monday and

Thursday. Though it is not mandatory, informants pointed that individuals can fast on these days depending on their will.

Regarding the reasons why Muslims fast the two weekly days of Monday and Thursday, one religious father suggests that:

Muslims fast two days in a week, Monday and Thursday. The texts written in the *Hadith* comprises what Prophet Mohammad was doing and should be followed by all Muslims. These are considered as *sunnah* which literally means likable and should be respected by all Muslims since it is considered as following what the prophet was doing. Among other things which are considered as *sunnah*, fasting on Monday and Thursday is the one.

In explaining the reasons behind fasting these days, the religious father also asserts that:

Fasting on Monday mainly associates with commemorating the day of which Prophet Mohammad was born. He was born in Mecca on Monday August 2, 570 A.D. During his life time, he always spent every Monday through fasting. As a result, Muslims fast on Monday by following what the prophet was doing. On the other hand, fasting on Thursday has also its reason. Prophet Mohammad believed that our worldly activities will be placed in the face of Allah on Thursday, i.e., judgment day will take place on Thursday. So in order to be accepted by Allah, the prophet was fasting every Thursday. With this consideration, fasting on Thursday came into existence. As a result, it is this tradition of Prophet Mohammad which is still practiced by Muslims.

4.2.4. Annual Alms/ *Zakah*

The fourth common practice of Islamic religion is giving alms to the poor and the needy ones. Someone who claims to be a follower of Islamic religion should give two and half percent of his/her annual income to the poor. This is the basic principle of being Islam. But this is not the case among the *Negede-Woyto* community. As one religious father asserted:

We know that *zakah*⁷ is very important in Islamic religion. Helping the poor helps us to have a great value in the face of Allah. But members of our community are also poor. So, we need help and support from others rather than sharing what we have with our community members. We cannot give *zakah* to others because we are also the needy ones.

From my observation, I could possibly say that members of the *Negede-Woyto* community are found at the bottom of the surrounding society's economic echelon. They face difficulty to cover all of their expenses with the money they get by selling what they produce. As a result, the issue of *zakah* is unthinkable among this community. Although there are few individuals who are found in a better economic condition, it is undeniable that they give priority to support their family members and relatives.

4.2.5. Pilgrimage to Mecca

The last religious practice of Islamic religion is performing pilgrimage to Mecca. Anyone who is devoted to the rules and prescriptions of Islamic religion should accomplish this task of pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their life time. But this issue is even unthinkable for the *Negede-Woyto* community since fulfilling this task is related with financial capacity.

4.3. Major Islamic Holidays among the *Negede-Woyto* Community

There are many Islamic holydays like *Eid al Fetir*, *Eid al Adaha (Arafa)*, and *Maulid*. Among these holidays, although they commemorate them simply by preparing coffee and chewing *chat (khat)*⁸, the *Negede-Woyto* community mainly celebrates two of them by preparing different foods and drinks. These are *Eid al Fetir* and *Eid al Adaha (Arafa)*. The main reason for a more elaborated celebration of *Eid al Fetir (Ramadan)* and *Eid al Adha (Arafa)*, as my informants

⁷ Zakah is the annual amount in kind or money which a Muslim must distribute among the poor/ needy

⁸ Chat (Khat) an evergreen shrub whose flowers and leaves have a narcotic effect

asserted, is that these two holidays are more prescribed by religious fathers of the community to be highly celebrated. Religious fathers of this community further preach that the two holidays are more common for Muslims all over the world. In addition, they cannot afford to prepare lavish feast with several foods and drink items for each Islamic holiday. Rather, they restrict themselves to the two main holidays with a preparation of limited food and drink items.

During one of the interviews, one religious father from the *Negede-Woyto* community indicated that:

We have two great religious holidays. The first one is *Eid al Fetir* which is the breaking of the fasting season of *Ramadan*. The second one is called *Arafa*. Even though it is not that much elaborate like *Ramadan* and *Arafa*, we also honor the memory of the birth of Prophet Mohammad (*Maulid*).

In addition, other informants from this community also asserted that they celebrate these two holidays communally unlike other holidays. They also compare this idea of communal celebration with the religious holidays celebrated by Orthodox Christians. One woman from this community, whose name is Mulu, explained that:

The degree of celebration for all holidays is not equal. This is not only evident in our case. We observe that our Christian neighbors do not prepare foods and drinks equally for all of their holidays. Although we could not understand the reason behind that, we assume that it is a matter of emphasis given to those holidays. This is also the case in our community. In addition, this difference in the celebration of our holidays is similar with what has been evident during the time of our forefathers. As a result, we are still following the same thing.

From the aforementioned statement we can understand the different reasons for the importance people put upon and the different ways of celebrating holidays among the *Negede-Woyto* community. In addition to poverty, the degree of emphasis placed on each holiday and the custom inherited from their forefathers play an important role.

- *Eid al Fetir and Eid al Adaha*

Eid al Fetir is one of the great holidays of Islam. This holiday takes place at the end of the great fasting season of Islamic religion, *Ramadan*. As Gulevich (2004:297) puts “*Ramadan* is the ninth month of Islamic calendar. All Islamic religion followers should fast the whole days of this month. Fasting during the entire month of *Ramadan* is one of the five pillars of Islamic religion.” As a result, like any other Muslims, members of the *Negede-Woyto* community also fast during the time of *Ramadan*. At the end of this fasting time, they also celebrate the *Eid al Fetir* holiday by preparing a feast.

Another Islamic holiday celebrated with festivity among the *Negede-Woyto* community is *Eid al Adaha (Arafa)*. According to information gathered from discussions with some religious fathers, this holiday is celebrated two months and ten days after *Eid al Fetir*. On the last days, the period is preserved for fasting. However, fasting on these days is based upon the willingness of an individual, not an obligation.

On both cases, prior to the holiday, members of the community will prepare for the festivity undertaken on that day. While men contribute money to buy an ox conjointly, women will make cereals and grains ready for the preparation of foods and non-alcoholic drinks at every household. After the men slaughter the ox, they will equally divide the meat among each other. Unlike the celebration of *Eid al Fetir (Ramadan)*, only chickens are slaughtered for *Eid al Adaha (Arafa)*. Meanwhile, women prepare non-alcoholic drinks such as *buqri*⁹ in advance. On the eve, they will also prepare food such as *enjera*¹⁰, bread, porridge with butter, and cookies for the

⁹ Buqri is a non-alcoholic drink prepared from sorghum

¹⁰ Enjera is thin flat bread which is commonly made from *teff*

holiday consumption. As a recent phenomenon that came along with the introduction of foreign market goods, they also use drinks such as fruit flavored powder which could be consumed after mixing it with water.

On the day of the holiday celebration, members of the community will go to the mosque in the morning. However, women will remain at home preparing foods and drinks for the festivity. The celebration will continue in every household after a long praying in the mosque. At home, members of the family will gather around and consume what has been prepared for the day. Then after, the women will prepare coffee while the men gather around chewing *chat (khat)*. In such occasions, beside family members, neighbors will also join to celebrate the day. Elder men, while chewing *chat (khat)* and drinking coffee, will give their blessings and pass on best wishes to the household as well as the community at large. They also request the good will of Allah to safeguard them from danger. The celebration, then, continues till mid night.

4.4. Customary Practices of the *Negede-Woyto* Community

In addition to the above mentioned common Islamic holidays, members of the *Negede-Woyto* community also celebrate their own customary practices, which they inherit from former members of the community. Among these customary practices are ‘*Hidar*¹¹ 12’, ‘*Sene*¹² 12’ and ‘*Abinaz*’.

4.4.1. *Nuriya* Celebration

In addition to *Eid al Fetir* and *Arafa* holidays, members of this community also celebrate ‘*Hidar 12*’ (*Hidar* Michael) and ‘*Sene 12*’ (*Sene* Michael). Before the teaching of Islamic doctrines

¹¹ *Hidar 12* (November 21) is the first annual celebration of St. Michael in EOTC

¹² *Sene 12* (June 19) is The second annual celebration of St. Michael in EOTC

widespread around the surrounding Amhara Muslims, where their influence prevailed over the *Negede-Woyto* community as well, members of the community did not have a detailed knowledge about the doctrines and norms of the religion, Islam, including religious fathers of the community. As a result, they celebrated on these days by slaughtering animals (an ox or a sheep) and by making local alcoholic drinks like *tella*¹³. Nonetheless, preparation of such local alcoholic drink is not present today since it is prohibited in religious proscriptions.

On the day of the ceremony, members of the community throw in money communally to buy an ox for the holiday. Elderly men, who are responsible for collecting the money and purchasing of the ox, will also slaughter the ox and apportion the meat to the ones who contributed. After such distribution undertakes, it is the women who are responsible in preparing feasts at home. Together with beef, every household also slaughters hen only for the holiday of *Sene 12*. It is during *Hidar 12* celebration that an ox is slaughtered. In general, among the foods prepared for the festivity of the holidays, such as ‘*doro wot*¹⁴, *enjera* and bread, people share them with their family and neighbors.

To avoid any misapprehension that they are celebrating an Orthodox Christian tradition, commemorating Saint Michael, they call the day of *Hidar 12* with an Islamic representation as ‘*nuriya*¹⁵. The celebration of *nuriya* is more elaborate than the day of *Sene 12*. The name *nuriya* does not designate the day of *Sene 12* and the emphasis given for the two days is not similar.

¹³ Tella is local alcoholic drink which is made from different grains

¹⁴ Doro wot is traditional food item of Ethiopians which is made of chicken and different spices

¹⁵ Nuriya is the name given by members of the *Negede-Woyto* community for the day of *Hidar 12* which means light

4.4.2. Commemoration of *Abinaz*

This celebration, which is the sacrificial veneration of the spirit of Abay River, *Abinaz*, takes place on the eve of the beginning of lent, *Abiy Tsom*¹⁶, of Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahdo* Church (EOTC). Even though the celebration takes place once a year, sacrifice of hen is also done every month. This mainly happens when the people take an oath or promise to venerate the spirit every month in return for fulfillment of wishes and desires. In each case, whether annually or monthly, sacrifice and offerings are given to the Abay River spirit, *abinaz*. Members of the community consider such sacrifice as an obligation; a means to address their part (*niya*¹⁷). Thereby, it is still respected and practiced by members of the community, particularly by elders.

There are different places where the celebration takes place. The former place of the celebration was taken away by the government for construction purpose. It is for the last three years that members of the community began celebrating in the current place, which is located on the area where Abay River detaches from Lake Tana. The following picture shows the recent place of *abinaz* celebration.

¹⁶ Abiy Tsom means lent

¹⁷ Niya is intention of an individual to do something to fulfill the requirement of Allah or his own wish



Fig 5: The current place where the celebration for Abay River takes place (Photographed by the researcher, March 2013)

Regarding the place of the celebration and the different designation given to the spirit of Abay River, the following informant illustrates that:

Emma Zemzem (female: age 64)

All religions have their own place of worship near the river. Amhara Muslims and Christians called the spirit of the river as ‘*Abay Kolle*’; and we call it as ‘*Abinaz*’. We gave it this name for the reason that it might seem to others that we believe in the water when we said we are going to celebrate Abay. In addition, it is believed that the early leader of our community, whose name is *Abinaz*, was dead in the water. Our fathers gave the name *abinaz* for the spirit so as to remember their leader. On the other hand, it is Christians who called it the celebration of Abay. As a result, to distinguish ourselves from them, we called this day as *abinaz*. Although some individuals still celebrate this day, most followers of Christianity have stopped such celebration. Our religious fathers and nearby Amhara neighbors tried to stop it from being celebrated by the community. But, we will never stop giving thanks and celebrating ‘our *abinaz*’.

To assert the promise that appeared between this community and the spirit of Abay River, the following informant explained that:

Ali (male: Age 85)

Our fathers had a kind of promise with the Abay River. That is why the river does not drown members of our community. There is one saying which our fathers used to say when someone from our community drowned in Abay River:

አባይ እኛው በእኛ

የተረፈው ለደገኛ።

This saying literally implies that the Abay River took others and freed us. It is mainly important to remember the promise between the spirit of the river and members of the *Negede-Woyto* community. We are the same and together with Abay.

Before the day of the celebration, certain preparations are mandatory such as contributing money to buy a bull, which should be white or red in color, by members of the community. On the day of the celebration, after 8am in the morning, members of the community began to move to the area. While the men arrange the place they will be sitting on, female members of the community set up the feast they brought to the area including *enjera*, butter, salt and coffee.



Fig 6: Women washing the slaughtered hen with the water of Abay River (Photographed by the researcher, March 2013)

After the commencement of the ceremony, male members cross the river and slaughter the ox they bought. Then after, they pour the blood into the river. Meanwhile, women are not allowed to cross the river like men do. Rather they stay on the other side of the river and prepare foods and drinks. Men who stayed with the women on the other side of the river are responsible for the slaughtering of hen, where they also pour the blood into the river. When they finish preparing these foods and drinks, all attendants of the celebration move into the river and wash or cleanse their body.

In this celebration, everyone prepares their own *silets*¹⁸ and offer it to the Abay River. It is believed that before anyone begins eating and drinking the feast that is prepared for the day, it is the river that should consume the foods and drinks at first. Therefore, members of the community offer some of the foods and coffee prepared to the river. In justifying such actions, a number of discussions with individual informants noted that the overall purpose of the celebration is for the commemoration of the spirit of Abay River. Therefore, it is forbidden to eat and drink before offering to the river.

After the offering undertakes, they sit in groups together with their family members or close relatives and began to consume what has been prepared. It is after this that they begin chewing *chat (khat)* and passing on blessings to each other. By doing such activities, they stay at the bank of the river starting from 8 am till 3 pm of the day.

Finally, the women wash the materials they used to prepare the feast and return to their home. Before their return, they fetch water from the river in a bottle to take it to their home. In

¹⁸ *Silet(votive)* is a promise or an oath to a higher power in order for something to be fulfilled

explaining their actions, they argue that the water from the Abay River is similar to a holy water which heals them from different kinds of health problems.

An old woman from the *Negede-Woyto* community noted that:

It was believed that the foods and drinks which are prepared for the water spirit (*abinaz*) should not return home. Everything should be dealt with near the River. We believe that everything which is prepared for *abinaz* should be given to ‘him’ (*abinaz*). If we bring the remains of the foods and drinks back home, it may cause illness and other problems. But nowadays, we are taking the leftovers back home and it did not cause anything bad.

Though they claim that they take the leftovers back home, my observation says otherwise. At the end of the celebration, the women will throw out all the leftovers into the river and wash the materials used in the preparation of foods and drinks before going back home. The following pictures illustrate the food left overs near the river.



Fig 7: The food leftovers near the Abay River (Photographed by the researcher, March, 2013)



Fig 8: The food leftovers near the river after the end of the celebration (Photographed by the researcher, March, 2013)

During the group discussion with the youth, participants of the discussion argued that most of the participants of the *abinaz* celebration are elder members of the community. They also argued that the youth are not going to the Abay River for the celebration. However, I observed that on the day of the celebration, it was possible to see many youth participating in the celebration. In a discussion with them about the *abinaz* celebration, they told me that they come every year to give thanks for *abinaz*. ‘He’ gratifies their wishes and desires. The following case will illustrate this idea of the youths.

Suleiman (male; age- 27)

My name is Suleiman. I came here, Abay River, to give my *silet* for *abinaz*. When my friends began to learn *Qur’an*, I was able to learn with them. During that time, I totally stopped participating in the *abinaz* celebration. However, I came back here three years ago and I have been celebrating since then. This is mainly related with a serious health problem that I faced three years ago. I went to different health centers, but I was not cured. Then, on the day of the celebration, I made *silet* for *abinaz* to help me get better from my health problem and I drink the water that came from the Abay River. Within few days, I found myself in a better condition. After that I regularly

attend the celebration every year. I always give offerings. Although I am well acquainted with the words of the holy *Qur'an*, I also believe in *abinaz*. He has done a lot for me.

4.5. Towards the Syncretic Elements of the *Negede-Woyto*

Community Religion

The notion of syncretism has been discussed as one of the main areas of focus in the anthropology of religion. Referring to the mixing of two or more religions or cultures (Shaw and Stewart 1994:1), syncretism might appear through the domination of one society over the other and through contact between different societies like the case of the *Negede-Woyto* community. The society being conquered or dominated, therefore, will have a syncretized element from both its previous culture as well as the culture of the new society. If there is contact between two or more societies, they are likely to exchange their cultures. Through time they might adapt themselves to a new culture.

Such idea of syncretism is evident among the *Negede-Woyto* community where we can find a combination of elements from Islamic religion and elements from the so-called traditional religion. Members of the *Negede-Woyto* community claim themselves to be followers of Islam. On the other hand, they are also devoted to the spirit of Abay River, which they called *abinaz*.

Members of the community are devoted in offering sacrifices to *abinaz* because 'he' safeguards them starting from the time of their ancestors. Early members of the community were highly devoted to give sacrifices and offerings for the spirit. In each and every aspect of their activities, they call upon the protection of the spirit. During the time of fishing, for instance, they first pour cereals like wheat to the water as a sign of good fortune. At the same time, it is also considered to be an offering used to appeal to the spirit till they accomplish what they are doing. Although

the intensity of devotedness to give sacrifices and even attend the celebration is decreasing from time to time, some members still do not want to terminate their sacrifices and offerings for *abinaz*.

At the same time, they are also performing Islamic practices. They make greetings in Islamic terms, they have built mosques and pray Islamic prayers and so on. Even though the applicability of Islamic practices among this community is a little bit different from the nearby Amhara Muslims, they considered themselves as Muslims. Most of my informants from this community, especially elders, argued that “there is no doubt, we are Muslims. It is the religion of our fathers and grandfathers”. In legitimizing their devotion to the spirit of *abinaz*, they consider it as one element of Islamic tradition. In explaining such syncretization, the following case elaborates on how such devotion is integrated within Islamic religious practices.

Ali (male: Age 75)

Abinaz is our guardian that we are given from Allah. ‘He’ protects us from every bad thing. We inherited giving thanks to ‘him’ from our elders. They were giving him what is appropriate and that makes him pleased. We are followers of Islamic religion. We believe in one Allah. We also believe in the protection he provides us with. One such protection is *abinaz*.

Devotion to celebrating *abinaz* is taken as one component of their religion, Islam. *Abinaz* is considered as a guard which came to them from Allah so as to protect members of the community. Being a follower of Islamic religion as well as devotion to the celebration of *abinaz* is perceived as components of one element by most of my informants, except some youth members of the *Negede-Woyto* community. Almost all of these individuals argued that they still celebrate *abinaz* with the intention of preserving the activities of their forefathers as well as fearing any kind of chastisement that may exist as a result of neglecting such offerings and sacrifices.

Although the religion of the *Negede-Woyto* community is claimed to be Islam, from their religious activities and practices one can easily understand that it is not purely Islam per se. Rather, as mentioned above, it holds some Islamic religion components as well as elements from traditional religion to which they are equally devoted to.

Based on the idea of Teclehaimanot, they converted to Islam through their contact with *sheikhs*¹⁹ that came to this community from Wollo in 1916. Then they adopted Islam as their religion. They also perform their early practices which are related with the spirit of River Abay (*abinaz*). Since they are dominated by the Amhara societies, they fall under their influence in many instances. This continuous influence from their surrounding makes them to rethink and stop performing their previous activities which are labeled as ‘traditional religious practices’. As a result, it is possible to say that the overall religious situations of the *Negede-Woyto* community could be taken as an example of the notion of syncretism.

4.6. Relationship between the *Negede-Woyto* Community and the Surrounding Amhara Society

4.6.1. Relations with the Surrounding Amhara Christians

Unlike their relation with the Amhara Muslims, members of the *Negede-Woyto* community have good relation with the surrounding Christians. This is mainly due to the fact that members of this community do not have, religiously, anything that could be shared in common with the Christians. They participate in non-religious institution with Christians like *iqub*²⁰. This is the

¹⁹ Sheikh is a man who has a better knowledge of the religious texts and can give an explanation on that

²⁰ Iqub is a traditional saving institution in which members have a chance to get money through rotation by using lottery method

only institution where both members of the *Negede-Woyto* community and the surrounding Amhara Christians could participate. Although it is found in a better condition, the previous religious behaviors and practices of the *Negede-Woyto* community such as eating non-ritually slaughtered meat and the flesh of religiously prohibited animals like hippopotamus cause negative attitude of the neighboring Christians towards them.

Some Christian individuals with whom I discussed believe that members of the *Negede-Woyto* community are not true Muslims. One Christian person asserts that:

Although members of the *Negede-Woyto* community consider themselves as Muslims, they are not true Muslims. Everything what they are doing and how they behave is not like other Amhara Muslims. It might be the result of their previous religious experience. I heard from elders that they did not have any religious affiliation with Christians or Muslim. They were eating everything what they get. As a result, they are not fully committed for their assumed religion, Islam. As a neighbor, I observe that they interact with Christians in few respects. If the Christians allowed them, members of this community can participate in *iqub*. But it is a rare case. Since their economic activity is from hand-to-mouth, most of the time they do not have extra money to be used for *iqub*. In addition if someone dies from the *Negede-Woyto* community, their Christian neighbors go and be with them for a while. The reverse will happen if someone dies from their Christian neighbors. But it is undeniable that no Christian is willing to eat anything in *Negede-Woyto* community's house. This is the result of their uncleanness. They are totally unclean. The area where they live smells bad. As a result, no one is willing to share those foods and drinks which are prepared in the house of *Negede-Woyto* community. Let alone Christians, the Amhara Muslims are also not willing to share anything with them. Generally, their religious identity is vague. It is difficult to call them Muslims. They are not doing what is expected from Muslims or what we are seeing from other Amhara Muslims.

4.6.2. Relations with the Amhara Muslims

Members of the *Negede-Woyto* community claim themselves as Muslims. However, the relation between this community and the surrounding Amhara Muslims is not all that good. The Amhara

Muslims discriminate this community. The surrounding Amhara Muslims believed that members of the *Negede-Woyto* community do not behave like what Islamic religion prescribes. They do not follow the rules of the Holy Qur'an. The surrounding Muslims do not want to pray in the mosque of the *Negede-Woyto* community. One Amhara Muslim woman argued that:

I live in *kebele* 16 where most members of the *Negede-Woyto* community live. I do not have close contact with them. Their behavior is very difficult. When you hear them, they are always nagging and fighting each other. They do not behave like Muslims such as their dressing style, and eating and drinking habits. They do not dress like Muslims especially women. They do not cover their hair. This is a serious matter in Islamic religion. Let alone during the time of *salat*, Muslim women should always cover their hair everywhere. But this is not the case among the *Negede-Woyto* community.

Informants from Amhara Muslims indicate that members of the *Negede-Woyto* community are ignorant about their religion. Every Friday, after *salat*, religious fathers teach all Muslims to be committed for their religion. Although, members of this community know which one is *haram*²¹ and which one is *halal*²², they are not practicing it. Since the nearby Amhara Muslims still perceive members of this community in relation to what they were doing previously, they are not willing to be with them in one mosque. But this attitude is changing over time.

An informant from the *Negede-Woyto* community also asserts that:

We cannot say that our relation with the Amhara Muslims is good. Although it is undeniable that we observe little improvement from time to time, there are still some problems. We are striving to avoid those problems which can be seen by others as a mistake. But the Amhara Muslims could not consider us as their co- religionists. The previous characteristics which were given to our fathers still could not be discarded from their mind. That is why we are not fully accompanying them in several religious and social activities.

²¹ Haram is something which is forbidden to do or say among Muslims

²² Halal is something which is acceptable and need to be followed by Muslims

4.7. Contributing Factors for the Non-Pious Behaviors of the *Negede-Woyto* Community

There are both positive and negative factors that contribute their part in the religious life of a given individual or a society in general. I have discussed the major issues in the religious life of the *Negede-Woyto* community. Some of their religious behaviors make them to be seen by others as different from the neighboring Amhara Muslims.

The main reason for the exclusion of the *Negede-Woyto* community from the rest of Amhara Muslims is their perceived level of devotion to their religion. They are seen by their Amhara Muslim neighbors as not fully committed to perform what is expected from every Muslim, for instance, regularly performing the five times daily prayers and dressing styles that manifest being Muslim.

Information gathered from the group discussion with elders of this community indicates that they may or may not regularly pray every day; they may not dress properly like other Muslims. These practices make members of the *Negede-Woyto* community not only to be seen in a different spot unlike their Amhara Muslim neighbors, but also contribute for the unpleasant relationship observed between them and the nearby Amhara Muslims. Even though it is changing over time, this unkind relationship ranges from not praying in the same mosque to marriage prohibitions with this community. Now a days, it is possible for this community to pray together with the Amhara Muslims in one mosque. However, creating marriage alliances between this community and Amhara Muslims is still the main issue that could not be resolved.

For all of these practices that make them to be alienated from other Amhara Muslims, members of this community offer their own reasons. They believe that it is not because they are ignorant about their religion rather there are factors that push them not to be able to fulfill their religious obligations. These reasons fall under two major categories; the first one is poverty; and the second one is the way they incur money or means of subsistence.

4.7.1. Poverty as a Factor for Non-Piety

Poverty is the main factor that makes a given individual or society not to sustain properly. It is a known fact that poverty hinders the proper functioning of a society. Likewise, informants from the *Negede-Woyto* community asserted that it is poverty that makes them to be found at a lower level of the society to which they are a part.

It is believed that they are the first settlers of Bahir Dar town. During that time, elder informants said, every natural resource like Abay River, Lake Tana, the land itself was under the ownership of this community. No one interfered in their possession and controlled what they are doing with all of these natural endowments. They could engage in fishing and used for household consumption. Through time, however, other Amhara societies began to settle in the area after this community made it suitable for living by clearing the forest.

The number of inhabitants in the town increased over time. This increasing number of Amhara peoples in the area makes the life of this community difficult. They were forced to move from their original place in the town which is called *Shum Abo*²³. Frequently, they changed their settlement areas due to the increasing pressure of the Amhara settlers as well as government officials.

²³ Shum Abo is original settlement place of the *Negede-Woyto* community in Bahir Dar town

An old man from this community, whose age is around 83, argued that:

We were not seen as human beings, the Amhara societies considered us as animals. That is why we are denied our right of getting equal opportunity to use those natural resources which were under our control before the coming of the Amhara societies. Through the increasing pressure from the Amhara societies, we are forced to settle in different areas of the town until we reached at the corner of the town. This situation makes our living condition difficult.

Members of this community always argued that their living condition is in a destitute situation. They are denied of every opportunity they could share with the rest of the Amhara society. Lack of attention from the government makes their situation even worse. As described in chapter three of this paper, they are still in process to get legal recognition for the area where they are living.

Education can be taken as a tool to improve the living condition of a given individual in particular and a society in general. In this instance, it was during the *Derg* regime that equal access to education came into existence including those outcaste and despised groups living in Ethiopia. This opportunity gave members of the *Negede-Woyto* community to have equal access to education like other people do. However, this chance could not give them an opportunity to improve their living condition. This is mainly the result of pressure they faced from the surrounding society. One of the manifestations of these pressures from their neighbors is unequal access to land. This situation led them not to settle in one permanent place and exacerbates the alienation of this community from other Amhara society. This condition results them to be found in poverty. So as to alleviate all of these problems, they need to learn. However, though they could get the chance to learn, they may stop at 4th or 5th grade, i.e., probably until they reach the age at which they start work to support themselves and their families.

As discussed earlier, the characteristic feature of their means of subsistence is from hand to mouth. Everything what they get from selling their products, i.e., handicrafts and traditional

stone mills, will be used to feed themselves and their families. It was unthinkable to use the money to make their living condition better. Now days, few individuals could engage in other economic activities like being a guard in different government institutions. Only these few individuals are trying to make their life better. But the majority of them still work to survive.

Such kind of living condition forced members of this community to be undermined by others. They renounced engaging themselves in different kinds of work other than their dominant economic activities. This is the result of both lack of education as mentioned above and because they are marginalized in every aspect of societal activities. Both of these reasons can relate in one or another way with poverty.

It is believed that Muslims and their surrounding should be clean during the time of prayer. Since everything is clean, they can perform the daily prayers. In order to pray, first and foremost, they should be clean. But this is unthinkable among this community. The money they get is not sufficient to use on other things other than their consumption. Using their money for things other than buying food items is considered as wastage including things that can enhance their sanitation. The following case illustrates how poverty affects the religious behaviors of individuals.

Fatuma (Female; Age-32)

My name is Fatuma. I have four children. My husband passed away two years ago. As a result, every household responsibility falls on my shoulder. The money that I get from selling *mesob* and *agelgil* is not sufficient to fulfill the needs of my children and myself. In order to perform the religious duties of Islam, to begin with the simple one, I need to buy different materials like *hijab*. But, I cannot do that. I spend my money for foods and drinks. In order to assure the survival of my family, I need to work the whole day. As a result, I am not doing what is expected from every Muslim like regularly perform the five daily prayers. This is the result of poverty. In order to avoid the problems that appear as a result of poverty, I need to work which in turn takes much

time. In one or another way, I am not doing what is taught to be followed by all Muslims. All of these are the result of being poor.

Thereby, among this community, poverty plays a great role in this community by hindering all the possible means and ways to be a pious individual. It also imparts to the unwillingness of the neighboring Amhara Muslims to be form marriage alliance with them. Informants from this community also asserted that in addition to the negative connotation of past ways of life of this community, their status of being a poor community also plays a great role in their relation with their Amhara Muslim neighbors.

4.7.2. Means of Subsistence/ Economic Activity

This is also the other major contributing factor for the non-pious behaviors of the *Negede-Woyto* community. Although it is the means of their survival, members of this community are taking their economic activity as the second reason behind their non- religiousness.

When we said economic activity limits the opportunity of being a religious person, it is to mean that it is related with time and cleanliness. As I mentioned earlier men and women members of this community are engaged in making traditional stone mills and handicrafts, respectively. These are so far the sole economic activities of the *Negede-Woyto* community that help them to survive. These economic activities are very tiresome and need much time. Starting from bringing the raw materials from their original place up to finishing the products, it takes much of their time.

Women informants noted that they have to spend the whole day working in order to finish their products as quickly as possible within 3 to 5 days and bring it to the market area. In order to make the handicrafts, they have to make the raw material (*dengel*) wet. In doing so, the water that they use to make the *dengel* wet passes onto their clothes. Beside the wetness, the water also

transfers the smell of the *dengel* which resembles with that of a fish. In addition, they also asserted that:

This is the main reason that our neighbors considered our living area as nasty. The smell here is 'bad'. Besides all these, we frequently miss our *salat*. This is the result of the nature of our work. We should finish our products quickly in order to get money. As a result, we give much attention to our work rather than our praying.

The matter of running against time to sell their products to get money is also similar among men members of this community. As female informants stated that their work and working situation not only makes them unable to perform *salat* but also not to properly dress like other Muslim women. The following case is taken during the time of informal group discussions with a group of four women, which clearly shows how their economic activity is related with them being Muslim and fulfilling what is expected of them as Muslims.

Jemila (female: age 24)

I am always doing my work throughout the whole day. Since the nature of the work requires sitting in one place for a long time, it makes me feel tired. When I set to start my work, I prefer not to wear *hijab*. Because it makes you feel warm. In addition, I also prefer not to wear shoe in my working time. This is the case of all women who make handicrafts. If you observe other women sitting in groups to make *mesob* or *agelgil*, you can clearly observe that they are without *hijab* and shoes. If you ask them the reason, they will give you what I have told you. After sitting for a long time, when I need to make something in my home like cooking or making coffee, I will walk in my bare foot. Then after, if I could get the time to pray, I need to be clean. This means I need time to change my cloths and wash my feet. But this is also another time taking and tiresome activity. So, I prefer not to pray on that day. This kind of situation is a routine for me. Those days where I prayed regularly are very few. I believe that I need to survive first. Everything will come next. Also, Allah is not like us. He understands everything and forgives our sins.

This case shows us that the tiresome nature of their work contributes to their non-pious nature. Even though I only mentioned the case of one woman, the other three women who were part of the discussion also share the experience of Jemila.

When we talk about being religion among the *Negede-Woyto* community, the above mentioned reasons are taken as the main hindrances. These factors play important role behind their inability to be a religious person at least in a way of fulfilling those rules which they are obliged to do.

4.8. Change and Continuity

Change is an inevitable situation which every society experiences. Every cultural component of a given society is always in the process of change. These changes might take a positive or a negative way. Among the enormous cultural components of a given society which are open to change, religion is one.

As a community that comprises its own cultural values and norms, the *Negede-Woyto* community also experiences the notion of change in their cultural behaviors and practices. Since the main focus of this thesis is on the religious aspect of this community, this section of the thesis only tries to deal with the changes around the religious experience of the community. Though continuity seems to be present when we speak of some religious elements, members of this community have also faced some sort of change in their religious experiences.

The religious identity of the community, the way they devoted themselves to their religion, their relation with the surrounding co-religionists, the celebration of holidays as well as the overall religious behavior and practice of the community are among the main focus areas where change is evident in the religious elements of the community. Such changes across generation and across time might appear as a result of the domination of the *Negede-Woyto* community by the surrounding Amhara society.

As mentioned in previous sections, regardless of the validity of the claim, it is believed that members of the *Negede-Woyto* community are the original settlers of Bahir Dar town. Through

time, as the town expanded and as the domination of the Amhara society increased, members of the *Negede-Woyto* community lost their control over things and their own right. The settlement of other Amhara societies in Bahir Dar town contributed to the perception of the *Negede-Woyto* community members as strangers in terms of their cultural make-ups, particularly with regard to their religious identity. However, Seltene Seyoum says otherwise in relation to the foundation of Bahir Dar town. He wrote that:

There is a popular tradition which attributes to the period of Amda Siyon (r. 1314-1344) the foundation of churches and monasteries along the southern part of Lake Tana. There were four *tabots* (arcs) of Gabriel, *Giyorgis*, *Kidana Mihret* and Mariam. Priests were said to have put the three *tabots* in their respective place except *Kidana Mihret*. Then one of the priests suggested that it could be placed by the '*bahiru dar*', that is, [to say literally] 'on the lake shore, on a place protruding into the lake from the south'. Then they erected the *tabot* on the *bahiru dar* and, hence, the settlement came to be called [as] Bahir Dar *Kidana Mihret*. Although there is no written confirmation of this tradition, this is the first mention of a religious settlement at Bahir Dar (Seltene, 1988:3-4).

Although Seltene associates the foundation of Bahir Dar town with the placement of churches and *tabots*, the data gathered from informants indicate that members of the *Negede-Woyto* community are the first settlers of Bahir Dar town. Both arguments about the foundation of Bahir Dar town are based on traditions and religion.

On the other hand, when we refer what Taye wrote about the historical background of the *Negede-Woyto* community, he asserts that "the *Woyto* tribe came to Ethiopia by following the Abay River in 2360 B.C due to the existence of famine in Egypt and the Sudan. Then they reached Ethiopia and settled around Lake Tana" (1964:35).

When we observe the idea of the above two scholars, it clearly shows whether it is the *Negede-Woyto* community who settled first in Bahir Dar or not. We can see the time frame which Seltene

and Teye used to explain the establishment of Bahir Dar town and the coming of *Negede-Woyto* community in Ethiopia respectively. There is a wide gap. It is the *Negede-Woyto* community who settled first in Bahir Dar before the Amhara society. As a result, I am inclined to agree with the tradition that asserts the first settlers of Bahir Dar town are members of the *Negede-Woyto* community.

In addition, we could also argue that, following Seltene's argument that indicates water related activities, such as transportation through *tankuwa* was taken by the Amhara society away from the *Negede-Woyto* community by the beginning of the 17th c., the argument that suggest the *Negede-Woyto* community were the first settlers of the town might be true.

Moving away from the debate over the first settlers of Bahir Dar town, we now come to discuss about the change that underwent within the *Negede-Woyto* community. It is a known fact that if a society lives in seclusion far from any contact with the surrounding society, the cultural elements of that society will remain intact across generations. Following this argument, it can be noted that the culture of the *Negede-Woyto* community changed through time due to their contact with the Amhara society.

Focusing our attention towards change in the realm of religion, as Teclehaimanot (1984:21) argued:

The first sheikh who arrived among the *Negede-Woyto* community came sometimes in the 19th c from Wollo specifically Werehimenu area. The reason has not been clear why those sheikhs came and intermarried with the woyto who had a lower social status. Possibly these Moslems had come during times of famine and may have owed their survival to the hippopotamus and meat fish.

Furthermore, he also mentioned that early scholars and travelers that had a chance to visit this community described that Islam is not the original religion of this community. Rather, they were

traditional religion followers (Ibid: 93-99). Aside from such claims, all informants from this community claimed that Islam was the original religion of the community. They also argued that they have not been affiliated with any other religion. Islam is considered to be their religion from the beginning.

In addition, regarding the intrusion of the new religion, Islam, among the *Negede-Woyto* community, Teclehaimanot argues that “the new religion was slow in penetration and weak in revolutorializing the spiritual life of this people” (1984:96). Here we can argue that Islam could not be easily observed by this community since it is their traditional religion that had been fully incorporated the entire life and everyday practices of the community.

To have reliable information on the subject matter, it is important to substantiate the findings of this research with that of other researchers’ findings on this area as well as the oral traditions of the *Negede-Woyto* community themselves.

The oral tradition of this community asserts that they were and still are followers of Islamic religion. Islam is the only religion that came down from their forefathers. Having mentioned the idea of early travellers and scholars who argued that this community had no religion, Teclehaimanot (1984:94) on his part contributes the idea that there is no sufficient evidence about the practices which members of this community perform when they were traditional religion followers.

From the present religious behaviors and practices of this community, it is possible to observe that they are not fully observing the religious practices of Islam. It comprises elements of Islamic religion and some sort of traditional religion. The main focus of anthropological researches advocates keeping and appreciating peoples’ point of view in which the study is conducted. To

be objective, however, it is crucial to include what we observe as a researcher. In this instance, combining the oral traditions of the *Negede-Woyto* community together with my observation, all community members argued that Islam is their original religion. Besides this, they also give thanks to the spirit of Abay River since, they argued, it is the custom which was practiced by their forefathers. In such instances, it can be argued that change is not present within the community. However, if we are to take into consideration the argument that the community was introduced to Islamic religion with the coming of *sheikhs* from Wollo in 1916, being and becoming Muslims can be regarded as one of the changes that members of this community experienced in relation to religion while continuing their devotion to the spirit of Abay River.

The other area of change that this community experienced is the way they devoted themselves to their religion. As discussed earlier, the religion of this community comprises a mixture of Islam and traditional religion. They adhered themselves to both Islamic religion and venerating the spirit of Abay River at the same time. Following this, changes have been evident in both cases. In previous times, as some elders explained, the religious commitment of the community members towards Islam was not supported with knowledge about the religion's teachings. However, this has changed over time.

We are Muslims. But, we were not that much aware of the rules of Islamic religion. Looking at Muslims from the neighboring Amhara societies and in fear of the pressure from them, we were forced to act like Muslims without any sheer knowledge of the *Qur'an*. In fact, our devotion to be ruled by the words of *Qur'an* is a recent phenomenon.

Beside their Islamic practices, the annual celebration for the water spirit at Abay River (*abinaz*) and the festivity have also changed through time. Previously, all members of this community were highly devoted to this celebration. In addition, it was expected from each and every member of the community to make financial contribution for the feast and sacrifices, including

ox, chicken, and different kinds of local alcoholic drinks like ‘*tella*’ and ‘*tej*’²⁴. Among other things, nowadays, members of the community stopped making those local alcoholic drinks, mainly due to the increasing influence of the surrounding Amhara Muslims which introduced the view that alcoholic drinks are seen as *haram* in Islamic religion. Today, all the sacrifices and meals are still prepared for the *abinaz* celebration with the exception of *tella* and *tej*.

With regard to participation, it has been argued that every member of the *Negede-Woyto* community was expected to be part of the celebration. Nonetheless, today, due to the spread of the study of the *Qur’an* among the community, some members, especially the youth, reserved themselves from being part of such celebration. In a colloquy with elderly informants on why they still continued their devotion to *abinaz* while some individuals restrained themselves from such devotion, they answered that:

We were not aware of the words of the Holy *Qur’an*. We were not educated to do so. That is why we were doing all of those things which are considered as *haram* in the Holy *Qur’an*. But due to the pressure from the Amhara Muslim neighbors, our children began to study the *Qur’an*. As a result, those who learned the *Qur’an* have stopped taking part in the *abinaz* celebration. Even though they tried to teach us about what they got from the *Qur’an*, we, the elders, are still going to give thanks to our *abinaz*. We will not quit it. *Abinaz* protects us from different kind of harms since the time of our forefathers. If we quit offering sacrifices, ‘he’ will punish us. In fear of ‘his’ punishment, we still offer our sacrifices in return for what ‘he’ is doing for us. ‘He’ is always with us. ‘He’ also gives us everything what we asked for. So how can we stop praising ‘his’ name?

In addition to the devotion to the spirit of *abinaz*, the number of participants on the celebration is also dwindling in number through time. This is also one of the main changes that members of the *Negede-Woyto* community are still experiencing.

²⁴ *Tej* is a local alcoholic drink which is made from honey and other grains.

Another area where change is visible is the dressing code of the community. Before the increasing pressure of the neighboring Amhara Muslims that forced members of this community to study *Qur'an*, members of the community do not follow the dressing style as dictated in the holy *Qur'an*. As a Muslim woman is obliged to do, women members of the community do not cover their hair. Neither do they wear longer skirts that reached up to their ankle. Through time, however, they began to dress like other Muslims. However, there are still observable differences between this community and the rest of Amhara Muslims.

Almost all of the informants from this community argued that their devotion to their religion is not the same compared with that of the previous time. It is changing in a better way from time to time. However there are still some problems which can be seen in some members of their community such as drinking alcohols.

With regard to their relation with the surrounding Amhara Muslims, members of this community are not considered as 'true' Muslims. This was, as informants from the neighboring Amhara Muslims explained, the result of their dietary habit. One informant who is working as a secretary in Bahir Dar Special Zone Muslim Affairs office asserted that:

Members of this community are not viewed as 'true' Muslims. On every Muslim holydays, we (Amhara Muslims) slay an ox by making groups of individuals who take their own share of the meat based on the money they contributed. When we finish distributing the meat, members from the *Negede-Woyto* community come and take the leftovers that are left there since they are not considered as edible, like the intestine. They prepare that for a meal. It is believed that such kind of practice is a thing in the past and not in the time of my age. Because of this food habit of the community, they were considered as 'unclean' to be called as Muslims. This was one of the reasons that made their relation with other Amhara Muslims rough and unpleasant. But this practice is changing from time to time. Regarding their food culture, it is now found in a better situation than the previous period.

In addition, to assure the increasing change of attitude towards this community, another man from the same office stated that they have contact with the religious leader of the *Negede-Woyto* community. Youth members of this community study *Qur'an* with the youths of Amhara Muslims. By doing so, the relation between this community and other Amhara Muslims is changing nowadays. Nevertheless, according to the information gathered from individuals from the concerned office, there are still some problems that they could not resolve like holding down marriage alliances between the two co- religionists.

This idea of changing relationship between the *Negede-Woyto* community and Amhara Muslims is also shared by members of the *Negede-Woyto* community themselves. They agreed with the idea that indicates the positive attitudinal change of their Muslim neighbors towards them. One of the main things that kept them apart is their inability to create marriage ties with the Amhara Muslims. The Amhara Muslims are not still willing to give their children to be married to members of this community. Beside this, everything else is changing.

The other area in which members of the *Negede-Woyto* community experienced some sort of change is with regard to their drinking habit. Informants, especially elders, assured that all members of the community drunk local alcoholic drinks like *tella* and *tej*. Based on their argument, this is the result of their lack of knowledge on what is considered as *haram* and which are prohibited in the Holy *Qur'an*. When they become aware that drinking alcoholic drinks is *haram*, they quit over time.

However, there are still some members of the community especially elders who drink those local alcoholic drinks. For instance, one old man explained the drinking habits of the community by saying:

My wife was known for making *tella*. So I did not drink water rather I used to drink *tella* on a daily bases to quench my thirst, just like water does. But through time, our children began informing us that it is haram to drink alcohols. In addition, our religious leaders and our neighbors condemned us because my wife was selling *tella*. Then, she stopped selling *tella*. After that, I was also forced to stop drinking *tella* by religious fathers. But, I could not manage to do so. Because I am too old to work, it was my children that give me some pocket money. So, I could buy and drink it from other sellers. When they knew that I did not quit drinking *tella*, they completely stopped giving me the money. Even though my children stopped giving me money, some individuals usually invite me to drink with them and I still love and enjoy drinking *tella*.

The above mentioned case indicates that it was possible to prepare, sell and drink local alcoholic drinks among this community. But through time, due to the influence of other Amhara Muslims, this condition changed. Today, no member of this community is preparing *tella* in their home. But, it is not to say that they stopped drinking. Some members, especially elders, still drink *tella*. This is not to say that it is exclusively elderly men who drink *tella*. Rather, there are also some youths who drink *tella*.

So far, I tried to discuss some of the observable changes that members of this community experienced in relation to their religious behaviors and practices. Even though, I have discussed those major changes on the religion of this community, it is not deniable that they still continue some of their previous religious practices. This includes the celebration that takes place on the Abay River. They still give sacrifices and offerings to the spirit of the water though it shows a slight change that ranges from the decrease in number of participants in the celebration up to the items which are prepared for that day.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary of Major Findings

This study was conducted to assess the relation between religion and everyday life by taking the case of the *Negede-Woyto* Muslim community of Bahir Dar town, Amhara National Regional State.

The controversial meaning of religion, the basic elements of Islamic religion, the idea of syncretism as well as the notion of everyday religion play important roles in this study. The various approaches to the study of religion are discussed in the study. In particular, this thesis dealt with the reasons behind the religious behaviors and practices of the *Negede-Woyto* community as the main focus. An attempt has been made to get viable information to understand the overall religious make-up of this community. As a result, the findings of the study indicate that the *Negede-Woyto* community is one of the most marginalized and out-casted community in Ethiopia.

With the increasing pressure of Amhara societies, they became the most alienated group in different social activities. Members of this community are seen as distinct group of people who live in their own right. Though the community is marginalized in a number of social, economic, and religious arenas, the main focus of this study revolved around the religious aspect. Regardless of the fact that members of the community identify themselves as Muslims, they are considered as non-Muslims by the surrounding Amhara Muslims.

The data also indicated that because of their past activities, members of this community are treated in a negative way by the surrounding society, especially when it comes to religious

experience and piety. Concerning the relationship between this community and the surrounding Amhara Muslims, the *Negede-Woyto* community is not seen as co-religionist by the surrounding Amhara Muslims, considering piety and observance of the rules of holy *Qur'an* as the main reasons. On the other hand, members of this community suggest two major reasons for their inability to perform all the mandates of Islamic religion. These are poverty and economic activities, which are in turn attributed to lack of attention from the government towards this community.

Furthermore, the past behaviors and activities of the community are taken as one factor. Since members of this community did not have any kind of food preference during previous times, there was no food taboo among this community. This history of food preference is held against them as non-Islamic behavior and thence as non-Muslims. Additionally, all of my informants asserted that they are considered as non-committed to the religious rules and norms of Islam by the neighboring Amhara Muslims. This includes dressing style, failing to observe the five daily prayers, and drinking alcoholic drinks. As a result, these are considered to be the main reasons that contribute to the negative attitude of the neighboring Amhara Muslims towards this community.

The other key issue in relation to such non-Islamic religious activities is holiday celebration. Like any other Muslims, they celebrate Eid al Adaha (Arafa) and Ramadan (Eid al Fetir). Besides these Islamic religion holidays, however, they are equally devoted to celebrate the event that takes place on the Abay River, called as *Abinaz*, which is the veneration of the spirit of Abay. They offer sacrifices for the water spirit and make a vow to keep them in peace. This activity takes place every year on the eve of the great fasting season of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church (EOTC). This brings us to the notion of syncretism. The existence of elements from

different religious experiences among this community leads us to consider the religious makeup of the *Negede-Woyto* community as an example of syncretic religious experience.

In general, the study explained the controversial religious identity of the community, their religious behaviors and practices, the way of celebrating their religious holidays, the main factors that make them not to be pious, how religious behaviors and practices affect social relations and how different socio-economic activities affect the religious life of a given community, their relation with the neighboring Amhara Muslims and Christians as well as the changes that this community experienced in relation to religious life. Finally, the data suggested that concerned bodies in Bahir Dar town need to give attention to members of this community in order to enable them to have equal opportunity in all aspects of their life

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following concluding remarks are made.

First, with the idea regarding the origin of the *Negede-Woyto* community, there is still no clear cut answer. The issue of the community's origin and identity is still a debatable notion. Second, besides what members of the community assume about the meaning of their name, the name '*Woyto*' generally took a pejorative connotation among the surrounding Amhara societies.

Third, the religion of the society is also the other component which could not be labeled with a single term. Whatever assumptions are made regarding the religious identity of the community, the research tried to indicate the reasons behind the religious activities of the community. It is said that members of this community are Muslims. Other than understanding the rationale behind

their religious activities, they are condemned as ‘non-Muslim’ and ‘non-pious’ by the surrounding Amhara societies. Poverty and the tiresome and time taking nature of their economic activity are taken as the two factors behind the inability to perfectly carry out their religious duties.

In this instance, they blamed the government for their poverty. They asserted that the government does not give them much attention like other Amhara societies, which can be accounted for the fact that they could not improve their living condition. Since they are engaged in tiresome activities, they may miss the five daily prayers. Their economic activity prevents them from being clean and ready for *salat*. Since, they work the whole day in order to finish and sell their products in time, the probability of being clean for *salat* is small. Thus, it is better to understand the reasons rather than condemning and excluding the community in many socio-economic respects.

In conclusion, there had been different studies conducted concerning about this community. These studies mainly focused on other aspects of the community rather than on religion. This study can contribute its part to reveal the religious dimension of the community. It can also serve as an input for future studies which will be undertaken on the *Negede-Woyto* community as well as on religious studies.

Bibliography

Published Materials

- Ahmed, Akbar S. 1986. *Toward Islamic Anthropology: Definition, Dogma and Directions*. U.S.A:
New Era Publications
- Asad, Talal. 1986. *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*. Washington DC: Center for Contemporary
Arab Studies
- Bacchidu, Giovanna. 2012. 'Doing Things Properly: Religious Aspects in Everyday Sociality in
Apiao, Chiloe'. In: Samuli Schielke and Liza Debevec (eds.) *Ordinary Lives and Grand
Schemes: Anthropology of Everyday Religion*. New York: Berghahn Books. pp 66-81
- Baumann, Gerd. 1992. 'Ritual Implicates 'Others': Reading from Durkheim in a Plural Society'.
In: Daniel de Coppet (ed.) *Understanding Rituals*. New York: Chapman and Hall Inc. pp
97-116
- Braukamper, Ulrich. 1992. 'Aspects of Religious Syncretism in Southern Ethiopia'. In *Journal of
Religion in Africa*. Vol. 22, Fasc. 3. pp 194-207
- Bryman, Alan. 2004. *Social Research Methods*. 2nd Edition. New York: Oxford University Press
- Central Statistical Agency (CSA). 2010. *The 2007 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia,
Results for Amhara Region: Part I Statistical Report on Population Size and
Characteristics*. Addis Ababa: Branna Printing Press
- Coppet, Daniel de. 1992. 'Introduction'. In: Daniel de Coppet (ed.) *Understanding Rituals*. New
York: Chapman and Hall Inc. pp 97-116
- Debevec, Liza. 2012. 'Postponing Piety in Urban Burkina Faso: Discussing Ideas on When to
Start Acting as a Pious Muslim'. In: Samuli Schielke and Liza Debevec (eds.) *Ordinary
Lives and Grand Schemes: Anthropology of Everyday Religion*. New York: Berghahn
Books. pp 33-47

- Durkheim, Emile. 1965 [1915]. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. New York: The Free Press
- Ephrem Amare. 2002. 'Socio- economic Situations of the Negede- Woyto Community'. In: *Cultural Anthropological Studies*. Heritage Studies and Conservation Authority. Pp 183-212
- Eller, Jack David. 2007. *Introducing the Anthropology of Religion*. New York. Routledge
- Frazer, James. 1958. *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. New York: McMillan
- Geertz, Clifford.1968. *Islam Observed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press
- Geertz, Clifford.1993 [1973]. *The Interpretation of Culture*. New York: Basic Books
- Glazier, Stephen D. and Charles A. Flowerday. 2003. 'Introduction'. In: Stephen D. Glazier and Charles A. Flowerday (eds.) *Selected Readings in the Anthropology of Religion: Theoretical and methodological Essays*. USA: Preager. Pp1-13
- Gulevich, Tanya. 2004. *Understanding Islam and Muslim Traditions: An Introduction to the Religious Practices, Celebrations, Festivals, Observances, Beliefs, Folklore, Customs, and Calendar System of the World's Muslim Communities, Including an Overview of Islamic History and Geography*. Michigan: Omnigraphics Inc
- Holy, Ladislav. 1991. *Religion and Custom in a Muslim Society: The Berti of Sudan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jackson, Michael. 1996. 'Introduction'. In: Michael Jackson (ed) *Things as They Are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. pp 1-50
- James, William. 1958 [1902]. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. New York: Mentor Books
- Kassim, Husain. 2004. 'Islam'. In: Frank A. Salamone (ed.) *Encyclopedia of religious Rites, Rituals and Festivals*. New York: Routledge. pp 195- 197

- Kenyon, Susan M. 1995. 'Zar as Modernization in Contemporary Sudan'. In: *Anthropological Quarterly*. Vol. 68, No. 2, pp107- 120
- Levinson, David. 2004. 'Sacrifice and Offerings'. In: Frank A. Salamone (ed) *Encyclopedia of Religious Rights and Festivals*. New York: Routledge. Pp379-380
- Lindstorm, Lamont. 2010[1996]. 'Syncretism'. In: Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer (eds.) *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge. pp 680-681
- Marranci, Gabriele. 2008. *The Anthropology of Islam*. New York: Berg
- McGuire, Meredith B.2008. *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Mittwoch,-----.' Proben aus dem amarischen Volksmunde', Mitt. d. Sem. F. Orient. Sparchen zu Berlin, Vol. x, pt.2, pp. 214-15
- Morris, Brian. 2006. *Religion and Anthropology: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Neitz, Mary Jo. 2011. 'Lived Religion: Signposts of Where We Have Been and Where We Can Go From Here'. In: Giuseppe Giordan and William H. Swatos (eds.) *Religion, Spirituality and Everyday Religion*. London: Springer. pp 45-55
- Olson, Carl. 2011. *Religious Studies: The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge
- Radin, Paul. *Primitive Religion: Its Nature and Origin*. New York: Dover Publications
- Rappaport, Roy A. 1999. *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press
- Rapport, Nigel and Joanna Overing. 2000. *Social and Cultural Anthropology: The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge
- Rippin, Andrew. 2005[1990]. *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge
- Salter, Benson. 2009. *Understanding Religion: Selected Essays*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter

- Schielke, Samuli and Liza Debevec. 2012. 'Introduction'. In: Samuli Schielke and Liza Debevec (eds.) *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes: Anthropology of Everyday Religion*. New York: Berghahn Books, pp 1-16
- Segal, Robert A. 2003. 'Clifford Geertz's Interpretive Approach in Religion'. In: Stephen D. Glazier and Charles A. Flowerday (eds.) *Selected Readings in the Anthropology of Religion: Theoretical and methodological Essays*. USA: Preager. pp1-13
- Seligman, Adam B., Weller, Robert P., Puett, Michael J., Simon, Bennet. 2008. *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity*. New York: Oxford University press
- Stewart, Charles and Rosalind Shaw. 1994. 'Introduction'. In: Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw (eds.) *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis*. London: Routledge. pp 1-26
- Taye Gebremariyam. 1964 E.C. *Ye Ethiopia Hizib Tarik*. Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press
- Tapper, Richard. 1995. "Islamic Anthropology" and "Anthropology of Islam". In: *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 68, No. 3, Anthropological Analysis and Islamic Texts. pp. 185- 193
- Trimingham, J. Spencer. 1952. *Islam in Ethiopia*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Tylor, E. Burnett. 1871. *Primitive Culture*. Vol.1. New York: Harper
- Wallace, Anthony F.C. 1966. *Religion: An Anthropological View*. New York: Random House
- Zonabend, Françoise. 2010. 'Marriage'. In: Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer (eds) *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge. pp 444-446

Unpublished Materials

Melake Mihret. 2010. *A Study of the Socio- Cultural and Economic Marginalization of the Wayto in and around Bahir Dar, Northwestern Ethiopia* (MA Thesis). Department of Social Anthropology, Addis Ababa University

Seltene Seyoum. 1988. *A History of Bahir Dar Town 1936-1974* (MA Thesis). Department of History, Addis Ababa University

Solomon Atnafu. 2006. *Marginalized Minorities in the Lake Bank* (MA Thesis). Department of Sociology. Addis Ababa University

Teclehaimanot Gebresellasie. 1984. *The Wayto of Lake Tana: An Ethno History* (MA Thesis). Department of History, Addis Ababa University

Wassie Kebede and Bayable Balew. 2010. *The Prospects and Challenges of Empowerment Process among "Casts". The Case of the Negede- Woyto community in Bahir Dar Town*. JeCCDO

Zelalem Anteneh. 1986. *Wayto: Tradition and Change* (BA Thesis). Department of Sociology and Social Administration, Addis Ababa University

ANNEXES

Annex I: Guiding Questions (for elder members of the community)

1. What is the historical background of the community?
2. What is the meaning of the name 'Woyto'?
3. What is the religious identity of the community?
4. How do you explain the socio- cultural and economic conditions of the *Negede-Woyto* community?
5. How do the relationship between this community and the neighboring Amhara society look like?
6. What are the main factors that affect the relationship between members of the *Negede-Woyto* community and their neighbors?
7. How do these factors affect their relation with their Amhara neighbors?
8. What are the main Islamic holidays celebrated among the *Negede-Woyto* community? How do they celebrate these holidays?
9. What are the customary practices of this community? How do they celebrate?
10. What are the changes that members of this community experience in the overall socio-cultural features?

Annex II: Guiding Questions (for youth members of the community)

1. What is the historical background of the community?
2. What is the meaning of the name '*Woyto*'?
3. What is the religious identity of the community?
4. How do you explain the socio- cultural and economic conditions of the *Negede-Woyto* community?
5. How do their relation with the nearby Amhara society look like especially with their age mates?
6. What is the difference between elders and youth members of this community in relation to commitment for their religion?
7. What is the perception of youth members of the community towards the customary practices which are still practiced by their community members?
8. How do you explain these practices in relation to the prescriptions/ commands of the holy Qur'an?

Annex III: Guiding Questions (for the surrounding Amhara society)

• Christians

1. How do members of the *Negede-Woyto* community seen by other Christians?
2. What are the major issues that place this community aside from the rest of Amhara society?
3. What is the relationship between the *Negede-Woyto* community and the surrounding Christians?
4. In which circumstances do members of this community cooperate with their Christian neighbors?

• Muslims

1. What is the relationship between members of this community and the surrounding Muslims?
2. Do they pray together with members of this community?
3. In which situations do the neighboring Muslims relate with members of this community?
4. Does the perception of the neighboring Amhara Muslims towards this community change over time?
5. What is their attitude in creating marriage alliances with members of the *Negede-Woyto* community?
6. What are the factors that contribute for the unpleasant relation between the *Negede-Woyto* community and the surrounding Muslims?

Annex IV: Guiding Questions (For officials)

1. Is there any difference between the *Negede-Woyto* community and other Amhara Muslims?
2. If yes, what are these differences?
3. What are the activities which are taken by this office to narrow the differences?
4. How does this office interact with members of this community?
5. Is there any change in the relationship between members of this community and the Amhara Muslims? If yes, how do explain that change?
6. Does the office take any measurement for the better relationship between this community and the Amhara Muslims?

Annex V: Profile of Research Participants

Profile of Key Informants

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Occupation	Date of Interview
1	Ali Mohammed	M	85	No job	January 27, 2013
2	Halima Seifedin	F	63	Controlling Toilet and Shower Services	January 25, 2013
3	Zemzem Mukemil	F	64	Handicraft Making	January 25, 2013
4	Nuru Ali	M	69	Stone Mills Making	January 28, 2013
5	Adem Abdu	M	75	Religious Father	January 27, 2013
6	Zeinu Ahmed	M	79	Religious Father	January 27, 2013
7	Mustafa Kemal	M	66	Mosque Committee Member	January 31, 2013
8	Mohammed Shikur	M	47	Head of Mosque Committee Member	January 29, 2013
9	Ahmed Seid	M	44	Secretary of Bahir Dar Muslim Affairs	March 14, 2013

Profile of Group Discussion Participants

No	Name	Sex	Age	Occupation	Date of Interview
1	Feleke Zemen	M	24	Stone Mills Making	February 24, 2013
2	Nurhussein Abrar	M	27	Guard	February 24, 2013
3	Seid Mohammed	M	22	Student	February 24, 2013
4	Aisha Kemal	F	29	Handicraft Making	March 3, 2013
5	Mulu Nesru	F	35	Handicraft Making	March 3, 2013
6	Jemila Seid	F	24	Handicraft Making	March 3, 2013
7	Leila Anwar	F	31	Handicraft Making	March 3, 2013
8	Nuru Ali	M	69	Stone Mills Making	January 29, 2013
9	Halima Seifedin	F	63	Controlling Toilet and Shower Services	January 29, 2013
10	Zeinu Ahmed	M	79	Religious Father	January 29, 2013

Profile of Interview Participants

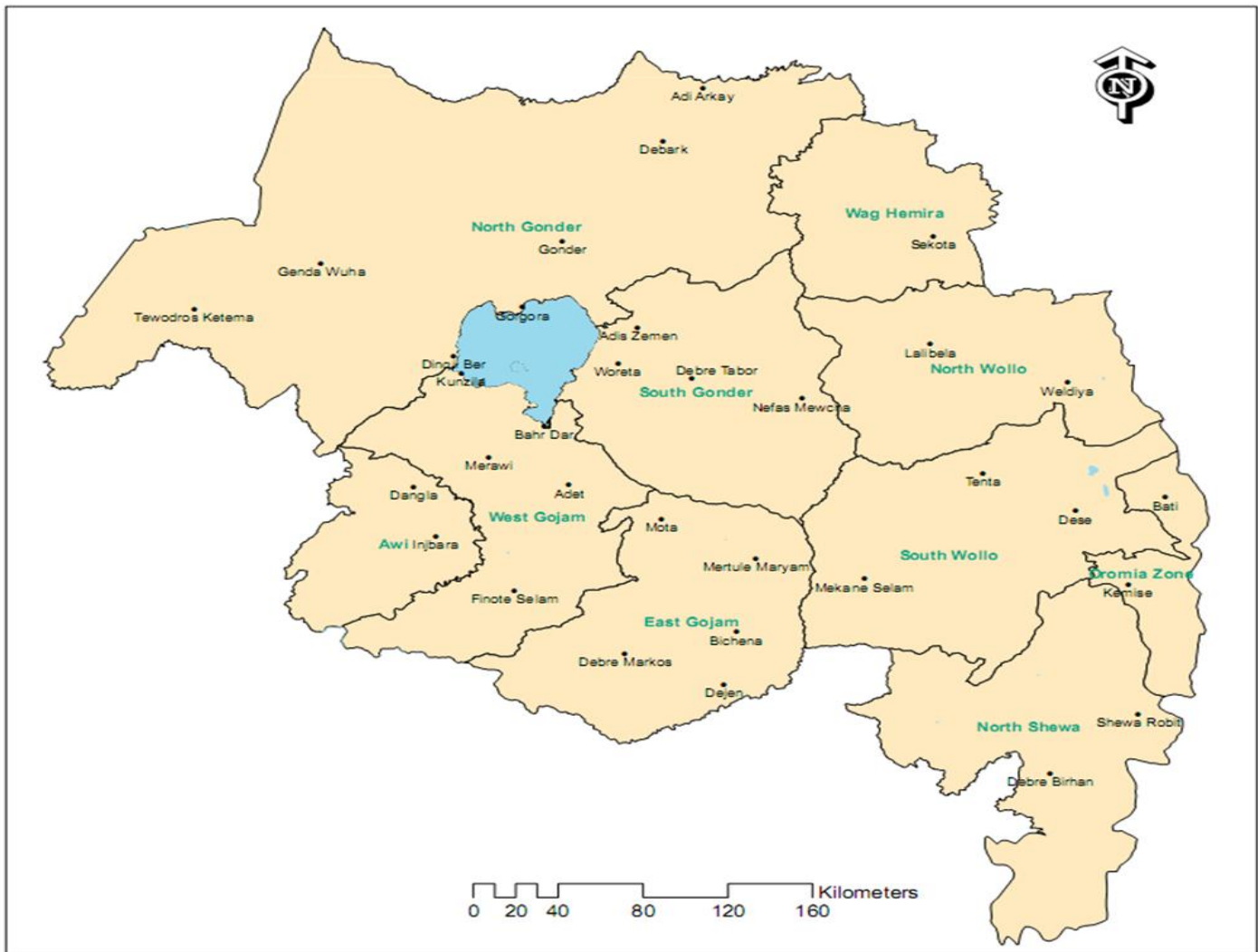
No	Name	Sex	Age	Occupation	Date of Interview
1	Oumer Mustefa	M	52	Head of Bahir Dar Muslim Affairs	March 7, 2013
2	Misaye Akmel	F	34	Handicraft Making	February 28, 2013
3	Tseганesh Bililign	F	27	Sugarcane Seller	February 23, 2013
4	Zubeida Ali	F	29	Teacher	February 15, 2013
5	Anwar Mubarek	M	25	Nurse	February 25, 2013
6	Tiruwork Haile	F	23	Daily Laborer	February 24, 2013
7	Jemal Kedir	M	79	Retired	January 31, 2013
8	Debritu Molla	F	32	Hair Dresser	February 23, 2013
9	Hassen Kemal	M	30	Stone Mills Making	February 28, 2013
10	Tirhas Gebru	F	23	Waitress	March 12, 2013
11	Zinabu Workneh	M	32	Stone Mills Making	January 25, 2013
12	Alelign Degu	M	27	Stone Mills making	January 25, 2013
13	Tesfaye Abebe	M	37	Barber	March 7, 2013
14	Wudnesh Zegeye	F	25	Handicraft Making	February 28, 2013
15	Dagne Tesfa	M	38	Secretary of <i>Idir</i>	March 10, 2013
16	Workiye Tekalign	F	83	No job	March 12, 2013
17	Hussein Kedir	M	79	Religious Father	November 15,2013

Profile of Case Study Participants

No	Name	Sex	Age	Occupation	Date of Interview
1	Jemila Seid	F	24	Handicraft Making	March 3, 2013
2	Suleiman Keiru	M	26	Guard	March 10, 2013
3	Alemu Demeke	M	31	Shop Owner	February 8, 2013
4	Hayat Nesredin	F	29	Secretary	February 23, 2013
5	Ali Mohammed	M	85	No Job	January 27, 2013
6	Fatuma Mukemil	F	32	Handicraft Making	February 8, 2013

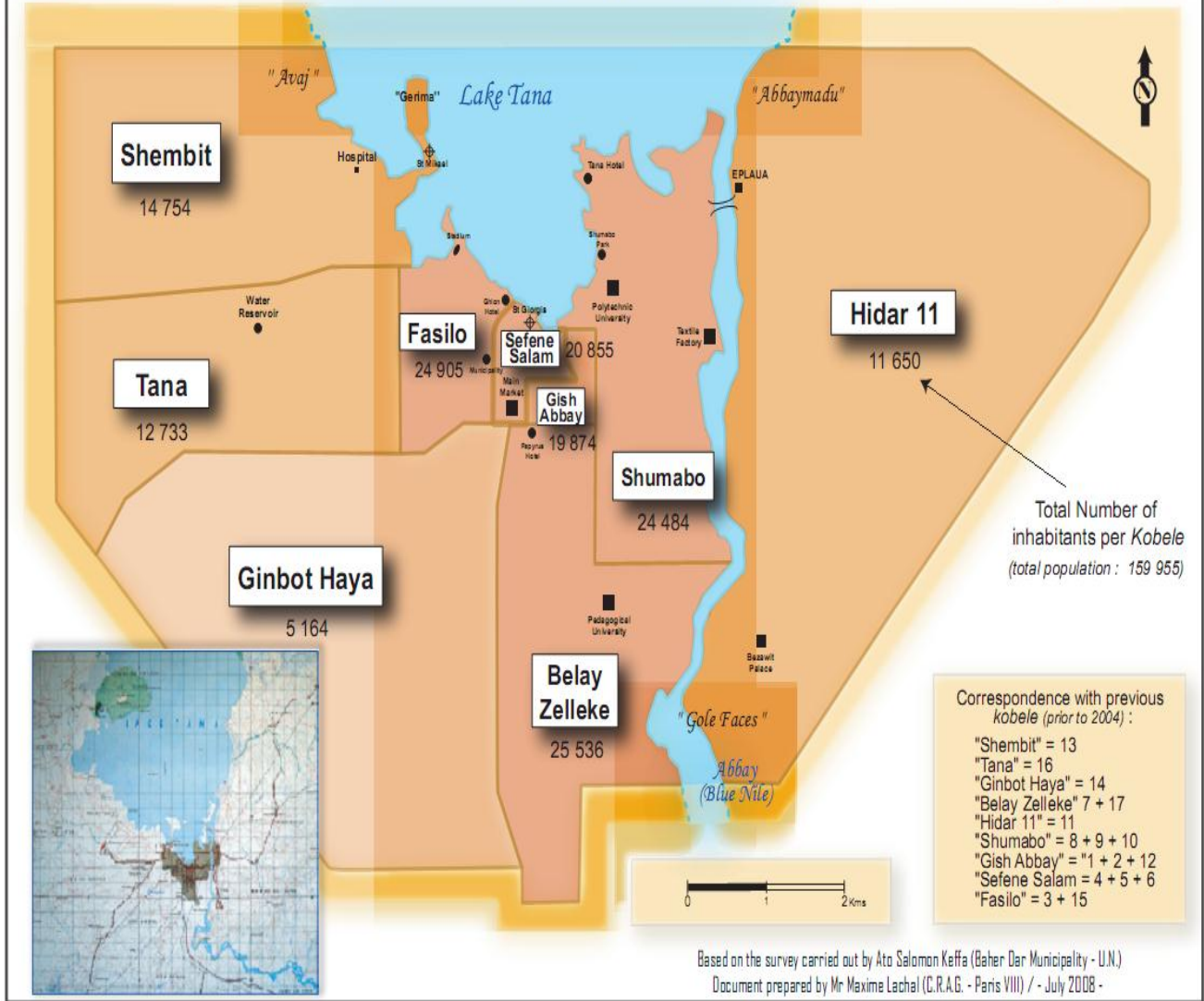
N: B elder group discussion participants were selected from key informants. Also two of case study participants were selected from key informants and group discussions participants. Individual names written in this thesis are all pseudonyms.

Annex VI: MAP OF THE STUDY AREA



Map 1: Map of Amhara National Regional State

The 9 new Urban *Kobele* of Baher Dar Metropolitan city (2005)



Map 2: Map of Bahir Dar Town

DECLARATION

The thesis is my original work, 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.

Name-----

Signature-----

Place-----

Date of Submission-----