



**Addis Ababa University
School of Graduate Studies**

**The *Irecha* Ritual, Its Significance and Value
Among the Oromo People: The Case of Bishoftu
and Surroundings**

By: Bayissa Negesa

**October, 2011
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**



Addis Ababa University

School of Graduate Studies

Department of Social Anthropology

MA Program in Social Anthropology

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Bayissa Negesa Faye

**A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Addis
Ababa University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Social Anthropology**

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Abstract

This study deals with the Irecha ritual, its significance and value among the Oromo people, with particular reference to Bishoftu and the surroundings. Many studies have dealt with the Oromo culture, but only a few looked at the purposes and the significances of the Irecha ritual and what those who practice it contribute to the wider society. The focus of this thesis is an attempt to fill this gap. The research was conducted at Bishoftu town, but most of the participants are from the rural areas of Ada'a district. Thus, the informants from four rural peasant associations such as Golbicha, Qurqura Dembi, Udee and Garbicha are included. The data are gathered from a total of 34 selected elders, farmers, Abba Gada Tulama (leaders of Gada Tulama), members of Gada Tulama, and workers of Bishoftu town and the Ada'a District Administration Culture and Tourism Bureau, and Bishoftu town dwellers. There was also a questionnaire distributed to and filled by Bishoftu town dwellers that served in the collection of data. The informants were both male and female as well as from varied religious and age groups. A qualitative research method was employed with a minor usage of a quantitative one, and the qualitative data were gathered through observation, focus group discussions, key informants' interviews, and informal conversations. Secondary sources and profiles of the study sites from the Ada'a District and Bishoftu Town Administrations were also obtained. The findings of the thesis revealed that the Irecha ritual is performed for different purposes: religious, cultural and/or both. The main purpose of the Irecha ritual is thanksgiving and praying to Waqa. Besides this, the Irecha Malka ritual is also celebrated as a 'rite of passage' from the dark summer season to the bright autumn season and also from the old year to the New Year. Each activity performed in the ritual celebration has its own symbolic representations attached to it by the traditional customs of the Oromo people. These symbolic events might get their meaning within this community. The Irecha ritual celebration at Hora Arsadi contributes to the Oromo community as a cultural promotion, strengthening their unity, increasing the income of the area, and it creates a good opportunity to declare and practice the indigenous laws that are the pillar of the existence of the society. The political domination that faced the Oromo people under the past regimes contributed much to the weakening of the Irecha ritual. However, parts of the indigenous culture are being revived, but with some changes in their practices and purposes. Yet, there is the good will of the youth groups to rejuvenate the indigenous rituals, including Irecha.

Acronyms

ADCTO – Ada’a District Culture and Tourism Office

BTCTO – Bishoftu Town Culture and Tourism Office

CSA - Central Statistical Agency

E.C. - Ethiopian Calendar

FEDO - Finance and Economic Development Office of Bishoftu Town

OCTB - Oromiya Culture and Tourism Bureau

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother *Adde* Dosse Hurisa Gada, with whom I grew up and who supported me for a long period, especially during my undergraduate studies. She passed away from this world on January 05, 2011.

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NOTE ON THE TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM USED

1. Short sounds are represented with single vowel: for example, /a/ lafa
2. Long sounds are represented with double vowels: for example, /aa/ Birraa
3. Gemmination is represented with double consonants: for example, Birraa
4. Alveolar implosive sounds are represented with 'dh': for example, Haadha
5. Velar, voiceless, ejective sounds are represented with 'q': for example, Qaalluu
6. Alveolar, voiceless and ejective sounds are represented with 'x': for example, xaafii
7. Palatal, voiceless and ejective sounds are represented with 'c': for example, Chachu
8. Glottal, voiceless stop sounds are represented with "'": for example, Ada'a
9. The rest of the sounds are represented in the Latin alphabet.

Glossary of Local Words

Abbaa – father or owner of something

Aadde – the status name that is given to married women and literally mean mistress

Afaan – a language or mouth

Alangee - a whip

Angafa – eldest son or senior

Arfaasaa - spring season

Ayyaana - a spiritual force or being

Ayyantuu - a person who is possessed by a benevolent spirit

Baddaa - highland

Baddadaree – middle highland

Beekaa - intelligent or knowledgeable person, among the Oromo tradition a person who is telling about good and bad seasons

Birraa - autumn season

Bokkuu - scepter made up of olive branches

Chachu - is a type of cultural clothes made of leather and worn by women on their shoulder and also a ritual object used only by women as a symbol of female fertility

Challee - is a ritual object that is worn on the women neck and it is the symbol of female spirit.

Chafe - the general assembly of Gada

Dhaddacha – literally a thorny tree having modest branches, technically it represents the traditional court that takes place in the open air under a tree

Dhugaa - truth

Eebba - blessing

Gaachana - shield

Gadaa – a indigenous democratic, political, economic, social and also religious organization of the Oromo

Galma - a hall or a home that served to dwell the sacred indigenous objects and the place for worshipping *Qaalluu*

Ganda - smallest governmental administrative unit organized under the district

Gosa - clan

Guma - blood price/ revenge/ ritual of purification after homicide

Haadha - mother or owner of something (for women)

Haroo - lake

Hora - a water body that is assumed more sacred than other lakes

Hororo - cultural stick hold by youth

Kallacha - an object that is considered as sacred in Oromo tradition

Malkaa - riverside for celebrating the *Irecha* ritual or a point where they are crossing the river, where also the Oromo search water for their cattle

Marga/magra - grass

Obbo - the status name is given to a man that literally means mister

Okole - traditional milk jar

Qaalluu – a religious institution that regarded among the Oromo as religious leader and also a person on which the spirit, *Ayyaana*, descends

Qabee - small traditional milk container and also serves as butter holder for daughters and sometimes serves as container for the delicious traditional meals that are prepared on special occasions

Quxusuu – junior or younger son

Safuu - a moral category or ethical principle: showing great respect

Seera - law

Siiqqee - ritual stick used by women

Tulluu - Mountain

Ulee - stick

Ulfaalulfoo - sacred object

Uumaa – bearer

Uumama - nature/creature

Waaqa – God, the creator

Yaa'ii – assembly or get-together of the local elders to discuss on different local issues

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Ritual is a ceremonial activity or a set of actions which can exist cross-culturally in different communities, with different forms and purposes. Ritual action has, most of the time, its own symbolic representation and value. Rappaport shortly defines the term ritual as “the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers” (Rappaport 1999: 24).

Kottak says that rituals are “formally stylized, repetitive and stereotyped, that people perform them in special (sacred) places and at set times. It includes liturgical orders - sequences of words and actions invented prior to the current performance of the ritual in which they occur” (2000: 310-11). Gruenwald (2003: 7) also states that rituals like ceremonies are repeatable events; people can do them for the same purposes, in the same orderly manner, and with the expectation of the same results. Therefore, rituals are a pattern of activity repeatedly done for different purposes.

Gruenwald (2003: 2) explains that rituals are an unmediated mode of expression. The human mind is the direct source of ritual behavior. Rituals are one of the major ways in which the human mind expresses itself and it does this without first creating the ideas or the symbols, to which, according to the prevalent view, rituals give expression. Gruenwald (2003: 7) continually notes that rituals often have a ceremonial presence; i.e. they require preparation and a display of various accompanying elements (such as special garments, colors, olfactory materials, etc.) and that ceremonies aim at drawing people’s attention to something that is worth noticing, something that is extraordinary in some way. They do not necessarily aim, as rituals do, at signaling to people that there are certain practices, which they should consider crucial to their life or existence.

Some rituals have a more localized character, which means that they represent a specific function or identity. In these cases, the specific place and time chosen for the doing of the rituals indicates functional specificity (Gruenwald 2003: 7). Therefore, the *Irecha* ritual is one of these localized rituals. *Irecha*, according to Temesgen Chibsa (2009: 66), is a ceremony held during the season of autumn (*Birraa*, in Oromo language, September - November) and spring (*arfaasaa*, March-May) during which the Oromo deliver their thanks to *Waqa* for what He has done for them.

The Oromo perpetuate their institutions and customs, contaminated by some superstitions and abuse, from the remotest ages. Their worship is directed to God, the master, creator and legislator, whom they call *Waqa* (Kanno 2005: 12, translation from de Salviac 1901). The *Irecha* ritual is conducted mainly for the thanksgiving (at a riverside) or asking for immediate solutions for pressing problems like delay of rain (on mountainsides). According to Temesgen Chibsa (2009:67), it takes place in spring or before the rainy season begins, to ask the creator, God, to give them ample and normal rain to carry out their agricultural activities whereas the other *Irecha* ritual is held just when the rainy season is over and crops are ready to be harvested and flowers of different plants blossomed everywhere.

Among these two *Irecha* rituals in the study area, the former one is held during the autumn season (*Birraa*), is well known and which gets special attention from the government bodies as well as from different individuals and groups of the Oromo and also is the main focus of this study. Therefore, this study focuses on the *Irecha* ritual, its significance and value among the Oromo with particular reference to Bishoftu and its surrounding inhabitants.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Different scholars are defining and explaining the *Irecha* ritual differently. As there are conflicting ideas on the term ritual by different scholars, there are also different assumptions and definitions given to the *Irecha* ritual. For instance, Galabu (2006) defines the *Irecha* as harvest ritual which is celebrated annually; whereas Admasu Shunkuri (1998) notes that *Irecha* simply is an annual holiday, or a periodic event, consecrated for thanksgiving. *Irecha* for him infers the habit of daily prayers and blessings. For centuries, the Oromo have practiced this custom of thanking God for His generosity, blessings and mercy.

The *Irecha* ritual is an indigenous cultural ceremony which takes place twice a year: once in September, a weekend after the Meskel festivity - The Finding of the True Cross - (Hailu Ejersa 2009: 64), at the special place Hora Arsadi (Bishoftu), and the other in March on the mountainside. This *Irecha* ceremony can also be performed in other areas like *Melka Ateetee* (at Gafarsa River, near Burayu town) and other places throughout Oromiya. Merga Yonas reported that in the year 2010, it was celebrated at *Malka Qeransa* and *Malka Awash* in the West Showa Zone of Oromiya on September 27 and 28, respectively (Reporter Newspaper, October 09, 2010). It was also celebrated in the United States, Australia and Europe. But the traditional place for the *Irecha* ritual is Hora Arsadi, Bishoftu, so Merga Yonas (2010) said that *Irecha* is one of the major traditional

Oromo festivities observed annually with colourful and great splendour at the end of the rainy season in September. Hailu Ejersa (2009: 5) adds that “Oromiya ... and Bishoftu are naturally endowed with attractive and passionate traditional religious beliefs and ritual practices, *Irecha*, being the most known and oldest practice in the area.” Therefore, why has this place been taken as a special place for the *Irecha* ritual?

Recently, after the government gave special attention to the *Irecha* ritual, this ritual ceremony created some confusion on the understanding of different people towards its purpose. For example, some group promotes it as religious ritual whereas others conceive it as only as an indigenous non-religious ritual. For instance, according to Maskarem Assagued (1998: 87) *Irecha* is a ritual that is performed to recognize the end of the rainy season and the beginning of the new light. She calls it a celebration of thanksgiving for the new light that brings new growth (Maskarem Assagued 1998: 103). But, for the followers of *Waaqeffanna*, *Irecha* is a religious ritual which is done for the purpose of praying to *Waaqa*. On this, for example, Merga Yonas (2010), on Reporter Newspaper, October 09, 2010, by quoting Diribi Demuse Boku, states that “there is no belief known as *Irecha* and that *Irecha* is a holiday of thanksgiving to *Waaqa*. It is a religious holiday like Easter and Id Al Adha or Arefa, which are celebrated by Christians and Muslims respectively.” (Reporter Newspaper, October 09, 2010). Hailu Ejersa (2009: 5) also states that the *Irecha* ritual is in a religious domain, and for him, it is a traditional Oromo religious ritual.

On the other hand, other religious adherents believe that it is a non-religious and an indigenous ritual ceremony which has no relation with religion, because of the followers of different religions, like Christians and Muslims, are also attending the festive event of the *Irecha* ritual. If it would be a religious ritual, why would the followers of different religions attend the ritual celebration? Therefore, this research focuses basically on this dilemma of the *Irecha* ritual ceremony; whether it is a religious ritual or an indigenous non-religious ritual ceremony.

There is little research done to analyze and describe the symbolism of this *Irecha* ritual with its specific activities. As each practice has its own symbolic meaning and significance among the adherents, the *Irecha* ritual has also indigenous symbols which may not have been clearly described. Therefore, this study describes their symbolic meanings among the Oromo people, and tries to frame it in the context of theories of ritual and symbolic meaning in social anthropology.

In addition to its religious/non-religious or spiritual/secular orientation, there are a lot of significances that the ritual gives to the Oromo in general and to the Oromo of the study area in particular. But the research done on its significance may not be sufficient. Thus, this study tried to examine the social and cultural values of the *Irecha* ritual among the participants.

Oromo culture allows the equality of gender in many activities. Some ritual activities might be done by both sexes. Or sometimes there are different ritual activities which might be confined to a single sex. But in the case of *Irecha*, there is little research done on the role of gender participation. Therefore, it would also be needed to identify the gender roles in the *Irecha* ritual, whether or not there is equal participation of both sexes.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The study has both a general and specific objectives:

1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective of the study is to investigate and analyze the *Irecha* ritual and its significance and value among the Oromo people in general and Oromo of the study area in particular.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

Based on the aforementioned general objective, the specific objectives of the study are:

- ❖ To explore the symbolic meanings of the *Irecha* ritual among the Oromo in general and the Oromo of Bishoftu and its surroundings in particular.
- ❖ To address the confusion on the *Irecha* ritual, whether it is a religious ritual or an indigenous non-religious ceremony.
- ❖ To identify the role of women in the *Irecha* ritual celebration.
- ❖ To analyse the relationship between the *Qalluu* institution and the *Irecha* ritual.
- ❖ To understand the changes and continuity of the *Irecha* ritual practices.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is assumed to be important to know and to understand the *Irecha* ritual and its significance and value among the Oromo people. There is confusion on the *Irecha* ritual, whether it is a religious ritual or a non-religious indigenous ritual. Thus, this research tries to investigate the symbolic meanings of the *Irecha* ritual, which is the main means of understanding clearly about it, and is also revealing its symbolic meanings.

Therefore, the study of the *Irecha* ritual, its significance and values among the Oromo people in general and the Oromo of Bishoftu and its surrounding in particular, is believed to be important from the following perspectives:

- ❖ The study would be an additional contribution to the few works that have already been done on the *Irecha* ritual. It serves as a useful input for the researchers interested to carry out in-depth studies on similar topics.
- ❖ It provides information to any concerned body to consider indigenous knowledge and values related to the *Irecha* ritual and its significance for the Oromo people.
- ❖ It may contribute to the understanding of the characteristics of the *Irecha* ritual with its indigenous symbolic meanings.
- ❖ It may contribute to clear, to some extent, whether the *Irecha* ritual is a religious ritual or an indigenous non-religious ceremony.
- ❖ It may help to show the role of women in this ritual.

1.5 Scope of the Study

Putting into consideration time and budget constraints, it has been impossible to conduct a research among the whole Oromo sites of the area. As a result, this thesis was delimited to the *Irecha* ritual performed colorfully at Hora Arsadi in Bishoftu. I selected this area purposely, because of the assumption that there are a great numbers of participants in this area, as well as by assuming that the area is relatively well known in terms of practicing the *Irecha* ritual from its very beginning and to get enough information.

1.6 Methodology

1.6.1 Site Selection

This study has been conducted in Bishoftu town and among the Oromo inhabitant around Bishoftu town. Even if Hora Arsadi is found at the center of the town, the majority of the Oromo people who are celebrating the ritual here are the Oromo farmers who resided in the rural area around the town. Thus, to get those knowledgeable individuals of the ritual, in addition to Bishoftu town, four rural peasant administrations of Ada'a district (Eastern Showa Zone, Oromiya Regional State) found at near distance from Bishoftu town, such as *Golbicha*, *Qurqura Dembi*, *Udee* and *Garbicha* rural *Kebele* were selected based on the residence of the key informants who were considered most knowledgeable among the local community about the indigenous culture. In addition, other key informants were also included out of the listed *Kebele*: one from *Liban Chuqqala* district, *Adulala*

town and the other from the Culture and Tourism Bureau of Oromiya, to include the necessary persons and also for the sake of further information.

One of the reasons for selecting these areas was that here, this prominent Oromo ritual, *Irecha*, is still observed and that the well known place for this ritual is Hora Arsadi in Bishoftu. Thus, for its historical significance and to get enough information about the *Irecha* ritual, Bishoftu town and the surrounding Oromo areas were selected as the main research site.

1.6.2 Informants

The main informants for this research were knowledgeable individuals who are considered as the library and custodians of the Oromo culture in the area. First I consulted the workers in Ada'a District and Bishoftu Town Administration Culture and Tourism offices to get access to those prominent individuals. Then I also asked the workers of the *Abba Gada Tulama* Office to name those individuals they consider most knowledgeable of the traditional Oromo culture, especially on the *Irecha* ritual, and then after, contacted them.

The total of the informants that were included in the research were thirtyfour (34). Among these, twelve served as key informants, which included elderly men and women in the study sites. The current and previous *Gada* leaders (*Abba Gada*) and other local elders were among the key informants. Varying age, sex, and educational background have been considered in selecting the informants, in order to determine how far the young and the elderly know about this indigenous ritual. To investigate the role of women in this ritual, the women who know, practice and participate in this ritual were contacted. In addition to these, members and followers of the *Waaqeffanna* religion were served as sources of information.

1.6.3 Data Gathering Instruments

The study employed both, qualitative and quantitative research methods, with more emphasis on qualitative research. Primary and secondary sources were used to gather the necessary data for the research. The primary data were gathered in fieldwork through observation, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and informal conversations, as well as through a survey method evaluating the distributed questionnaires to the local respondents.

Field observation, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and informal conversations were designed to find out the perception of informants (insiders' view or "emic" perspectives) about the

Oromo ritual practices in general and the *Irecha* ritual in particular, as well as why, how and when they practice it.

The quantitative data were gathered from questionnaires that were distributed among the Bishoftu town dwellers. Secondary sources of data were also gathered from documented materials and from different offices such as Ada'a District Culture and Tourism Bureau, Bishoftu City Administration, Oromiya Regional State Culture and Tourism Bureau, and also, from *Abba Gada Tulama's* office, on the topographic, demographic, climate and other profiles of the study area and about the study topic. To make the communication with the informants easier, and for the sake of the natives' worldview, the research was conducted in Afaan Oromo and then translated into English.

1.6.3.1 Observation

Observation was used from the very beginning of the data gathering to the end of the fieldwork. During the first week of the field work, the researcher observed some of the study sites that were very important to the study. The main purpose of the field observation was to see the different environmental characteristics of the area as well as observing the practices of the people that could be related to indigenous culture such as *Irecha* rituals. During this period, the researcher also observed repeatedly the place where the *Irecha* ritual is undertaken, Hora Arsadi, with its surrounding environment and he also took the photographs of the lake and its surrounding.

The researcher observed the gathering of the Gada organization of the area, which is held at the *Abba Gada Tulama's* Office. He also attended the meeting of the *Waaqeffannaa* religious association at the home of Obbo Tadese Mul'ata, in the Golbicha rural peasant association, during his fieldwork. During the field observation, field notes and pictures of different sites and of some of the key informants were taken. The observations helped to generate more questions to the informants during informal conversations, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

1.6.3.2 Informal Conversation

This tool might be used randomly to obtain relevant information while the purpose of discussion might not directly be related to the data gathering activities. It was undertaken while the informants were engaged in some other activity or while walking, during which a conversation started and often directed the discussions towards the topics of the study. Activities like coffee ceremonies, distributing the questionnaire, attending meetings and/or other events might be some of the occasions in which informal conversations were used as means of gathering information.

Some questions based on the activities of the informants were developed with the hope that people would respond more freely when approached informally than during the formal interviews. To approach them, the knowledge of the local language, Afan Oromo, and the first field observations helped in the easily establishment of a rapport with the people.

1.6.3.3 Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussions were used to learn about the collective perception, knowledge and practices of the people in the study area towards Oromo ritual in general and the *Irecha* ritual in particular and also to learn more on the issue under study from their different ideas, that helped me to understand their arguments. It was also used to cross check and supplement the data gathered through observation and key informants' interviews.

There were four focus group discussions conducted, two with local communities, and two with the Culture and Tourism Bureau's personnel (one was conducted with the Culture and Tourism Bureau office personnel of Ada'a district, whereas the other was conducted with the workers of Bishoftu Town Culture and Tourism Office). All the focus group discussions included both male and female, different religious followers such as Orthodox Christian, protestant, catholics and *Waaqeffannaa*, and different ages. The data obtained from different groups were compared and cross-checked with the data that were obtained through other instruments. The groups consisted of 4-7 members with varying age, sex, religion and educational backgrounds. To guide the discussions, semi-structured questions were developed, but were flexibly used based on the information the members of the discussion group have raised (see appendix E: List of FGD informants, p. 119).

1.6.3.4 In-depth Interview

In-depth interviews were used in the gathering of detailed data from the selected key informants. The majority of the informants were selected from the local community and also some from the focus group discussants, during which the researcher identified the most knowledgeable individuals.

Twelve in-depth interviews were conducted with the selected key informants that were taken from *Abba Gada* (previous and current *Abba Gada*), elderly men (four) and women (one) and urban dwellers (two). One in-depth interview was held with the official of the Culture and Tourism Bureau of Ada'a District, whereas the other was held with the official of the Culture and Tourism Bureau of Bishoftu town. The remaining one in-depth interview was held with a higher official of Oromiya Regional State Culture and Tourism Bureau. The informants chosen for this purpose were

those who were willing to give the detailed information about their culture in general and the *Irecha* ritual in particular.

The in-depth interview questions were semi-structured questions; that was to allow the flexibility in directing questions. Some guiding questions were prepared, whereas the other important questions were asked directly based on the given information.

1.6.3.5 Survey Method

The survey method was used in the gathering of information especially with relation to the attitudes of the people towards the purposes of the *Irecha* ritual. One hundred people, as a sampling size, were selected to respond to the questionnaire prepared and distributed to them. The respondents were selected through a simple random sampling method, without posing some criteria of selection by the researcher from the Bishoftu town dwellers. They were selected by giving the priority to those who can read and write the Oromo language as the questionnaire had been prepared in Afaan Oromo. This was thought to complement the information gathered qualitatively by supporting it quantitatively.

1.6.3.6 Documentation

The data collected using the above mentioned instruments were tape-recorded, transcribed and translated into English. The data obtained through observations and informal discussions were documented in field notes and supplemented the recorded data. The data obtained from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were the main sources of the information and it was recorded by tape-recorder and also documented in field notes. Some photographs related to the study were taken to give the background information for the data.

1.6.3.7 Secondary Sources

Secondary sources were gathered from different books, articles in journals and published and unpublished theses from Addis Ababa University. The informations from secondary sources were used to find out related works about ritual, defining concepts and to show the missing data related to the study. Demographic, climatic and topographic data about the study area were obtained from the Ada'a District Culture and Tourism Office, Bishoftu town Finance and Economic Development and Culture and Tourism Office, and some also from the Culture and Tourism Office of the Oromiya Regional State.

1.6.4 Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed through description immediately after its collection. The data collected through questionnaires were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively after the field work. The data gathered through a survey method have been divided into two in terms of its analysis or documentation: the responses that were given to the open ended questions were incorporated to qualitative data and described qualitatively, whereas the responses to closed ended questions were analyzed quantitatively through the use of percentage.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

This thesis focuses on the *Irecha* ritual, its significance and value among the *Tulama* Oromo in Bishoftu town and the surrounding Oromo inhabitants. The *Irecha* ritual is one among the indigenous ritual practices of the Oromo in general and of *Tulama* Oromo in particular. Thus, to study the *Irecha* ritual, one problem which faced the researcher was that the information was given mostly orally; the researcher did not participate in the ritual practices because the time of fieldwork and the time of ritual practices did not correspond. The information that was given orally is depending on the personality of the informants. Therefore, this oral information might create some gaps between what practically exists and what the researcher is told.

Some concepts of the Oromo language are not easy to be translated into the research language, English. Hence, the concepts might be distorted in the translation to English. This is also another shortcoming that was faced in this study. The time that was given to the research was very short, resulting from the complicated modular system which created serious time-constraints on the study. The financial constraint was another problem that hampered the study.

1.8 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis emphasizes the *Irecha* ritual, its significance and value among the Oromo in general, the Oromo setting in Bishoftu town and among the surrounding rural inhabitants. Accordingly, the first chapter presents the background of the study, statement of the problems, objectives, significances, scope, and limitations of the study. The methodology of the study is also discussed in this chapter. The second chapter discusses the related literature, conceptual and theoretical frameworks of the thesis which guided the research. Chapter three presents the historical background of the Oromo in general and the study area in particular. It describes the general profile of the Oromo people shortly, like its indigenous administration system, kinship, religion and belief systems, and also describes

the genealogical line of the *Tulama* Oromo moiety and the demography, climate, and topography of the Ada'a district and Bishoftu town. The fourth chapter presents the nature, concept and meaning of the *Irecha* ritual, the relationship between the *Irecha* ritual and the *Qaalluu* and *Gada* institutions, and also discusses the gender participation in the *Irecha* ritual. The symbolic meanings of the *Irecha* ritual, specifically by focusing on the objects that are held during the ritual celebration with their specific symbolic representation are discussed. This chapter also presents the changes that faced the *Irecha* ritual and its continuities as a result of different factors. The last chapter of the thesis presents the conclusion of the study that reflects the perspectives of the researcher related to the existing findings and the related literature review.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW, CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This chapter discusses the literature related to the thesis concepts and the theoretical frameworks of the study. The first part of the chapter explains the concepts and meanings, characteristics, categories and functions of the ritual whereas the second part deals with the concepts and definitions of symbol and symbolic interpretations. The third part deals with the general characteristics of symbols. The fourth part discusses the concepts of rite of passage whereas the last part of this chapter deals with the theoretical frameworks applied in this study, such as structural functionalism and symbolic /interpretive anthropology.

2.1 Concepts and Meanings, Characteristics, Categories, and Functions of Ritual

2.1.1 Concepts and Meanings of Ritual

Different scholars are defining and explaining the term ritual differently, and there are also different assumptions associated with the term ritual. Some anthropologists have seen the ritual only in connection with religion or as religious ceremonies, while others explain it in terms of a very wide aspect of human life. Others also said that it exists in a number of human activities and beliefs, including politics. Therefore, some of the definitions and assumptions given by different anthropologists and scholars on the term “ritual” would be discussed briefly as follows.

For instance, Kertzer (1988: 8) explains the ritual in both religious and secular aspects. According to him, ritual, on the one hand, is limited to “the religious sphere and identify with the supernatural” (Kertzer 1988: 8); on the other hand, it has a “broad definition, labeling ritual as any standardized human activity” (Kertzer 1988: 8). Kottak (2000: 310f) defines the term ritual as “formal- stylized, repetitive and stereotyped”. He says that “people perform them in special (sacred) places and at set times” (Kottak 2000: 310f). Kottak’s definition of ritual is also in terms of a religious view; he does not identify it in other aspects. In this, Davies (2002: 111) argues that the term “ritual carries strong religious values within different traditions”. Gruenwald states that “rituals like ceremonies are repeatable events; people can do them for the same purposes, in the same orderly manner, and with the expectation of the same results” (2003: 7). Therefore, rituals are a pattern of activity repeatedly done for different purposes.

Durkheim, in Kertzer (1988: 8), also presents the main significant early social scientific view of ritual. Durkheim's view of ritual is relating to religious practices. According to him, the world we live in is divided into two classes: the sacred and the profane. Rites, as he states, are the "rules of conduct which prescribe how a man should comfort himself in the presence of the sacred objects" (Kertzer 1988: 8-9). Durkheim's idea, as noted in Kertzer (1988), is convincing to link the ritual behavior to the religious perspectives (Kertzer 1988: 9).

Friedrich (1966: 192) also defines the term ritual as "sets of repetitive and culturally specific ceremonies or performances relating to the supernatural or to some similar body of authoritative or abstract persons and ideas". His definition of the term, more or less, is in the religious framework. Keesing (1958), like Friedrich, defines rituals as "patterns of action, often highly symbolic, such as forms of worship, sacrifices, and avoidances" (1958: 335), his definition of ritual also expresses its religious nature.

According to Kottak (2000), the term ritual identifies the social action in a society. For him, "rituals are social acts, by which inevitably, some participants are more committed than others". For him, "just by taking part in a joint public act, the performers signal that they accept a common social and moral order, one that transcends their status as individuals" (Kottak 2000: 311). He also explains that through the public participation in the ritual performance, the practitioner accepts a common social and moral order, which is more essential for the existence of each society and results in the existence of social status in the society. Geertz (1966), in Banton (1966), defines the term "ritual" as "some sort of ceremonial form that the moods and motivations which sacred symbols induce in human beings and the general conceptions of the order of existence which they formulate for them, meet and reinforce one another" (Geertz 1966: 28). His definition is more or less in the religious paradigm. But, he tries to explain more than else it in its symbolic nature.

Another author who tries to define the term ritual, as quoted in Morris (1987: 238), is Victor W. Turner. He employs the term when referring to "prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical (or non-empirical) beings or power" (Morris 1987: 238). According to him, Ndembu rituals are categorized into two main parts: the life-crisis rituals and rituals of affliction. The life-crisis rituals are "associated specifically with death and puberty" where "*rituals of affliction*" are "associated with various misfortunes, primarily thought to result from the action of mukishi spirits" (Morris 1987: 238). In these "life-crises rituals"

there are two important initiation ceremonies; "the *mukanda*, or boys' circumcision rite and the *nkanga* or girls puberty ritual" (Morris 1987: 238).

Adams (2005) asks the basic question before he defines the term ritual: "*What was said about myths applies equally to the term "ritual" which anthropologists sometimes use to designate any kind of religion- inspired behavior*". And then he gives his own definition:

It usually refers to a formally specified and a repeatable performance. But, a great deal of religiously inspired behavior consists of impromptu actions, and much of it also consists not of acts but of avoidances. The Navajo's refusal to touch anything that has been struck by lightning is certainly based on religious belief, but most people would not think of such avoidance as a ritual (Adams 2005: 115).

Adams adds that as "in the case of mythology, there are many purely lay rituals. Even great religious rituals, like the Navajo's 'sing' and the Arab villagers' *mulid* (birthday of a saint) are often at the same time great lay festivals" (Adams 2005: 115).

Leach, in Morris (1987: 220), explains the term ritual in his interpretation of symbols. He is also critical on Durkheim's dichotomy between the sacred and the profane and the suggestion that rituals refer specifically to social action that occurs in the sacred context. Leach suggests, rather, that social actions are in a continuum. He tries to explain two extremes of the idea:

At one extreme are actions that are entirely profane, entirely functional, technique pure and simple; at the other extreme are actions that are sacred and technically non-functional. Viewed this way, he suggests, technique and ritual, profane and sacred, do not indicate types of social action, but aspects of almost any kind of behavior. Ritual, in this sense, is a symbolic statement that "says" something about the individual or event; thus Leach conjoins, under the heading of ritual, behavior that is considered simply communicative- such as shaking hands ... (Morris 1987: 220).

Leach also tries to compare the ritual with myth. For him ritual is symbolic action, and myth is simply its counterpart in the realm of ideas. "Myth and ritual are essentially one and the same", he writes (1954: 264). But, what does ritual action symbolize? On this, he is fairly explicit; it "represents" the social structure. Leach wrote, as quoted in Morris (1987), that "my view is that ritual action and belief are alike to be understood as forms of symbolic statement about the social order." And further "Ritual makes explicit the social structure The structure which is symbolized in ritual is the system of socially approved 'proper' relations between individuals and groups." Morris (1987: 220)

A relatively more comprehensive definition of the term ritual was given by Rappaport (1999). He takes the term "ritual" to denote the "performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers". His definition being extremely concise, the author adds elaboration and discussion. First, his definition encompasses much more than religious

behavior "in sociology and anthropology "ritual" and "ceremony" may designate a large range of social events, not all of which are religious, or may denote the formal aspects of such events ... and the application of the term has not been restricted to human phenomena" (Rappaport 1999: 24). According to the definition given by Rappaport, it encompasses not only human rituals, but also those stylized displays reported by ethologists to occur among birds, beasts and insects. He notes that not all behavior plausibly called "religious" fits comfortably within the term. Related to his definition of the term ritual, he concludes that "as all ritual is not religious, not all religious acts are ritual" (Rappaport 1999: 25-26).

Finally, to conclude the discussion of the concept of ritual, Eller has this to say: "We have all observed or participated in rituals, religious and secular; ritual is not necessarily or essentially a religious phenomenon. College graduation is a ritual with little or no religious content or significance. Some hold that getting your first driver's license and going on your first date are rituals" (Eller 2007: 110). Haviland and his colleagues (2007) also say in support of Eller's idea that "rituals or ceremonial acts are not all religious in nature...but those that play a crucial role in religious activity" (Haviland et al. 2007: 5001). Kottak's idea concludes the discussion by saying that "there are both sacred and secular rituals" and for him the secular rituals "include formal, invariant, stereotyped, earnest, repetitive behavior, and rites of passage that take place in nonreligious settings" (Kottak 2005: 227-228). In short, ritual is ceremonial acts that are performed repeatedly for different purposes at specified time and place and it is very important in creating common social and moral order.

2.1.2 Characteristics of the Ritual

Ritual action has a formal quality attached to it and some basic characteristics. For example, Kertzer says, related to its characteristics, that "it follows highly structured, standardized sequences and is often enacted at certain places and times that are themselves endowed with special symbolic meaning. It is repetitive and, therefore, often redundant, but these very factors serve as important means of channeling emotion, guiding cognition, and organizing social groups" (Kertzer 1988: 9).

Another characteristic of the ritual is that it transmits a message about the society and it is repeatedly practiced. Kottak (2000) notes that "rituals convey information about the participants and their traditions and since they are repeated year after year, generation after generation, rituals translate enduring messages, values, and sentiments into action" (Kottak 2000: 311). According to

him, the ritual is characterized by its repetitive nature. Other author also agrees with this repetitive nature of the ritual practice and its standardization on the basis of the society's culture.

Kertzer (1988) also says that if a ritual is "lacking symbolization it is an example of habit or custom", rather than a ritual. Thus, for him, "symbolization gives the action much more meaning" and "through ritual, beliefs about the universe are acquired, reinforced, and eventually changed (Kertzer 1988: 9). According to Cassirer, as quoted in Kertzer (1988: 9), "nature yields nothing without ceremonies".

Another main characteristic of the ritual, according to Kertzer, is that "it helps give meaning to our world in part by linking the past to the present and the present to the future" (Kertzer 1988: 9-10). According to him, this supports the human being to handle up two human problems: one is "building confidence in our sense of self by providing us with a sense of continuity and giving us confidence that the world in which we live today is the same world we lived in before and the same world we will have to cope with in the future"; Where the other is the existence of "certain psychological and even physiological basis of ritual" (Kertzer 1988: 10). According to him, "the power of ritual stems not just from its social matrix, but also from its psychological underpinnings".

Another characteristics of the ritual, as stated by Gruenwald (2003), is that

Rituals often have a ceremonial presence; i.e. they require preparation and a display of various accompanying elements (such as special garments, colors, ... etc.) and that ceremonies aim at drawing people's attention to something that is worth noticing, something that is extraordinary in some way. They do not necessarily aim, as rituals do, at signaling to people that there are certain practices, which they should consider crucial to their life or existence. (Gruenwald 2003: 7).

According to Kertzer (1988), ritual "is presented to individuals by the society, rather than generated from the individual's psychic activity". But it did not conclude as it is an inherently conservative force. The ritual is an inherently conservative force. Rituals are characterized by its flexibility in any society at any time. It changed "through the individual activity" and creativity. On this Kertzer (1988: 11), says that "rituals do change in form, in symbolic meaning, and in social effects; new rituals arise and old rituals fade away". Kertzer says in short that "people are not just slaves of rituals, or slaves of symbols, they are also molders and creators of ritual. It is because people create and alter rituals that they are such powerful tools of political action." (Kertzer 1988: 11-12).

On the other hand, Kertzer also explained that as "yet ritual has a conservative bias". It tends to be reluctant to change than many other aspects of culture. Thus, rituals have both a conservative bias and innovatory potential (Kertzer 1988:12).

2.1.3 Categories of Rituals

There are different categories of rituals performed by various groups. Some social groups practice one or all different categories of rituals. But there is no general consensus of the researchers on the types of rituals. Different anthropologists categorize them differently depending on their own argument and its justification. For instance, according to Haviland et al. (2007: 501), among “the several different types of rituals; **rites of passage** and **rites of intensification**” are the main. Haviland and his colleagues define the term “rites of passage” as “rituals that mark important stages in an individual’s life cycle” (Haviland et al. 2007: 501) and rites of intensification as “rituals that take place during a crisis in the life of the group and serve to bind individuals together” (Haviland et al. 2007: 502). For them, the typical example for these rites of intensification are funeral ceremonies; “regarded as rite of intensification that permit the living to express in non-disruptive ways their upset over the death while providing for social readjustment.” They also note that as “the performance of rites of intensification does not be limited to times of overt crisis”, but also in the “regions where the seasons differ enough that human activities must change accordingly; they will take the form of annual ceremonies” which is common among the “horticultural and agricultural people, with their planting and harvest ceremonies.” (Haviland et al. 2007: 503).

Another anthropologist categorizes the “**Funeral Ritual**”, unlike Haviland et al. (2007), as independent type of ritual; and it involves the sending of the dead into the grave or into another world (Maret 1994: 190). Sometimes it is known as “burial ritual”. Maret (1994) states the processes how the ancient African people practiced the funeral ritual that:

Since the early Iron Age, the body of the deceased was placed in the grave, oriented towards the cardinal points. From this period onward, grave goods were put with the deceased; first only iron tools and weapons that were indicative of the importance of funerary practice...There was a relationship between age and the burial ritual: adults were buried deeper than children and children deeper than infants. The body was generally interred lying on its back, its feet placed downstream in relation to the Zaire River. Among the Luba, waterways played an essential role in funerary rituals and in relation to the afterlife. For example, the dead chief was usually buried at the bottom of a river (Maret 1994: 190).

The **Initiation Rite** is also another type of ritual that the individual or the group must partake in, in order to join. For example, Cassirer, in Kertzer, states that initiation rite in politics occurred when an individual receives the authority as “a man is given a new name because what he receives in the rite is a new self. A man becomes a king because he comes to be treated as a king. The ritual is used to constitute power, not just reflect power that already exists. This becomes most evident where authority is under attack” (Kertzer 1988: 25).

Another type of ritual is the “Magical Ritual”. Haviland and his colleagues state on this magical ritual that

among the most fascinating of ritual practices is application of the belief that supernatural powers can be compelled to act in certain ways for good or evil purposes by recourse to certain specified formulas. Many societies have magical rituals to ensure good crops, the replenishment of game, the fertility of domestic animals, and the avoidance or healing of illness in human (Haviland et al. 2007: 503).

Rituals of pregnancy, birth and fertility control: are also among the well known types of rituals that are performed in different societies. Child and Child note that traditional societies have developed many techniques to control fertility (Child and Child 1993: 142). The mystical beliefs and practices concerned with pregnancy are also numerous. An example is provided by taboos on a woman’s food habits during pregnancy. Food taboos of the pregnancy period must, in some societies, be observed by the father, this custom foreshadows more extensive male participation in the rituals surrounding childbirth itself (Vinci 1959: 76; Metraux 1963, Child and Child 1993: 143). “A man whose wife is about to give birth, it was reported, would take to be, perhaps act as though suffering the pains of giving birth, and in other respects seems to imitate the role of his wife” (Child and Child 1993: 143), named “couvade.” Typical of “couvade ritual” in the broader sense is the following description of relevant practices and beliefs of the Kapauku, a Melanesian people of West Irian (Child and Child 1993: 144):

The birth imposes only a few restrictions on the parents. The mother is forbidden to leave her room for about three to five days. For about seven days it is taboo for her spouse to fell trees, burn them, plant sugarcane, build fences, or take a long walk. There are no food restrictions for either spouse. All these taboos have been set by (the creator) and their neglect would cause the newly born child to become sick.

Child and Child (1993: 147) say that “rituals surrounding childbirth include a great variety of other rules commonly stated to be followed for the benefit of the child”.

Conflict resolving rituals: are the rituals that are containing episodes of reconciliation that bring together both groups in conflict and are targeted to resolve the conflicts (Dirks 1988: 856). A typical example for this conflict resolving ritual is *Guma*; “it refers to the ritual of purification that follows homicide” (Dejene Gemechu 2002: 85) and there is no feeling of revenge after this ritual. There are also a number of rituals that are performed by different societies based on their own beliefs.

2.1.4 Functions of Rituals

There are a number of functions obtained from practicing a ritual. Different anthropologists have described its function differently depending on different aspects. For instance, Turner, in Morris (1987), explains the concept of rituals in his study of the Ndembu people of Zambia, in terms of its

function as it serves in conflict resolution and maintaining the social order and equilibrium of the community. For instance, as he puts ritual, "The function of maintaining the widest social unit, the Ndembu people, dissolves mainly upon the ritual system" (Morris 1987: 237).

Turner, in Morris (1987), also interprets the social function of the ritual in terms of an analysis of conflict resolution, ritual being a mechanism of redress (Morris 1987: 240). For him, a ritual was invoked under the pretext of curing a patient, but in reality to settle a conflict. He also suggests that this cult ritual had a number of social functions, namely:

It reduced hostility felt by many villages against Nyamukola, whom some had been accused of being a witch, by making the accused person object of sympathy in public ritual, It tended to close a breach opening between different factions within the village, since the organization of the rite demanded cooperation among leading members of each faction, It gave prestige to the host village and reestablished friendly relations with neighboring villages, and It made a dramatic restatement through ritual of the values of Ndembu society (Morris 1987: 240).

Turner (1968) notes that the ritual has the role of integrating the society politically and also "restores the equilibrium and solidarity of the group" (1968: 272, Morris 1987: 240f). Haviland et al. (2007: 501) also add on the function of rituals in creating social solidarity that "ritual serves to relieve social tensions and reinforce a group's collective bonds. More than this, it provides a means of marking many important events and lessening the social disruption and individual suffering of crisis, such as death." This shows that as ritual also used to decrease the social problems and used to organize under some social groups.

As Turner raised the political function of ritual in Ndembu society, there are a number of political functions of the ritual at different levels of political organization or offices. On this issue Kertzer (1988) described the political functions of ritual. He points out:

From national party convention to presidential inauguration, from congressional committee hearing to the roar of the football stadium crowd belting out the national anthem, ritual is an ever-present part of modern political life. Through ritual aspiring political leaders struggle to assert their right to rule, current power holders seek to bolster their authority, and revolutionaries try to carve out a new basis of political allegiance. All of these political figures, from leaders of insurrections to champions of the status quo, use rites of create political reality for the people around them. Through participation in the rites, the citizen of the modern state identifies with large political forces that can only be seen in symbolic form. And through political ritual, we are given a way to understand what is going on in the world, for we live in a world that must be drastically simplified if it is to be understood at all (Kertzer 1988: 1-2).

Kertzer (1988) also clearly states the function of ritual in politics:

Ritual is much more important to politics than the common view that political ritual merely serves to bolster the status quo. True, kings use ritual to shore up their authority, but revolutionaries use ritual to overthrow monarchs. The political elite employ ritual to legitimate their authority, belt rebels' battle back with rites of delegitimation. Ritual may be vital to reaction, but it is also the life blood of revolution (Kertzer 1988: 2).

Kertzer also writes that “ritual practices are a major means for propagating the political myths. The symbols at the heart of ritual observances are part of the issue of myth that helps structure an understanding of the political world and the politics attitude to the various political actors that populate it” (1988: 13). According to Lewellen (2003: 67), a ritual is the glue that holds states and societies together. For him, especially religious ritual has important political functions that “the reenactment of legitimizing myths unites the entire community in a sacred bond that transcends private interests and day-to-day conflicts, while reinfusing the society with the mystical power of the world of the ancestors. In some uncentralized societies religious ceremony was the major source of tribal integration.” (Lewellen 2003: 67)

In general, Kertzer (1988) explains the political importance of the ritual in many aspects. He explains that ritual helps to build political organization, is employed to create political legitimacy, helps to create political solidarity in the absence of political consensus and molds people’s understandings of the political universe. He also explains how political competitors struggle for power through ritual.

In short, rituals are important because they give human beings a sense of security and loyalty to a group. Humans can perform rituals to demonstrate their values and beliefs, and many times to reinforce unity within a group. Some believe that it is the ritual that has kept humankind so long, and without this regular practice, we would not have the security or solidarity needed to survive.

2.2 Symbols and Symbolic Interpretation

Symbol is another critical word in this research that needs to be discussed. Different anthropologists define the term symbol differently. For example, Eller (2007) defines it as

things - objects, images, sounds, actions, gestures, utterances, and almost any other medium - that “mean” something, that “have a meaning. The meaning is that which the symbol “stands for,” the phenomenon of which it is a representation or a place-holder. Moreover, the relationship between the symbol and its meaning is arguably arbitrary and conventional - that is, there is no necessary connection between the particular meaning and the particular symbol. It is only cultural habit that unites the two (Eller 2007: 55).

Raymond Firth (1973), in Morris (1987) and in Eller (2007), makes a distinction between four different signs. According to Firth, an **index** is a sign that is “directly related to what it signifies” - part of the whole, e.g. the tail of a dog signifies a dog, the footprint of a lion signifies a lion, or the smoke of a fire signifies a fire (Eller 2007: 55, Morris 1987: 219). A **signal** is considered “the dynamic aspect of an index”; it is “something that is “made” by or co-occurring with the signified, like the barking of a dog or the crash of thunder” (Eller 2007: 55, Morris 1987: 219). An **icon** is a

“sign that bears some similarity, or resemblance, to the thing it signifies like a picture or statue of a dog” (Eller 2007: 55, Morris 1987: 219), for example, the statue of a lion is iconic. And finally, a **symbol** is “a sign that has a complex series of associations, but there is no direct relationship or resemblance between the sign and the object signified” (Morris 1987: 219). The relationship is based on convention and may seem arbitrary. There is no obvious, natural or necessary connection between the symbol and what it symbolizes (Kottak 2005: 44).

In other words, Leach, as quoted in Morris (1987), makes a distinction between sign and symbol. A sign, for him, expresses a “relationship that is intrinsic, in the sense that the sign and the thing symbolized belong to the same cultural context (i.e. they have the resemblance or have natural connection between the thing and the symbolized)”, the relationship is metonymic (Morris 1987: 220). He notes that natural indexes entail the same sort of relationship. A symbol, on the other hand, “represents an entity belonging to a different cultural context (i.e. there is no relationship between the object and the symbol given, it is arbitrary given by the culture), and the relationship is metaphorical” (Morris 1987: 220).

According to Cassirer, in Morris (1987), a **sign** belongs to the physical world of being, it is an “operator”, there being an “intrinsic” or “natural” connection between the sign and the thing it signifies. A **symbol**, on the other hand, is “artificial”, a “designator”, and belongs to the human world of meaning. Thus, human knowledge by its very nature is symbolic.” (Morris 1987: 219). According to Eller, making and using symbols entails the cognitive ability to find and place meaning where it otherwise “is not.” He also notes symbolization as “the process of making and using symbols” (Eller 2007: 56).

Geertz gives his own definition of a symbol as “any object, act, events, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception - the conception is the symbol’s ‘meaning’” (1973: 91) ... symbols “are tangible formulations of notions, abstractions from experience fixed in perceptible forms, concrete embodiments of ideas, attitudes, judgments, longings, or beliefs” (Geertz 1973: 91), (Eller 2007: 58).

Turner is another prominent advocate who defined the term symbol in his multifaceted anthropological works. In his work “The Forest of Symbols”, he explores the ritual symbolism of the Ndembu (Eller 2007: 59). He notes as ritual and symbolism are closely interrelated, and also defines the term symbol as “the smallest unit of ritual which still retains the specific properties of

ritual behavior; it is the ultimate unit of specific structure in a ritual context" (Turner 1967: 19). For him, symbols are interpreted widely because they include "objects, activities, relationships, events, gestures, and spatial units" (Turner 1967: 19, Eller 2007: 59) that are merely understood within a specific society familiar with that symbol.

Turner (1967), in Eller (2007: 59) and Kertzer (1988: 11), arrives at three properties of symbols which are especially important to understand what a symbol means; condensation of meaning, multivocality or unification of disparate significata and ambiguity or polarization of meaning (Kertzer 1988: 11, Eller 2007: 59).

According to the above mentioned authors, condensation refers to the way in which individual symbols represent and unify a rich diversity of meanings. The symbol, whether verbal or iconic, that is, manifest in a physical form such as a bible or a flag, somehow embodies and brings together diverse ideas. By multivocality or unification of disparate significata, they "are interconnected by virtue of their common possession of analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought," the same symbol may be understood by different people in different ways and the variety of different meanings attached to the same symbol (Turner 1967: 28, Eller 2007: 59).

It should hardly be surprising that ritual symbolism is often ambiguous: the symbol has no single precise meaning without its context. Turner states that symbols as "it bring together two "poles" of experience, the natural/physiological and the moral/social. Thus, a symbol integrates the physical qualities and associations of the symbolic object (e.g., the red and therefore "bloody" quality of the mukula tree) and the emotional and even visceral reactions it inspires with the ideas, norms, and values of the group that uses it" (Eller 2007: 59).

Geertz (1966) gives a detailed concept of symbols. He describes it well in many aspects:

Symbol has been used to refer to a great variety of things, often a number of them at the same time. In some hands it is used for anything which signifies something else to some one: dark clouds are the symbolic precursors of an on-coming rain. In others it is used only for explicitly conventional signs of one sort or another: a red flag is a symbol of danger, a white of surrender. In others it is confined to something which expresses in an oblique and figurative manner that cannot be stated in a direct and literal one, so that there are symbols in poetry but not in science, and symbolic logic is misnamed... the cross, talked about, visualized, shaped worriedly in air or fondly fingered at the neck ... They are all symbols, or at least symbolic elements, because they are tangible formulations of notions, abstractions from experience fixed in perceptible forms, concrete embodiments of ideas, attitudes, judgments, longings or beliefs (Geertz 1966: 5).

Finally, it is important to discuss symbolic interpretation in the sense that symbols always need interpretation, "thin" and "thick" interpretations (Geertz, 1973: 3-30) in each symbolic usage and in

any culture. Thus, this study tries to explore and investigate the symbolic representation or meaning of the *Irecha* ritual among the Oromo people.

2.3. General Characteristics of Symbols

Symbols have some general characteristics. The first main characteristic of symbols, according to Kottak (2000: 63), is that its meaning is arbitrarily given. There is no obvious, or natural, connection between the symbol (the object) and what it symbolizes (Kottak 2005: 44, Haviland et al. 2007: 283). For instance, Holy water is a symbol; the association between a symbol (water) and what is symbolized (holiness) is arbitrary and conventional (Kottak 2000: 63, 2005: 44).

The other characteristic of symbols is that it needs reinforcement. According to Chapple et al. (1947: 472), “a symbol does not operate in a vacuum, but is subject to its place in the interaction”. They also noted that “a symbol produces its result not merely by itself, but because it is reinforced by the repetitive actions of persons” (Chapple et al. 1947: 472). For example, a dog loses its capacity to salivate at the sound of a bell if the conditioned response is not reinforced by receiving meat at regular intervals.

Symbols are also characterized by changing their meaning. They do not remain constant, but also change in time and place as well as in condition. “The symbol itself may change its technical reference, while the type of action or interaction to which it refers remains the same” (Chapple et al. 1947: 472).

Symbols are also antagonistic by nature. According to Chapple et al. (1947), as some symbols may be linked together owing to the similarities of the interaction rates of their referents, so others may be considered antagonistic. For instance, a group of people or a person cannot use two opposed symbols at the same time, or in some case they can never use opposite symbols at all (Chapple et al. 1947: 476-79). The commonest type of antagonism of symbols and the easiest to use in illustration is that between the symbols of the two sexes. A man would not ordinarily wear earrings or a skirt in our society, since these are symbols of the opposite sex.

It is also characterized by its linguistic in nature (Kottak 2005: 44). It uses words to represent objects and ideas (Haviland et al. 2007: 283). In addition to its verbal nature, there are also non verbal symbols such as flags, which stand for different countries (Kottak 2005: 44).

Finally, symbols are characterized by their universality. The culture unique to human beings is represented by symbols and it is found everywhere where the human being is living (Kottak 2005: 44).

2.4 Rites of Passage

Rites of passage are another main concept which has to be discussed here. It has been discussed by different anthropologists and scholars. For instance, Van Gennep (1908/1960) defines "rites of passage as rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age" (Gennep 1908/1960: 2-3). Turner (1964) states that "rites of passage are found in all societies, but tend to reach their maximal expression in small-scale, relatively stable and cyclical societies, where change is bound up with biological and meteorological rhythms and recurrences rather than with technological innovations. Such rites indicate and constitute transitions between *states*" (Turner 1964: 4).

According to Turner,

State means "a relatively fixed or stable condition," and would include in its meaning such social constancies as legal status, profession, office or calling, rank or degree. Turner also hold it to designate the condition of a person as determined by his culturally recognized degree of maturation as when one speaks of "the married or single state" or the "state of infancy." The term "state" may also be applied to ecological conditions, or to the physical, mental or emotional condition in which a person or a group may be found at a particular time. Thus, a man may be in a state of good or bad health; a society in a state of war or peace or a state of famine or of plenty. State, in short, is a more inclusive concept than status or office, and refers to any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognized (Turner 1964: 4).

Haviland and his colleagues define the term 'rites of passage' as "rituals that mark important stages in an individual's life cycle" (Haviland et al. 2007: 501).

Van Gennep subdivides the rites of transition into three phases: rites of separation, transition, and incorporation (Van Gennep 1960: 10f, Kottak 2005: 215, Haviland et al. 2007: 501). According to Van Gennep, the first phase of separation comprises when "people withdraw from the group and begin moving from one place or status to another" (Kottak 2005: 215). During the intervening transition rites, "they exist apart from ordinary distinctions and expectations, living in a time out of time" (Kottak 2005: 216). In the third phase, it is the "formal return and readmission back into his or her new status" (Haviland et al. 2007: 501), they reenter the society, having completed the rite (Kottak 2005: 215). According to Van Gennep (1960), these three sub-categories are not developed to the same extent by all peoples or in every ceremonial pattern (Van Gennep 1960: 11).

Van Gennep describes well each of the three subdivision of rites of passage with examples. According to him, for instance, rites of separation are well-known in funeral ceremonies, rites of

incorporation are known at marriages. Transition rites may play an important part, for example, in pregnancy, betrothal, and initiation; or they may be reduced to a minimum in adoption, in the delivery of a second child, in remarriage; or in the passage from the second to the third age group (Van Gennep 1960: 11). According to Haviland and his colleagues, these three subdivisions of rites of passage is "something that takes place in many forms in all cultures around the world" (Haviland et al. 2007: 501). Thus, for Van Gennep (1960), a complete scheme of rites of passage theoretically includes these three rites and in specific instances, these three types are not always equally important or equally elaborated (Van Gennep 1960: 11). In addition, Van Gennep (1960) states that these three subdivisions of rites of passage exist in each stage of rite of passage, the arrangement is reduplicated (Van Gennep 1960: 11).

Turner says that "the most prominent type of rites of passage tends to accompany the movement of a man through his/her life time, from a fixed placental placement within his/her mother's womb to his/her death and until his/her tomb stone as final containment in the grave. These are the important times of birth, puberty, marriage and death." (Turner 1964: 5).

But, Turner also states the scope of rite of passage as it did not merely limited to the human biological development by criticizing the former anthropologists who were stated the concept before him that:

as Van Gennep, Henri Junold and others have said, rites of passage are not confined to culturally defined life-crises but may accompany any change from one state to another, ... Rites of passage, too, are not restricted, sociologically speaking, to movements between ascribed statuses. They also concern entry into a new achieved status, whether this may be a political office or membership of an exclusive club or secret society. Or they admit persons into membership of a religious group where such a group does not include the whole society, or qualify them for the official duties of the cult, sometimes in a graded series of rites (Turner 1964: 5).

According to Van Gennep, "the life of human being is full of succession of stages with similar beginnings and ends; such as birth, marriage, occupational advancement and death." (Van Gennep 1960: 2f). According to him, each stage of life is supported by the serial ceremonies that may enables the individual to exceed from one defined social position to the next position or to another which may be acquired by personal efforts (Van Gennep 1960: 2-3). Additionally, Van Gennep explains not only the passage of human beings from one stage to another through the process of rites of passage, but he also discussed every state of change from one stage to another (Van Gennep 1960: 3f). Kottak (2005: 215) also explains the concept as it is not confined to humans by stating that it "may mark any change in place, condition, social position or age". Van Gennep (1960: 3-4) says that the universe itself is governed by a periodicity which has consequences on human life,

with stages and transitions, movements forward, and periods of relative inactivity. According to him, the change of years and months are, like that of human rites of passage, sequences of rites of passage that are performed by humans with the indication that nature reflects these changes of seasons in the years (Van Gennep 1960: 3-4).

Van Gennep further describes that rites of passage are by no means restricted to rites of birth, initiation, marriage and the like. In addition to their overall goal, all these ceremonies have their individual purposes. For instance,

Marriage ceremonies include fertility rites; birth ceremonies include protection and divination rites; funerals, defensive rites; initiations, propitiatory rites; ordinations, rites of attachment to the deity. All these rites, which have specific effective aims, occur in juxtaposition and combination with rites of passage and are sometimes so intimately intertwined with them that it is impossible to distinguish whether a particular ritual is, for example, one of protection or of separation (Van Gennep 1960: 11-12).

2.5 The *Irecha* Ritual in Literature

The *Irecha* ritual is an indigenous Oromo ritual with a long history. Currently, this indigenous ritual is facing a problem of understanding about its purpose by different social groups. Scholars formulated different ideas on the purposes of the *Irecha* ritual.

For instance, Knutsson (1967: 62) notes that “before the harvest begins at the end of the rainy season during September – October ... there is a great collective ceremony called *Irresa*”. For him, it is “a form of thanksgiving to *Waqqa* with the participation of larger regional groups.” Temesgen Chibsa (2009: 66) also gives the same argument that it is a ceremony held during the season of autumn and spring during which the Oromo deliver their thanks to *Waqqa* for what He has done for them. For Galabu (2006), the *Irecha* ritual is a harvest ritual that is celebrated annually. But, for Admasu Shunkuri (1998) it is simply an annual holiday, or a periodic event for thanksgiving. According to Admasu Shunkuri (1998), the *Irecha* ritual refers to the habit of daily prayers and blessings and also thanking *Waqqa* for his generosity. The above mentioned authors agree that the purpose of *Irecha* ritual is basically thanksgiving. I also agree with them on its thanksgiving nature, but there are also other purposes that are attached to it that were overlooked by these authors.

Hailu Ejersa (2009: 64) adds that “it is a form of thanksgiving for the new light that brings new growth and new hope”. He also states, as most elders of the study area say, that the *Irecha* ritual is related to the power of *Waqqa* (Hailu Ejersa 2009: 65). In short, Hailu Ejersa’s thesis basically focuses on the changes and continuity of the *Irecha* ritual and he regards it as part of the religious domain or as religious ritual. Maskarem Assagued (1998: 84) also interprets the *Irecha* ritual as

“ancient religion” and Hora Arsadi as “the center of this religious ground” (1998: 87). But, today, there are a number of controversies whether the *Irecha* ritual is a religious ritual or not. To get the empirical data on this dilemma, this thesis targets to distribute questionnaires, this was missed by other researchers.

Hailu Ejersa (2009) touches most aspects of the *Irecha* ritual and he describes the *Irecha* ritual more in details than others. However, he misses very important issues of the *Irecha* ritual that this thesis targets to investigate. For example, Hailu Ejersa (2009) tries to touch the symbolic meaning of the *Irecha* ritual; but he was not able to explain the symbolic meaning of the objects that are used in the *Irecha* ritual celebration. In any ritual celebration, there are a number of objects and events that give more meaning and attract the attention of everybody. Thus, this thesis targets to fill this gap by investigating the symbolic meanings of different objects that may be sacred objects or not.

This thesis also gives more attention than Hailu Ejersa’s (2009) thesis to the significance of the *Irecha* ritual for the Oromo people in general and Oromo of the study area, in particular. In general, the main target of this thesis is the significance and value of the *Irecha* ritual in the self-identification of the Oromo people.

2.6 Theoretical Framework: Structural Functionalism and Symbolic or Interpretive Anthropology

The theoretical frameworks adopted for this study are structural functionalism and interpretative or symbolic anthropology. The latter approach has been developed to fill the gap created by the former theory, i.e. structural functionalism. The structural functionalist perspective states that all the human institutions have a function for the well being of the society. It is also concerned with the place of the individual in the social, less with the construction of the social order itself (Barnard 2000: 61). One of the shortcomings of structural functionalism is on the symbolic interpretation of the society. It only gives emphasis to the functions, without considering their meanings.

According to the structural functionalist approach, the society is considered not only outside of time but also isolated in space. Thus, the society is seen as independent of its wider social environment (Lewellen, 2003: 82). On the other hand, interpretative anthropology (another term for symbolic anthropology) states that cultures are not metaphorical grammars to be figured out and written down, they are languages to be translated into terms intelligible to members of other cultures (Barnard 2000: 158). The interpretive approaches reject the ideas of a ‘grammar’ of culture in favor

of a 'meaning' in the more subtle everyday discourse of culture (Barnard 2000: 160). They offer the vision of anthropology's object as the totality of moral and symbolic systems which require interpretation (Barnard 2000: 161).

Symbolic anthropology is the study of symbols as instigators and receptacles of social contradiction and social action (Beers 1992: 39). It is a theoretical orientation in anthropology which is the study of culture through the interpretation of the meaning of symbols, values, and beliefs of a society. This theory focuses on the symbolic rather than the material aspects of culture. It suggests that many cultural symbols cannot be readily reduced to the material conditions and adaptive mechanisms of a society, as proposed by cultural materialists, rather than viewing values, beliefs and world views, as a reflection only of environmental, technological, or economic conditions, it argues that cultural symbols may be completely autonomous from material factors (Scupin and Descorse 2005: 312).

According to Scupin and Descorse (2005: 312), the goal of symbolic anthropology, therefore, is to interpret the meaning of symbols within the worldviews of a particular society. The symbolic anthropologist tries to distinguish how such symbol helps people produce meaning for themselves. For instance, a particular hair style or the classification of different foods may become symbolic metaphors, communicating messages (Scupin and Descorse 2005: 321).

In interpretative anthropology, Geertz (1973: 3-30) distinguished two types of symbolic description: "thick description"- the detailed and layered description for the meaning of symbol – and "thin description" – the rough and easily observed description of the culture. Geertz emphasizes the thick description of symbolic studies.

According to the structural functionalist perspective, any institution can have a function in fitting together with some other institutions; everything is, therefore, in some sense functional (Barnard 2000: 82). There are two forms of functions that have to be considered in this perspective: the manifest and latent functions. The manifest functions are the real and observable functions of a unit of social structure; whereas the latent functions are consequences that are unintended and often hidden (Lewellen 2003: 82). The manifest function is directed towards a given goal to maintain equilibrium; yet this manifest function is not analytically significant. As Lewellen (2003: 82) puts it, the anthropologist is much more interested in the latent functions of which individuals are

unaware, and these can only be determined by looking at the whole system; it may be relatively related with the “thick description” of Clifford Geertz and interpretive or symbolic anthropology.

In this study, the concepts of manifest function and latent function of structural functionalism are adopted and used in order to see the direct and implied functions of the *Irecha* ritual in the study area. Lewellen (2003: 83-84) states that structural functionalism seems close to symbolic anthropology, which views culture as involving powerful sets of unconscious symbols, that are also used to see the symbolic interpretation of the ritual activity. The cultural activities of different societies, including ritual practices, are not understandable simply from the outside, it may be best to additionally use the symbolic or interpretative anthropology. Thus, the structural functionalism and the symbolic or interpretative anthropology are employed as a theoretical framework to investigate the *Irecha* ritual, its significance and value among the Oromo people.

In this thesis, an attempt is made to “reconcile” two theoretical approaches in investigating the *Irecha* ritual: structural functionalism and symbolic/interpretive anthropology. The idea behind is to observe the ritual “from outside” in its various functions for various groups of people, and foremost, in its consecutive stages, interconnections with other rituals and institutions in the Oromo society, as well as to have a deeper look at the “meanings” of the ritual for individuals and social groups. In the latter case, whereas the symbolic meanings can be explained by informants (even if they are sometimes contradictory), the part of the researcher ventures into interpretation, based on the informants’ statements.

CHAPTER THREE

THE HISTORICAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE OROMO IN THE STUDY AREA

This chapter discusses the historical, social and cultural background of the Oromo in general and the study area in particular. The first part gives brief survey of the Oromo people, their history, demography, indigenous administration system, kinship system and religion. The second part of this chapter deals with the historical and genealogical development of the Tulama Oromo moiety, whereas the third part describes and introduces the study sites (Ada'a district and Bishoftu town) such as the climatic condition, population characteristics, topography and different rituals performed in the area.

3.1 The Oromo People: A Brief Survey

The Oromo people are the largest ethnic group of the Cushitic language family that makes up a significant portion of the population occupying the Horn of Africa (Gada Melba 1988:1). The Oromo people are the people who enjoy a homogenous culture and share a common language, history and descent and also shared common political, religious and legal institutions (Ibid). They are also among the branches of the Cushitic family that densely inhabited their area for long periods of time and still are living in the Horn of Africa (Gada Melba 1988: 1, and Dirribi Damuse 2009: 359).

Oromiya is the name that refers to the Oromo land, given by the Oromo Liberation Front (Gada Melba 1988: 23). Currently, the Oromiya Region is one of the nine regional states administrated under the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. It covers the largest portion of the land (367,000 km²) which is located between 2⁰N and 12⁰N latitude and 34⁰E and 44⁰E longitude (Gada Melba 1988: 23) with a total population number of the region 26,993,933 (CSA, 2007). The Oromo people are living in different regions of Ethiopia outside Oromiya region together with other ethnic groups and they are also found in neighboring countries like Kenya and Somalia (Gada Melba 1988: 8).

The Advocates of Human Rights (2009), by quoting the U.S. State Department, estimate that the Oromo people constitute 40 percent of the Ethiopian population or approximately 31 million people.

Oromiya is the region that is naturally endowed with fertile and rich land resources that are especially suitable for agriculture and it is the home to an exotic fauna and flora. The region is ecologically and agriculturally the richest region in Ethiopia (Gada Melba 1988: 1 and 23). The Oromiya regional state is divided into 18 administrative zones. Each zone is subdivided into a number of small administrative units called *Aanaa* (districts) whereas each district is further subdivided into the smallest administrative units called *Ganda* (the smallest administrative unit being the rural peasant association).

There are controversies on the origin of the Oromo. Different scholars denied the Ethiopian origin of the Oromo people and presented the Oromo nation as outsiders, as the name Ethiopia didn't represent Oromo. For example, Jaenen (1956: 171f) notes that they are "... of uncertain origin although many theories exist of its origin." But, new findings are coming up with new results related to the origin of the Oromo by the Culture and Tourism Bureau of the Regional State of Oromiya.

Previously, different scholars concluded that the Oromo people originated from the southern part of Ethiopia. But, currently these ideas and conclusions were falsified by recent scholars; as to them, the Oromo originated from the north and moved southwards. According to Alemayehu Haile et al. (2006: 17), the Oromo people were living in northeastern parts of Africa from the early period, and it could be said that the movement has taken place from north to south. On this, they note that "the Oromo population as members of the Cushitic family had started to live in the northeastern parts of Africa from 3,500 B.C. to 2000 B.C. with its own culture and language" (Alemayehu et al. 2006: 17). Based on this, they note that "the northern origin of Oromo and that the population movement took place from north to southern direction" (Alemayehu et al. 2006: 8). This shows that there were different errors on Oromo history.

Abba Gorgorios (1999:10) and Alemayehu et al. (2006: 16) state that the word Ethiopia refers to the land of the Cush. Abba Gorgorios (1999:11) also noted that this word is derived from the Greek word, "*aityops*" which literally means "those with burnt faces". According to the new finding, Oromo is among the aboriginal or indigenous population of Ethiopia and the name Ethiopia is the derivative of the Cushitic people inhabiting in the region which largely includes the Oromo. For example, Alemayehu et al. (2006: xv), note as follows:

... the Oromo belong to the Cushitic peoples of the Northeast African region including Ethiopia since very distant past. After all, the name of Ethiopia itself is a derivative of the Greek term for the black Cushitic

peoples of northeastern Africa. The Oromo are one of these Cushites of the region in general and of the Cushitic inhabiting the region referred to as "Ethiopia" in particular.

Gada Melba (1988:4) also notes that formerly, as the Cushitic people in general and Oromo in particular originated in the north and then moved southwards that "the land of Kush, Nubia, or the ancient Ethiopia in middle and lower Nile is the home of the Cushitic speakers. It was most probably from there that they subsequently dispersed and become differentiated into separate linguistic and cultural groups." (Gada Melba 1988:4).

The linguistic studies done on Afaan Oromo, show that the present Cushitic peoples of Ethiopia are direct descendants of ancient Cushites of North East Africa. According to Alemayehu et al. (2006) and Gada Melba (1988), the Cushite people's, movement and distribution, in the long run, resulted in the formation of four branches of the Cushitic speakers, such as Northern, Central, Eastern and Southern Cushitic, which include about a total of 23 further languages in the classification, whereas Greenberg (1963) categorized the Cushitic family formerly into five, such as Northern, Central, Eastern, Western and Southern Cushitic. In these classifications, Afaan Oromo is classified under the Eastern Cushitic languages (Alemayehu et al. 2006: 18f, Gada Melba 1988: 4 and 8). Dirribi Damuse (2009: 359) in his book entitled "**Ilaalcha Oromoo: Barroo, Aadaa, Seenaa fi Amantaa Oromo**" recently asserts that as the Oromo people are the descendants of Eastern Cushites they formed the largest, densely populated group for a long period of time in the Horn of Africa.

Gada Melba (1988:9) notes that "taking into consideration the number of speakers" in the Horn of Africa and "the geographic area it covers", Afaan Oromo (Oromo language), "most probably rates second among the African indigenous languages" of the whole continent. In terms of its usage "it is the third most widely spoken language in Africa", next to Arabic and Hausa (Gada Melba 1988:9, Ayalew Kanno 2005: 7). It is the mother tongue for more than 23 million Oromo people living in the Oromiya regional state and there are also a number of Oromo people that are living in different neighboring regions and countries, whose mother tongue is Afaan Oromo. There are around 2 million non-Oromo who speak Afaan Oromo as their 2nd language. It is also a language spoken in common by several members of many ethnic groups found in Ethiopia like Harari, Agnuak, Barta, Sidama, Gurage, etc. who are neighbors to Oromiya regional state and Oromo people (Gada Melba 1988:9).

3.1.1 The Gada System

Different scholars tried to give the definition of the Gada system at different times. Among this, the prominent one is Asmarom Legesse, a person who studied the Borana Oromo Gada system and published different books and articles on the Oromo Gada system. He defines the Gada system as “a system of Gada classes (*Luba*) or segments of genealogical generations that succeed each other every eight years in assuming political, military, judicial, legislative and ritual responsibilities” (Asmarom Legesse 2000: 31). According to him, “it is an institution that represents an extreme development of a type of social structure known to anthropologists as *age-sets*.” (Asmarom Legesse 1973: 50). The Gada system is “the systems that organizes the male Oromo people into groups or sets that give them different responsibilities and social status in the society every eight years” (Gada Melba 1988: 10). It guides the overall aspects of the society like “religious, political, social, economic, philosophical, artistic, historical aspects and provides a method of time-reckoning” (Gada Melba 1988: 10-11) and a calendar system of the Oromo society. “It is the law of the society, a system by which Oromo administer, defend their territory and rights; maintain and guard the economy and through which all their aspirations are fulfilled” (Gada Melba 1988: 11).

The Gada system functions based on the age set and generation sets. According to Asmarom Legesse (1973: 51),

The Gada classes or age sets are the group of people who share the same status and who perform their rites of passage together whereas the Gada grades are the stages of development through which the groups pass. The former refer to the collectivity, whereas the latter refers to a conceptual scheme that defines the kind of activities, rights, and duties the groups assume successively throughout their active careers.

To complete one Gada generation it lasts forty years and there are five segments or Gada classes within it (Asmarom Legesse 2000: 31).

The Gada system has the principles of checks and balances through the periodic succession every eight years, and division of power among executive, legislative, and judicial branches, a balanced opposition among five Gada classes, and power sharing between higher and lower administrative organs to prevent power from falling into the hands of dictators or to prevent the abuse of power (Asafa Jalata 2010). For instance, according to Obbo Alemayehu Hayile, key informant, there are three main assemblies which are held to evaluate the power usage and sharing, the division of labor among the three governmental bodies, such as *yaa'ii bantii*, *yaa'ii dagaagaa* and *yaa'ii odaa*.

Yaa'ii bantii (Banti assembly) in *Gada Tulama* is held at the 5th years of the Gada power. This is a type of ritual carried out for the purpose of checking and balancing the power of Gada of the period. In this assembly, all the members of Luba or Gada classes are gathered at Oda Nabe (the place where the *Chaffe* of the Gada Tulama held) to evaluate, check and balance the power usage of the Gada in power and even to take corrective action if necessary. The *yaa'ii dagaagaa* (*Dagaga* assembly) is another meeting held at the 7th years Gada power for the same purpose. The *yaa'ii Oda* (*Oda* assembly) is held at the end of the eight years of Gada in power. In this assembly, the laws which were followed are evaluated, if there are some limitations of the laws, they may be corrected and, if necessary, amended and additional laws may also be developed.

Asafa Jalata (2010) also notes the other principles of the Gada system: balanced representation of all clans, lineages, regions and confederacies, accountability of leaders, settlement of disputes through reconciliation, and respect for basic rights and liberties. According to him, the Gada government is thus based on democratic principles, but excludes caste groups (such as smiths and tanners) and women. The system only accommodates the male members of the society. On this, Gada Melba (1988: 11) wrote that “every male member of the society who is of age and of Gada grade has full rights to elect and to be elected. All the people have the right to air their views in any public gathering without fear”. This shows that even if the women and the caste groups are excluded from direct participation, they have the full right to participate in public gatherings and to ask any questions related to every aspect of the society.

According to Asmarom Legesse (2000: 30) “the Oromo have developed their own variety of a democratic political organization that has endured for at least four centuries of recorded history”. Asafa Jalata (2010) expands more on this by saying that “we do not know when and how this system emerged but we know that it existed as a full-fledged system at the beginning of the sixteenth century”. According to him, during that period, the Oromo people were under one *Gada* administration. He also extends his explanation and states that “during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when various peoples were fighting over economic resources in the Horn of Africa, the Oromo were effectively organized under the *Gada* institution for both offensive and defensive wars”. Dirribi Damuse (2009: 206) also notes that “it is difficult to say that the Gada system started at a certain time and was initiated by somebody; rather it is the result of a long period of experiences and it developed through trials of the Oromo community”.

There are five Gada classes in the system, which compete with each other for power according to the indigenous laws of the society. These Gada classes have different names in different parts of the Oromiya, as a result of Oromo expansion and the establishment of different autonomous administrative systems (Asafa Jalata 2010). For instance, according to Obbo Negesa Nagawo, the names of these classes among the Tulama Oromo are: *Robale*, *Birmaji*, *Melba*, *Mudana*, and *Halchisa*. These Gada classes are existing in each Tulama Oromo moiety which helps in coordinating the local community to compete with each other for power. According to Asmarom Legesse (2000), “the class in power, Gada (VI), is headed by an officer known as *Abba Gada* or *Abba Bokku* in different parts of the Oromo nation, that means “father or leader of the institution” or “bearer or owner of the symbol of authority”, respectively” (2000: 31). During the power transferring ritual, the general assembly, called *Chaffee*, does not elect the Gada leader from the preceding party; instead they elect the *Abba Gada* based on the sequence of their competition to power. For example, the Gada class that led the Tulama Oromo from 2003 to 2010 Gada period was from the *Robale* class, while those who took over the power from the *Robale* to lead for the next eight years are from *Birmaji* Gada class.

Starting from his birthday or adoption, each individual male enters into the Gada grades. Asmarom Legesse (1973: 51) notes that the basic rule of the Gada system is that the newly born infant boy always enters the system of grades exactly forty years behind the father, regardless of the age of the father. There are five grades gap between father and son. Like the Gada class, the names of the Gada grades are also vary from place to place. According to Obbo Negesa Nagawo, the names of these Gada grades are: *Gammee* (first Gada grade, from birth to 8 years), *Daballee* (from 9-16 years), *Folle* (from 17-24 years), *Qondaala* (sometimes known as *Kuusaa*, from 25-32 years), *Doorii* or *Dooroma* (from 33-40 years) and *Gada* or *Luba* (41-48 years) and at this grade they are the class in power. After they finish the Gada grade or their political position, they enter into *Abba Seeraa* (literally: law officer or a person who is responsible in advising and teaching the indigenous Gada law of the community).

The transition from one grade to the next is supported by specified rituals or rites of passage, which legitimize the transition publically. On this, Hailu Ejersa (2009: 40) states that “the transition from grade to grade is marked by ritual observances similar to the rite of passage ceremonies of age grade organization”. He also notes that the transition from one stage to the next is not physiological rather it is socially accomplished and conducted with ritual on the basis of maturation (2009: 41).

Indeed, these rites of passage are not specified on the basis of an individual age or maturation, rather it is based on the generation gap between father and son.

In short, the Gada system is the system of self government and the system of political, religious, social, economic and ritual activities of the society. It organizes the people into different age sets and age grades through which they share the responsibility among the community and train and practice in different fields of activities like war and political leadership. They even celebrate different indigenous ritual ceremonies in general and the *Irecha* ritual in particular, according to their social position.

3.1.2 Kinship System

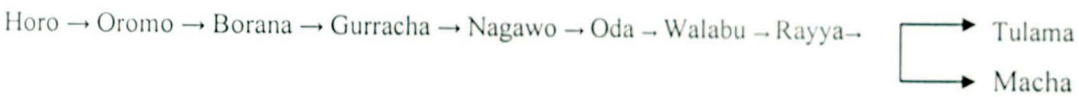
In the Oromo culture, family and kinship play a central role. In a patriarchal society, men are considered as the head of the household, though the family's daily life depends mostly upon the women (The Advocates of Human Rights, 2009). According to Blackhurst (1978: 246f), the Oromo descent system largely follows the patrilineal descent system and patrilocal residence after marriage, especially among the Shewa Oromo. On this, Blackhurst (1978: 247) also notes that "at marriage, or shortly thereafter, a son builds his own house, an indication that a fledgeling independent domestic unit has been brought into being".

With regard to the Oromo genealogy, formerly, different scholars agreed that the Oromo people descended from the two major groups or moieties: Borana and Barentu (Gada Melba 1988:8, Asafa Jalata 2010, The Advocates of Human Rights 2009: 4). According to that old view, *Borana* was the senior (*angafa*) and *Barentu* the junior (*quxusuu*). But the recent study by the Oromiya Culture and Tourism Bureau (OCTB) states that the old derivation of the Oromo nation from the *Borana* and *Barentu* has become invalid by new evidences. The new findings by OCTB proves the fact that the two names are not names of people, instead names of directions: Borana- stands for an Afaan Oromo word *Boro- ana* (west), while the second refers to *Bari- ana* (east). Both terms refer to names of two Oromo confederations that were created based on their settlement patterns (Alemayehu et al. 2006: xv). Confederation is any league or union of people or groups. In modern political usage, it refers to a union of sovereign states in which the stress is on independence of the constituent states - as contrasted with a federation, in which the stress is on the supremacy of the central government.

According to the new findings, the authors put “a man known as “*Horo*” as a founding father of the Oromo peoples. The legend tells us that God has created *Horo* in a country known as *Walabu* - a place where *Waq* has kneaded a mixture of clay soil-water that has been turned into a human being, called *Horo*, by blowing his breath to it. While the first man was living alone, God has miraculously turned him into two and then said that the person was the first woman. She was said to have given birth to Oromo (Alemayehu et al. 2006: 114- 115).

According to these oral traditions, *Horo*, the first man, is the father of Oromo. Then, the *Oromo* gave birth to *Borana*, *Borana* begotten *Gurracha*, *Gurracha* begotten *Nagawo*, then *Nagawo* begotten *Oda*, *Oda* begotten *Walabu* and then *Walabu* begotten *Rayya*. After these seven generations *Rayya* begot *Tulama* and *Macha*. The above explanation of the Oromo genealogy can be summarized in the following figure.

Figure 1: Origin and descendants of the Oromo (Alemayehu et al. 2006: 114)



On the other hand, Alemayehu Diro (2004: 49) notes that “Macha and Tulama belong to Rayya who is regarded as their common father and believed to descend from Borana division of the Oromo”. This argument is in favor of the old view of the Oromo kinship and it is in contradiction with the new findings on the Oromo genealogy.

According to Asafa Jalata (2010), despite the fact that the Oromo claim that they descended from the same family stock, they do not limit their kinship to biological ancestry, but also to social descent. The Oromo kinship system is based on biological as well as social descent. Oromo recognize social ancestry and avoid the distinction between the biological and social descent since they know that the formation of the Oromo people was based on blood as well as social kinship. Oromo laws strictly forbade the distinction between social and biological descent. Baxter explains, as quoted in Asafa Jalata (2010:11), that

the adoption of adults, and often all their dependants, used to be a common practice, which thereby incorporated them and their descendants into the family, and hence into the lineage, clan . . . These practices, though almost certainly widespread and frequent, took place despite the firm ideological contention that descent and inheritance were both rigidly patrilineal. Oromo social theory, like most others, was often very flexible in practice.

The Oromo society is well known in Ethiopia in terms of practicing adoption. The adoption process is undertaken for two reasons: one is for the process of Oromonization (becoming Oromo) or

adoption of non-Oromo individuals and groups and the process in which members of other ethnic groups were admitted and became Oromo (Alemayehu et al. 2006: 112), while the second reason is to be given as a child to those who are not able to bear a child. According to the Oromo culture, the adopted has equal access to inheritance of property and even to political position, as the biological son.

The Oromo people comprise a large number of clans and they are interrelated to each other on the basis of their kinship system. According to Knutsson (1963: 507), "a gosa has a genealogical depth of from twelve to fifteen generations, and the actual relationship to the founder is always remembered". On the other hand, Gada Melba (1988) notes that as it may be difficult to get the common genealogical terms across the society. However, in reality, there is an extensive overlap in the area they occupy and their community groups (Gada Melba 1988:8). In spite of the difficulty in kinship system classifications faced as a result of diversified customs, some of the basic kinship structures among the Oromo are the kinship system that begins at the family level (it is the building block of social organization in the community) or household, which normally consists either of a nuclear family or of one wife and her children in a polygynous family (Knutsson 1963: 509), then the minimal lineage or extended family, the minor lineage, the maximal lineage (*gosa*, clan, sub clan) (Knutsson 1963: 509), and then the higher level of the Oromo kinship structure like moiety, sub moieties and beyond (Temesgen Chibsa 2009:29). Knutsson (1963: 508) defines the term lineage as "the various segmenting divisions of gosa". He continually states that "larger lineages tend to have a somewhat dispersed membership, whereas small ones retain the character of localized descent groups" (Knutsson 1963: 509).

According to Gada Melba (1988:8), marriage among the Oromo occurs only according to clan-exogamy, as a result of the existence of a high degree of homogeneity within the community. It is a system that seeks mate selection outside the lineage, clan, sub-clan, etc.

3.1.3 Oromo Religion

Haviland et al. (2007: 489) state that, from an anthropological point of view, spirituality and religion are part of a cultural system's superstructure, earlier defined as the collective body of ideas, beliefs, and values by which a group of people makes sense of the world and of their place in it. According to Kottak (2005: 211) religion exists in all human societies, it is a cultural universal. Therefore, religion is a part of culture of the society that serves them to make sense for their day-to-

day life in their world and to give meaning to their life. The Oromo people have their own religion to make sense and meaning for their life and the world in which they live.

Gada Melba notes about the religions that are accepted by the Oromo people, namely traditional Oromo religion, Islam and Christianity. He also remarks that before the introduction of Christianity and Islam, the Oromo people practiced their own traditional religion (which recently was given the name *Waaqeffanna*) (Gada Melba 1988: 19). These three religions are the current religions dominantly practiced among the Oromo people as a whole. According to Obbo Chala Sori, most of the Gada system followers and practitioners and also adherents of the indigenous religion are the Oromo people residing in the southern part of the Oromiya National Regional State, like Borana and Guji. The Oromo societies who are residing at the center and west of the region are dominantly Christians, whereas in most of the eastern parts of the region, the dominant religion is Islam.

Waaqeffanna is a type of religion with the belief in one *Waaq*. The word "*Waaqeffanna*" is derived from the Afaan Oromo, called *Waaq*, which literally means the creator and master, God. According to Hailu Ejersa (2009: 2) the term *Waaq* has the meaning of "supreme being". Therefore, the word *Waaqeffanna* indicates the religion that believes and worships in one *Waaq*. According to Rayya Horoo (2008: 2), it means "believing in one *Waaq*, respecting the laws of *Waaq*, peace and purity". Traditionally, the Oromo believe in one *Waaq*, who created them (Hailu Ejersa 2009: 2) and they interpret their religion as they believe in one *Waaq* from the early period, but the name *Waaqeffanna* is recently given to that indigenous Oromo religion. Thus, according to Rayya Horoo (2008: 4), currently the followers of this religion are called "*Waaqeffattoota*".

Related with the Oromo's conversion to Christianity and Islam, Admasu Shukuri (1998) tells us that it indicates the cultural openness and mental flexibility of the Oromo. He extends his explanation and states that while the Oromo have assimilated with the Ethiopian officialdom, Islam, and Orthodox and Western Christendom, very few forms of Oromo cultural identity have been assimilated in the mainstream of Ethiopia's social and cultural life. According to him, *Irecha* is one of the few mentionable exceptions revived from dormancy and official neglect into recognition as a festive public affair. Abbas Haji (2002: 99) added on this issue that the Oromo constitute the largest single national group in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, of whom many were converted to Islam, some have embraced Christianity, whereas there are still some that remain faithful to their indigenous religion.

Obbo Alemayehu Hayile, key informant, also reported that the Oromo people accepted the Christian religion like the Semitic people in the 4th century, from its introduction, and adopted this creed as their own religion, i.e. the Cushitic people, particularly the Oromo, converted to Christianity from its introduction to Oromiya. He also remarked that the Oromo people are the first people who accepted Islam from its introduction from the 7th century onward in Ethiopia. This shows that the indigenous belief system of the Oromo people was gradually replaced dominantly by these two religions. Therefore, to talk about the Oromo religions, means to understand that these three religions of Oromo are Christianity, Islam and the indigenous belief system

Traditionally, the Oromo believed in one “*Waqqa*” which comes close to the word God, as a result they are considered as monotheistic. According to Gada Melba (1988: 19), “they never worshipped ‘false gods’ or carved statues as substitutes, *Waqqa* is the creator of everything, source of all life, omnipresent, infinite, incomprehensible, he can do and undo anything, he is pure, intolerant of injustice, crime, sin and all falsehood”.

Their monotheistic religion was manifested in their praises to *Waqqa* on the *Irecha* ritual or at any time turn by turn (Alemayehu Hayile et al. 2006: 28 and Gada Melba 1988: 19). Obbo Alemayehu Hayile and the members of the first focus group discussion and others recited the praise verses to *Waqqa* as:

*Waaqqa gurraacha garaa garbaa,
Tokkicha maqaa dhibbaa,
Leemmuu garaa taliilaa
Utubaa malee dhabbatte
Dhisaa malee diriirte*

*Qaawwaa malee dhimste
Ajeeftee gumaa hin baafu*

*Waqqa the black, whose stomach is ocean,
One with hundred names
Your stomach is pure,
You stand without a supporting pole,
You are stretched without any stretching
techniques
You drip without having a hole
You kill, but never pay for compensation*

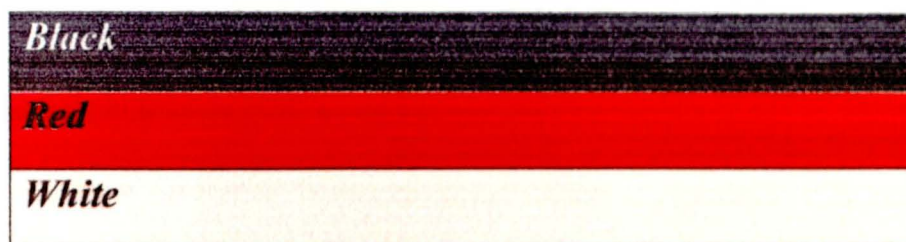
This praise also shows that they believe that *Waqqa* has a black color when they look upward to the sky and others also refer to light sky as the residence of *Waqqa* (informant and Hailu Ejersa 2009: 55). An informant told me why they say that “*Waqqa* the black, whose stomach is an ocean”, is by looking at the color of the sky during the dark cloud that announces rain, so they attribute the dark cloud to *Waqqa*, and the rain from the sky is as the stomach of *Waqqa*, full like an ocean. Thus, the word *Waqqa* represents on the one hand, the Supreme Being, and, on the other hand, the sky. In this regard, the society under study has stated the fact that they recognize for their religion, as they

believe in *Waaqa*, the Supreme Being and the sky as His residence. In relation to this, the black identity of *Waaqa* in Oromo belief, Alemayehu Hayile et al. (2006: 26- 27) state:

Black identity is considered as a symbol of holiness and divinity. Oromo worshipped in one God and believed that this God has black color similar to that of the Cushites and the Oromo nation. As a Cushite and an African the Oromo nation recognizes the supremacy of the black over all other things. That is why there is always a mention of the black in all Oromo blessings and rituals.

Thus, the Oromo people have great respect towards the black color and they perceive it as their identity. According Raayyaa Horoo (2008: 3), within the *Waaqeffanna* religion, black is power, purity and it is a *Waaqa*. Based on this black identity, according to the informants report, the Gada system incorporates the black color in the flag or in the national symbol, which is presently known as the flag of Abba Gada. According to Obbo Bayana Sanbato, key informant, the flag has three colors, black at the top, red at the middle and white at the bottom. These colors symbolize the black identity of *Waaqa* and the Oromo, struggle and peace, respectively. On the other hand, Gada Melba (1988: 25) notes that in the Gada system, these colors represented those yet to enter active life, those in active life (*Luba*) and those had passed through active live, respectively.

Picture 1: The Flag of the *Abba Gada*



Traditionally, the Oromo believes in one *Waaqa* and they interpreted previously their religion as believing in one *Waaqa*. They believe in *Waaqa tokko* (one *Waaqa*), unique universal creator and master. His manifestations are in the great forces of nature, without mistaking them for him (OCTB, 2009), why they recently gave the name *Waaqeffannaa* (believing in one *Waaqa*) to the traditional Oromo religion. According to my informants' report, they gave this name to the traditional belief to develop it to official religious organization with parallel to that of Christianity and Islam religions.

In relation to the Oromo religion, there is a crucial concept called *Safu*. *Safu* is the ethical principles towards *Waaqa* and towards everything he created. According to Alemayehu et al. (2006: 30), *Safu* enables the human being to formulate laws and regulations needed to respect the natural environment and save themselves from committing sins. Gemetchu Megersa (1998:42) explains this concept as follows: "Safu is a moral category based on Oromo notions of distance and respect for

all things. The concept of *Safu* is not merely an abstract category: it constitutes the ethical basis upon which all human action should be founded; it is that which directs one on the right path; it shows the way in which life can best be lived.”

According to Gemechu Megersa (1998:49), *Safu* provides the moral and ethical code according to which events, whether at a personal, social or cosmic level take place and it is believed that a full and happy life can be achieved through living in harmony with these laws (the laws of nature that are created by *Waqqa* and the laws that are made by human beings for their better life) and by following the path of *Waqqa*.

In the Oromo tradition, *Safu* means giving prior respect to the creator. The concept *Safu* is not merely manifested in religion, but there is also *Safu* towards each creature. For instance, it also connotes mutual respect among both elders and young, respect of the junior for the senior, respect for *Ayyaantuu* (a person who has the spirit) and *Qaalluu* (an institution that serves as religious leader in the Oromo traditional belief), not calling them by a single name is important. One who does not respect a senior or a junior is labeled as a person devoid of *Safu* or a shameless (Alemayehu Hayile et al. 2006: 30 and Birru Tsagaye 2009: 20 and 54). It is living together by understanding the existing diversity and it is the right and obligation of the nature to live together peacefully (Dirriabi Damuse 2009: 61 and 63).

Another important concept in Oromo traditional religion is *Ayyaanaa*. It is believed that God created different creatures by different *Ayyaanaa*, spirits – it is a deity or divinity that is believed to bring death, disease, happiness, etc. (Tilahun Gamta, 1989). According to Alemayehu Hayile et al. (2006: 29), every creature has its own *Ayyaanaa* or spirit with which it is created. They also stated that the creator reveals himself to his creatures through such spirits and the spirit granted by God from the very creation decides the fate of every individual, bad or good. On this, Gada Melba (1988: 19) writes:

There are many saint-like divinities called *Ayyaanaa*, each seen as manifestation of the one *Waqqa* or of the same divine reality. An effective relationship is often maintained between *Ayyaanaa* and Oromo by *Qaalluu* (male) and/or *Qaallitti* (female). A *Qaalluu* is like a Bishop in the Christian world and an Imam in the Muslim world. He is a religious and ritual expert who has a special relationship with one of the *Ayyaanaa*, which possesses him at regular intervals.

According to Gada Melba (1988:19) the *Qaalluu* institution is one of the most important in the Oromo culture and society and is believed to have existed since mythical times. It is very important in preservation and protection of the Oromo culture. Asmarom Legesse (2000: 32) states, in his

study of the Borana Oromo, that the *Qaalluu* institution is the organization at the head of the two great moieties or “societal halves” of the Oromo nation. In the Oromo tradition, according to *Obbo* Bayana Sanbato, the *Qaalluu* is regarded as the most senior person in his lineage and clan (as a result it is hereditary) and the most respected in the society and considered as pure and clean. The Oromo people perceived the *Qaalluu* as he respects the traditional taboos (*Safu*) and ritual observances in all situations and in all his dealings, and must follow the truth and avoid sins (Gada Melba 1988: 19).

The ritual house of *Qaalluu* is called *Galma*. Each *Ayyaanaa* has its own *Galma* and its own special ceremonies. Traditionally, they worship at *Galma* and also at different places endowed with natural beauty e.g. under trees, beside large waters, by the side of big mountain, hills, stones, etc. (Gada Melba 1988: 20 and Alemayehu Hayile et al. 2006: 28f). This has been misrepresented by outsiders and sometimes some individuals within the community pretending that the Oromo worship trees, rivers, mountains, etc.

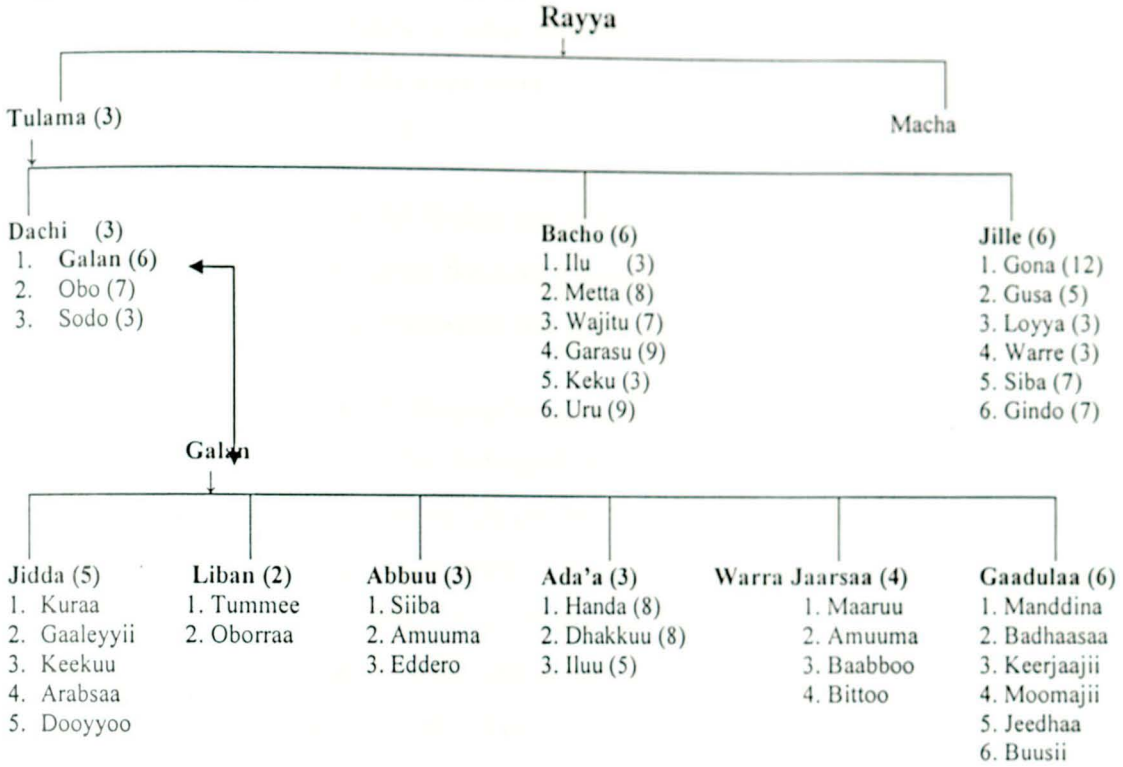
3.2 The Tulama Oromo Genealogy and Settlement

The peoples located around Bishoftu are largely Tulama Oromo. According to Alemayehu Hayile et al. (2006: 115) and Alemayeho Diro (2004: 49 and 52) *Rayya* had two sons: *Tulama* and *Macha*. The genealogical development of the Tulama Oromo of the study area is discussed as follows.

According to Alemayehu Hayile et al. (2006: 115), *Tulama* is the elder son and he has settled on the holdings of his father; whereas the younger son, *Macha*, occupied a new land. This author also notes that *Tulama* and *Macha* settled in far off areas from each other due to the conflict between their mothers (co-wives of *Rayya*) known as *Sire* and *Akittu* respectively. As a result, the *Macha* moved to a place comfortable for his family known as *Oda Bisil*, currently a place located in *Wallaga* and also the center for *Gada* assembly of *Macha* moiety.

According to *Tulama* elders and *Hailu Ejersa* (2009: 29), the *Tulama* moiety is divided into three submoieties: *Dachi*, *Jille* and *Bacho*. Each sub moiety is further subdivided into smaller units known as *gosa* (clan), *balbala* (line of descent through lineages, i.e. a set of nine generations), *warra* (sub lineage) and *mana* (family) (Alemayehu Hayile et al. 2006: 115 and Temesgen Chibsa 2009: 37).

Figure 2: Genealogy of the Tulama Oromo



Source: Alemayehu Hayile et al. 2006:117-122

NB: The number found in the bracket after each name shows the number of sons each had.

Dachi is subdivided into three clans: Galan, Sodo and Obo. These three clans are residing mainly around Bishoftu town and around 'Oda Nabe' - the place where the Chaffee assembly of the Tulama Oromo is held. Oda Nabe is one among the five known Odas (places), where the Chaffee assembly of Tulama Oromo takes place. Bishoftu and rural Aada'a are in the possession of the Dachi sons. They also hold the "Chafe Tulama" (the place where indigenous laws and proclamations are made by the Gada general assembly and also the place where Tulama Oromo handover the power during the power transferring year in Gada system. The place is located at 10km distance in the west direction from Bishoftu town, near Dukem town).

According to the local elders, Galan is the eldest son of Dachi and his descendants are divided into six lineages: Liban, Jidda, Ada'a, Aabbuu, Warra Jaarsaa, and Gaadulla (they are known as Ja'an Galan - meaning six sons of Galan). Liban was the eldest son of Galan and formerly, the present day Bishoftu and the surrounding areas were under his control and owned by him. But, because of the conflict between the elder (Liban) and the younger (Ada'a) son's of Galan, the Liban left the

area for his brother, *Ada'a*. Therefore, currently, the community settling around Bishoftu town descends from the *Ada'a*. *Ada'a* is subdivided into three sub-lineages: *Handa*, *Dhakku* and *Ilu*. Among these three sons of *Ada'a* the elder one is *Handa*. Now he is the *Abba Malka* (blessing father) of the area.

The settlement areas of the *Galan* lineage begins from the southern edge of the Chuqqala Mountain and then extends northwards across the Awash River up to Finfine (Alemayehu Hayile et al. 2006: 137). Moreover, they extended westwards and also to north Shewa.

According to the reports of Obbo Negesa Nagawo, next to *Dachi*, *Jille* also settled around Bishoftu town, but not equal with *Dachi*. *Jille* is divided into six lineages: these are *Gona*, *Gusa*, *Loya*, *Ware*, *Siba* and *Gindo*. They are known by “*Ja'an Jille*” - meaning six sons of *Jille*. These lineages are divided into three areas of residence. Some of them are settled to the south eastern part of Bishoftu; around *Maqi* (*Dugda Bora* District, East Showa Zone) and *Alem Tena* (East Showa). The second group is residing around *Adama*, *Wonji* and *Bosati*. For example, among the *Ja'an Jille*, *Gusa* was dominantly settled around *Wanji*, as a result they called the peoples found there as “*Gusa Wonji*”. The third groups of the *Jille* lineages expanded to the northern part into the present day Northern Showa Zone (Oromiya region), Northern Showa (Amhara Region) and settled in Kemise Zone.

Bacho settled in west direction from Bishoftu. Like that of *Jille*, *Bacho* had six sons: they are known by “*Ja'an Bacho*” (meaning the-six sons of *Bacho*). Especially they settled around *Sodo* and *Finfine* up to *Waliso* and *Ginchi*. They also reside in ‘*Salale*’ Northern Shewa Zone, Oromiya Region with *Obo* lineages “*Torban Obo*” (*Obo* was the son of *Dachi* and he had seven sons) why described as *Torban Obo*). According to Alemayehu et al. (2006: 141), *Bacho* is the only who competed with *Dachi* in the number of its sub-lineages and families. *Bacho* is divided into six lineages: *Ilu*, *Keku*, *Metta*, *Waajitu*, *Garasu* and *Uru*. Each lineage is also further divided in to sub-families and families.

The Tulama Oromo of the study area trace their genealogy mainly to one of the Tulama sub moieties, *Dachi*. They belong to one of the six *Galan* sub-lineages called *Ada'a*. The Oromo who live in the present *Ada'a* district and Bishoftu town are predominantly descendants of the *Ada'a*.

In general, the descendants of the Tulama Oromo have occupied a vast area of central Ethiopia. According to Alemayehu et al. (2006: 137) and the Tulama elders, the area they occupied is

bounded by: Lake Dambal (Ziway) in the south, Wallo Administrative Zone (Amhara Region) in the north and Arsi and Fantalle in the south east. In the north, the settlement area of the Tulama moiety is included under the National Regional State of Amhara and constitutes the regions of northern Shewa inhabited by *Derra* and *Borena* and Southern Wallo. According to Obbo Negesa Nagawo, the boundary of the Tulama Oromo area in the South-East is Ziway, in the East - *Fantale*, in the north - *Debrebirhan* (Amhara region, North Shewa Zone), in the North-West Gojjam (Amhara), in the West *Ginchi* (Western Shewa Zone) up to Waliso. Around *Ginchi*, they are more mixed with Mecha (the brother of the Tulama) Oromo; therefore, it may be difficult to demark their boundary up to Ambo and Waliso. Around Ambo, there is a number of Tulama Oromo living side by side with Macha Oromo.

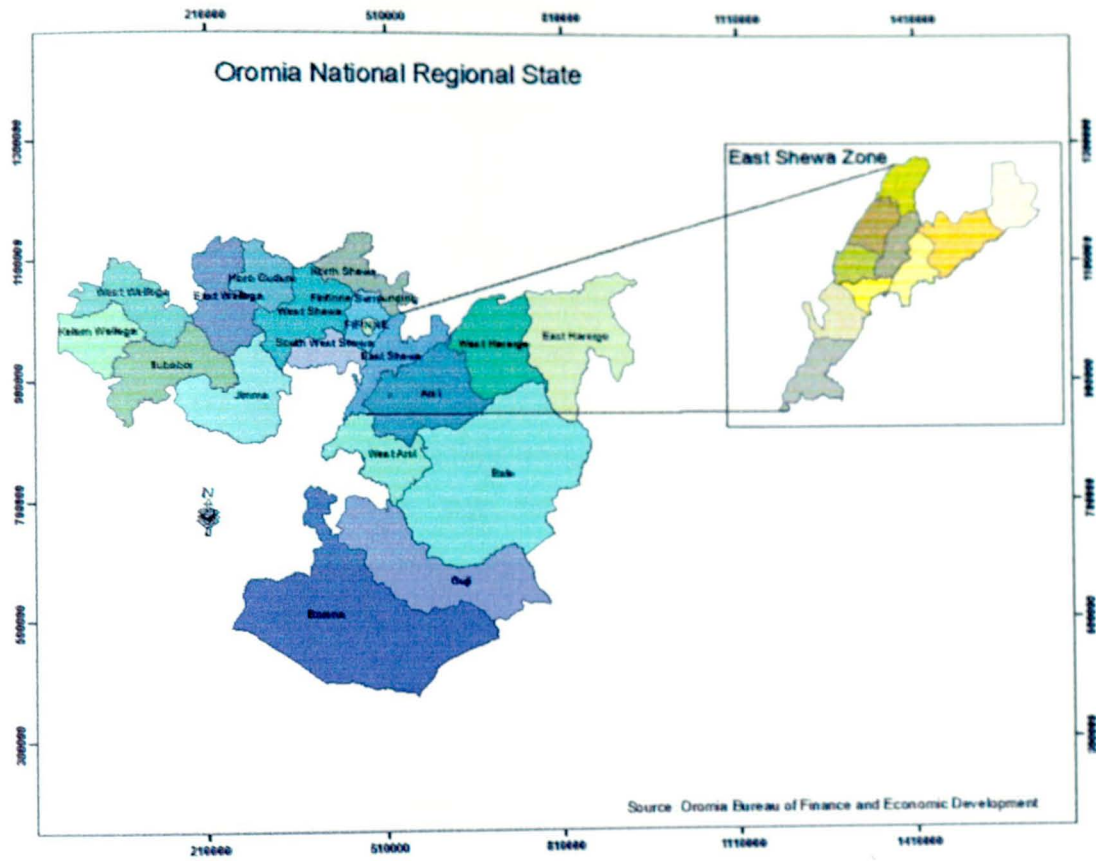
3.3 Ada'a District and Bishoftu Town

To make more clear the location and inhabitants of the study area an attempt has been made to describe the Ada'a district (rural area) and Bishoftu town independently as follows.

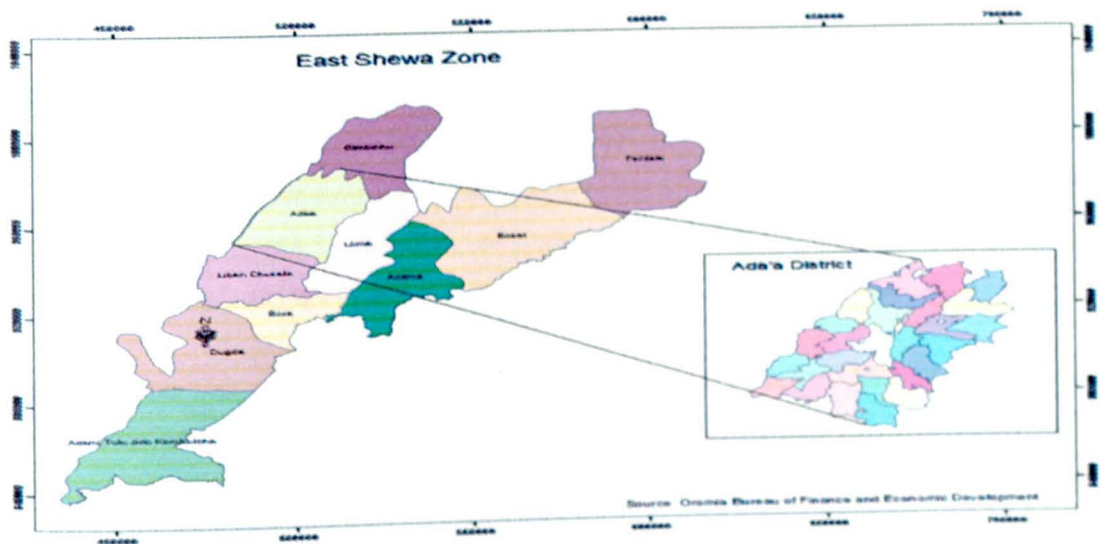
3.3.1 Ada'a District

The Ada'a district is one among the many districts administrated by the Eastern Shewa Zone of the Oromiya Regional State. This district is found on 47km distance from the capital city of the country, Addis Ababa, to the south eastern direction, and 53km distance from the Eastern Shewa Zone capital city, Adama, in north western direction. The district is bounded by the Akaki district (Finfine Special Zone) in the west, Gimbichu district in the north, Lume district in the east and Liban Chuqqala district in the south directions. There are also two rivers which serve the district as boundary with other districts: Dukem and Mojo rivers.

Map 1: Map of Oromiya National Regional State and the location of East Shewa Zone in the Region



Map 2: Map of East Shewa Zone in Oromiya National Regional State and the location of Ada'a district in East Shewa Zone



According to the Ada'a District Culture and Tourism Office (ADCTO) (2009), the district is composed of 27 rural peasant associations, called *Ganda* (the smallest administrative unit) and three city administrations. Formerly, Bishoftu town was the capital city of the district and was administered under the Ada'a district, but recently, the city was developed to an independent city administration and self governing town. However, it still serves the district as the residence of the district offices.

According to the ADCTO (2009), the total area coverage of the Ada'a district is 895,403.28km² or 96,680 hectares of land. The district lies between 1600-3100m above sea level. The topography of the district exhibits mainly mountains and plateaus (constituting 65%), land plains constitute 25% and the left 10% are others. The highest mountains are *Yerer* Mountain (3100m a.s.l) on the northwest of the district, and *Badda Gababe, Akako, Gara Barru*, etc. There are also a number of large rivers in this district like *Dukem, Mojo, Balbala* and *Waddecha*. All these rivers emerge from the northern and western highlands of the district and flow to the Awash River, and some of them are serving for irrigated cultivation.

The Ada'a districts' climate is mainly middle highland (*Badda-dare*) that constitutes more than 90%, while the left 10% are highland. The average annual temperature of the middle highland lies between 15- 20 C⁰, whereas the highland average annual temperature is between 10-15C⁰. The district gets 815mm average annual rainfall. According to Hailu Ejersa (2009: 34), "the rural Ada'a is attractive with relatively vast plain interspersed by a chain of small hills and six tranquil crater lakes which adds to its beauty". The land of the district is more suitable for growing crops like wheat, barley, maize, beans, peas, etc and is mostly known by its teff production. Even at country level, it ranks first in white teff (known as *magna*) production (informants and Hailu Ejersa 2009: 34). In general, among the total land of the district, the land suitable for agricultural farming is around 80,482.5 hectares, the land suitable for pasture is 590 hectares, the land covered by forests is about 901 hectares, and 1188.833 hectares are given for investment while 9509.977 hectares are for other different purposes (ADCTO, 2009).

The population number of the Ada'a district is relatively high. This is due to its approximate to Finfine, the comfortable climatic conditions and fertile land. According to the CSA (2007), the total population of the district is 130, 321, (67,869 male and 62,452 females). Among the population of the district, the majority is following the Orthodox Christian religion, which constitutes 116,186. In

percent, the Orthodox Christianity constitutes around 89.15% of the total population, while Protestants, Catholics, Islam and traditional beliefs constitute 6,123, 42, 490, and 7212 respectively. According to the ADCTO (2009), the population number of the district has developed to 144,289 people, excluding the Bishoftu town dwellers.

Table 1: Religious distribution of Ada'a District (CSA, 2007)

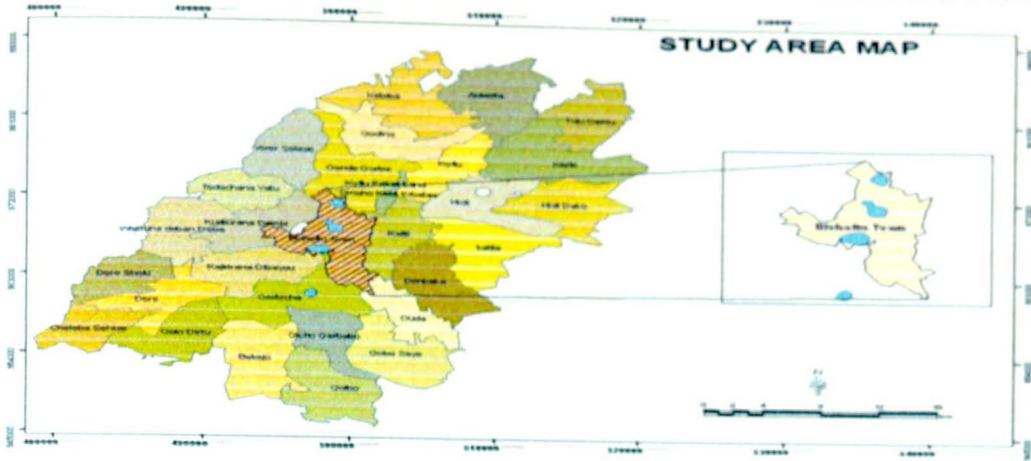
Religious organization	Total number of adherents	Male	Female	Percent
Orthodox	116,186	60,502	55,684	89.15
Protestant	6,123	3,185	2,938	4.69
Catholic	42	17	25	0.032
Islam	490	256	234	0.375
Traditional	7,212	3,765	3,447	5.5
Other	268	144	124	0.2

Although the dominant ethnic group is the Oromo, other ethnic groups also dwell in the district, like Amhara, Gurage, Kambata, Hadiya, Wolayita, Siltie, Tigray, Gamo, and others (CSA, 2007). But, I do not have any report that shows the ethnic composition of the Ada'a district and Bishoftu town.

3.3.2 Bishoftu Town

Bishoftu town was found at the center of the Ada'a district. According to the Bishoftu town Finance and Economic Development Office (FEDO) report, the exact time of foundation is not known but as indicated in some documents, it was established around 1924/25. The foundation of the town was directly connected with the establishment of the Ethio-Djibouti railway. The town is located between $8^{\circ}43' - 8^{\circ}45'N$ latitude and $38^{\circ}56' - 39^{\circ}01'$ east longitude (Bishoftu town FEDO, 2011). The town is located at a distance of 47 km southeast of Addis Ababa and 52 km northwest of Adama. The town is bordered with *Ganda Gorba* in the north, *Kaliti* in the east, *Kurkura Dembi* and *Kajimana Dibayyu* in the west and *Gerbicha* and *Udee* peasant associations in the south.

Map 3: Map showing the Ada'a district and the location of Bishoftu town in Ada'a district



Source: Oromiya Bureau of Finance and Economic Development

According to the towns FEDO (2011), the term Bishoftu is derived from the local language, Afaan Oromo, “*Bishaanoftu*” is referred to “the land of excess water”. Therefore, the name Bishoftu was given to the town, literally speaking, based on the easily available many crater lakes closely found in and around the town, such as *Hora Arsadi*, *Bishoftu*, *Cheleleka*, *Kuriftu*, *Kilole*, Green lake (*Hora Hadho or Magarisa*), and *Babogaya* lakes. On the other hand, according to Hailu Ejersa (2009: 35) the name was given to the town from the name of one lakes among six lakes, called Bishoftu. According to him, the name Bishoftu was firstly given to that lake as a result of it used to be stinky, dirty, frightful and hosted mosquitoes. From this, Bishoftu means ‘ugly’ the name attributed to one of the six lakes, Bishoftu. Hailu also note that lake Bishoftu, currently, is no longer a serious threat and even both the town and the lake itself have attracted visitors to the town.

During the past different autocratic regimes, this original name was ignored and the town has been given the name “Debre Zeit”. According to Hailu Ejersa (2009: 36), “the town was given the name “Debre Zeit” on Pagume 3, 1947 E.C. by Emperor Haile Sillassie”. However, recently the original name Bishoftu has been reinstalled.

Bishoftu town is in the midst of several lakes, hills and mountains. There are eight known mountains around Bishoftu town at close reach, such as mount *Yerer*, *Bericha*, *Dalota Ada'a*, *Babogaya*, *Boset*, *Kaliti*, *Zukala (Chuqqaalaa)*, and *Katila*, that are the sacred ritual grounds for many of the people. Collectively, the Oromo Tulama say “*Waaqa hara jahani*” (literally meaning

“God’s six lakes”) for the six known lakes, and the mountains are “*Waqqa Tulu saddeettanii*” (literally meaning “God’s eight mountains”) (Maskaram Assaged 1998: 83).

Bishoftu town, during the years 1941-1989, became the political center of the Ada’a district, during the period when the administrative system was *Awuraja*- is the political administration system that was used during the past regimes and it was relatively the largest administration unit that was composed of a number of district administration units (it might be parallel with the present day of Zone administration). From 1991-2002, after the Derg regime was overthrown and the administration system was changed from *Awuraja* to the Zonal system, it was the administrative center of the Ada’a Liban district under East Shewa Zone, Oromiya Regional State. But, later the Ada’a Liban district was sub-divided into two independent districts: Ada’a and Liban Chuqqala. Currently, the town is a first ranked city administration administered by a mayor. Still it also serves the Ada’a district as political center, all of the Ada’a district offices are found in this town.

According to the report of FEDO (2011), in 2009, the total land coverage of the town was about 14,500 hectares. Presently, for the sake of administrative simplicity, the town is divided into nine *Ganda* administrative unit and three sub town special administration.

The majorities of peoples residing in and around Bishoftu town are engaged in mixed agriculture. The natural environment endowed with fertile land and comfortable climatic conditions invites the communities to engage in farming activities. People also make their living depending on domestic animals and their products. In addition to agricultural activities and animal husbandry, the urban dwellers may engage in trade activities and other income generating sectors such as services including hotels, transportation, recreation, and tourism.

3.3.2.1 Topography and Climate of Bishoftu Town

The natural topography of the town with buffer zones is characterized on the north and east by flat land that is locked by the swampy areas and lakes, on the south by undulating land, on the west by undulating land dominated by hills and some flat land. Accordingly, the general topography of the town is undulating land dominated by hills. But, according to *Obbo Chala Sori*, key informant of the study, the topography of the town is dominated by flat land that seems to be undulating land as a result of the Barru Mountain found in near distance. According to the towns FEDO (20011) report, the elevation of the town ranges from 1800-1995m above sea level. It is very important to note that the town is part and parcel of the rift valley.

It belongs to the agro climatic zone middle highland, *Badda-dare*. The average annual temperature of the town is 18⁰C whereas the average annual rainfall is 816 mm. According to Maskaram Assaged (1998: 83), the climate of Bishoftu town is warmer than the capital city, Addis Ababa. The soil of the town and the surrounding area is comfortable for any type of cultivation like fruits, vegetables and crops.

There are seven major lakes that have natural, cultural and religious tourist attraction sites in and nearby Bishoftu town, such as *Bishoftu*, *Hora Arsadi*, *Cheleleka*, *Kuriftu*, *Kilole*, *Hora Hadho or Magarisa*, and *Babogaya*. The Hora Arsadi, the remarkable place for the *Irecha* ritual celebration, is located at the center of this town with its more attractive natural surroundings. Therefore, this study selects Bishoftu as the study site; because of it is the center of this *Irecha* ritual ceremony that is undertaken at Hora Arsadi.

3.3.2.2 Demography of the Town

According to CSA (2007), the total population of Bishoftu town is about 99,928 inhabitants. Among these, 47,860 are males, 52,068 are females. In percentage, 52.1% of the total population of the town is female, whereas 47.9% of the total population is male. The FEDO of Bishoftu town (2011) report states that

Population dynamics of the given area is the result of fertility, mortality and migration. These demographic processes are complex phenomena that are affected by the social, cultural, economic, political and psychological factors. In urban environment, migration leads the role in changing the population characteristics and reflects the urbanization rate of the town.

As a result of such factors, the population characteristics of Bishoftu town are further changing after the population census undertaken in 2007. Therefore, the current total population of Bishoftu town is 108,809. From this, about 47.8% are male while 52.2% are female. In terms of age distribution, 35.7% and 3.3% of the total population are under the age of 15 and above 64 years respectively, while 61% are categorized by ages ranging from 15 to 64 years (FEDO, 2011).

The religious distribution of Bishoftu town is, according to the CSA (2007), among the total population of that time, 79,691 Orthodox Christians, 13,814 Protestants, 462 Catholics, 4,979 Muslims, and 376 traditional believers whereas the left 606 are belonging to other creeds. The religious distribution of the town is shown in the following table.

Table 2: Religious distribution of Bishoftu town (CSA, 2007)

Religious organization	Total number of adherents	Male	Female	Percent
Orthodox	79,691	38,058	41,633	79.7
Protestant	13,814	6,323	7,491	13.8
Catholic	462	229	233	0.46
Islam	4,979	2,667	2,312	4.98
Traditional	376	261	115	0.37
Others	606	322	284	0.6

Currently, there are seven Orthodox churches, three mosques, one Catholic Church and over 30 Protestant churches in Bishoftu town. The demography and religious distribution of the rural surrounding areas of Bishoftu is discussed under Ada'a district in general.

3.3.3 Different Ritual Ceremonies in the Study Area

There are a number of rituals celebrated by the local community at different time and different places. Some of them are the following:

Ayyaana Irecha (Irecha Ritual): is celebrated in the bright season (at the end of September and beginning of October) at different riversides and in spring at mountain sides.

Irecha Dire Ritual: another *Irecha* ritual celebrated in December, at the time people harvest their crops. It is a harvest ritual. For example, it is still celebrated among the Bacho, on bringing in the harvest, by slaughtering a cattle, called *Dullacha* – which literally means old enough cow or bull and eating the meat together. The ritual is celebrated under a huge tree (*Abdaarii*). On this ritual day, they give thanks to *Waaqa* because He gave them sufficient harvest and they bring in their harvest by praying for peace and prosperity. This is different from *Irecha* ritual in its purposes and time. It is celebrated once a year in December during the people harvests their crops, why it is considered as harvest ritual. The *Irecha* ritual is broader in purpose than *Irecha Dire*, and also it celebrated twice a year.

Qame Ritual: celebrated during summer season, in August. This is different from the *Qame* Ritual celebrated for Ethiopian New Year. Traditionally, the Oromo have their own calendar. But, because of the political domination during the past centuries, they forget their dating system and were obliged to accept the current calendar. But this indigenous dating or calendar is left as a vestige in some parts of the region.

Therefore, *Obbo* Negesa Nagawo and *Obbo* Chala Sori told me that, this *Qame* Ritual, according to the indigenous calendar system, is considered as the end of the old year and the beginning of New Year. This ritual is the mate selection ritual; the unmarried youngsters are recruiting their mate on this ritual. The ritual is used basically for mate selection.

At the eve of the ritual, there is a bon firing (campfire) ceremony and the next day all people come together and sing songs, especially the youngsters. During this ritual celebration, the youngsters of both sexes come together by forming a number of groups and they rotate around their families' home by singing songs and dancing.

On the celebration, the girls hold "*Alaanduu*"- a type of grass that is grown mostly in the river, within the water body and around the water stream and it is an elongated and slender grass. It serves to celebrate this *Qame* ritual and is held only by women. During their singing, they hold this *Alaanduu* grass in their hand and rotate around their families' home. When they are provided with food, they put it on a food serving material and they also give it to the family, that provided them food, as a gift, and this is also known as *Irecha*. The family also blesses them and again provides them with butter. When the girls come home with this *Alaanduu* on the *Qame* ritual, the family should have to provide them blessing, food, drinks and also butter.

According to the key informant *Obbo* Negesa Nagawo, this ritual is not celebrated equally among all Tulama Oromo at present time, except by a few clans such as among the Jidda. The other clans did not celebrate this on August 11, like Jidda (the original date), rather they celebrate the ritual with other Ethiopian ethnic groups on September 11, on the New Year ceremony according to the Ethiopian calendar. But their purpose is different from other ethnic groups who celebrate only the New Year. The Tulama Oromo celebrate the *Qame* ritual on September 11, in addition to the Ethiopian New Year; they celebrate it for mate selection, like the Jidda. They call the ritual in Afaan Oromo "*aduu itti wal-kaadhimmatan*"- which literally means the day of mate selection.

Meskel Ritual: This celebration is held on September 27, but not only for the reason of "the Finding of the True Cross" like in Orthodox Christianity, rather for the reason of the bright New Year (informant, Nagasa Nagawo). In addition to the Finding of the True Cross, the Tulama Oromo who are mainly Orthodox Christians, celebrate Meskel for the beginning of the bright season. According to the informants' report, the Meskel ritual day for the Finding of the True Cross and the new bright year celebrated by the Tulama Oromo overlap and today they celebrate on the same day together for

both purposes. This ritual ceremony is celebrated by a few clans on August 27 (the original day for Oromo Meskel).

Obbo Chala Sori said that the Meskel ritual is also known as *Masqala Birraa* and was celebrated from the very early period among the Oromo people and now it overlapping with the Meskel celebration of the Finding of the True Cross. Some of the Tulama Oromo who are Orthodox Christians can celebrate both Meskel rituals. For example, one of the key informants, *Obbo* Negesa Nagawo, said that the Liban Chuqqala district Oromo are celebrating these two Meskel rituals, one on August 27 for their indigenous new bright year and the other on September 27 (one month later) for the Finding of the True Cross. He also reported that this Meskel ritual is also known as "*Ayyaana Ijoollee*" which literally means "children's holiday". On this day the rain has ended the land this becoming dry and it creates a good situation for the children to play.

Ayyaana Bixillee (Bitile Ritual): another indigenous ritual is celebrated on November 22. It is celebrated by cooking local bread called "*Bitile*" (*Bixillee* in Afaan Oromo) and people stay outside their home during the night on this ritual ceremony. This indigenous ritual is nowadays, no more celebrated by the local community because of the influences of different religious organizations, with a few exceptions, like among the Jille. The Jille sub-moiety who resettled in southern direction from Liban Chuqqala district beyond the Awash River, still celebrate this *Bitile* ritual on November 22.

Ayyaana Ariyaa fi Tullu Kormaa: a ritual celebrated by the local rural community, by slaughtering a bull under a tree or on a mountain. According to *Adde* Bachu Fenta, one of my key informants, this ritual is celebrated during the night by the neighbors who come together under the tree or on the mountain. But my informants were not able to report when and why this ritual is celebrated. *Adde* Bachu also reported that this ritual is currently in extinction, and is only celebrated by a few individuals within a few rural peasant associations, why she was not able to get the full information on it.

Ayyaana Jaarraa: a type of indigenous ritual celebrated by the local community once within eight years for the purpose of the Gada power being transferred to the next age grades and the succeeding Gada class. It is performed at Oda Nabe. The group in power is giving the power to the succeeding group and this group takes the power with great ritual celebration at Oda Nabe.

In addition to the above mentioned indigenous ritual, according to *Obbo* Negesa Nagawo's and *Obbo* Balay Shifara's statements, the local communities celebrate the Christian rituals because most of them are converted to the Christian religion (see also Knutsson 1967: 62f); especially the Orthodox Christians celebrate Epiphany, Christ Mass and Easter; and also there are the local communities who celebrate Islamic religious ceremonies, like Mawled and Eid al Feter.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MEANING AND NATURE OF THE *IRECHA* RITUAL

This chapter explains and discusses the nature, concept and meaning of the *Irecha* ritual. It delineates the meaning of the *Irecha* ritual from different perspectives, the purposes of the *Irecha* ritual, categories of the ritual, and also introduces the *Irecha* ritual in relation to different aspects of the Oromo people, such as the relationship between the *Irecha* ritual and the *Qaalluu* and *Gada*. In this chapter, the gender participation in the ritual, the symbolic meanings of the *Irecha* ritual with special focus on the objects that are used for the ritual celebration are discussed in detail. The significance of the *Irecha* ritual for the Oromo people in general and the study area in particular, and the changes and continuities faced the *Irecha* ritual celebration at different times and as a result of different factors that might hinder the celebration of the ritual is another issues discussed under this chapter.

4.1 The Meaning of the *Irecha* Ritual

The word *Irecha* is defined as “gifts given for thanks” or it refers to “thanksgiving” for everything that *Waqa* gives them and does for them; they give thanks to Him (informant *Obbo* Alemayehu Hayile). According to *Obbo* Balay Shifara, *Irecha* is referred to as “praying to *Waqa*”.

According to *Obbo* Chala Sori, the term *Irecha* refers to the green grass which does not cut or has not been touched or eaten by cattle; it is sharp, held during prayers and thanksgivings with flowers. The term *Irecha* also refers to broad concepts which represent something that is given to somebody. The gift anybody applies to *Waqa* is an *Irecha*. That gift may be everything prepared for a ritual or another occasion. It may be money, cattle, or any other gifts that was given to somebody. The gifts given to somebody or to *Waqa* for the sake of blessing are an *Irecha*. If an individual gives money or other gifts to the elders by seeking their blessing, it is an *Irecha*. During the wedding, the groom holds a wet grass which is an *Irecha*. The prayer performed on the mountain, within the family's home or at any other place by holding green grass is an *Irecha*. If people were not able to get grass, they also hold leaves of different ever-green trees like *Mi'esa* (*Pygeaum africanum*), *Birbirsa* (*Podocarpus gracilior*) and *Wadesa* (*Cordia africana*), and there are also branches of other trees that are held in the absence of grass. These trees are known as “*Muka Jila*”- the trees that serve for different ritual celebrations in the indigenous Oromo culture and the *Gada* system and are also used as shade.

Adde Bachu Fenta, informant, said that the *Irecha* ritual is the action or the practice that shows the Oromo belief system in practical action. On the *Irecha* ritual, there is a blessing ceremony that the participants get from *Waqqa*. It is the ceremony performed by the group of people around the *Malka* (riverside) or on the mountain for the purpose of thanksgiving and praying for peace, surplus harvest and rain. According to the leaflet prepared by OCTB (2008), *Irecha* means literally thanksgiving, worshipping and praying to *Waqqa* through cultural practices.

On the *Irecha* ritual, the Oromo pray to *Waqqa* “*guddina sanyii sadiin- sanyii namman, sanyii horii fi sanyii midhaaniin*” literally meaning: for growth in three dimensions, growth in human or human fertility, growth in cattle or cattle fertility and growth in seed or surplus harvest. According to *Obbo Asefa Waqtola*, this is the main praying addressed to *Waqqa* on the *Irecha* ritual. According to *Obbo Bayana Sanbato*, the *Irecha* ritual is the power of the Oromo people, it is through this ritual that *Waqqa* gives them everything like peace, prosperity and healthy.

According to *Obbo Negesa Nagawo*, people give thanks to *Waqqa* for the meal they had been given, for the water, trees, life, health and their movements. During this *Irecha* ritual they slaughter cattle for everything they got from *Waqqa*, to show their respect and love to Him. They slaughter the cattle by symbolizing that they feed *Waqqa* for the love they have for him by eating that meat at the place where they are celebrating the ritual. And they also anoint the butter on “*Sida*”. *Sida* is the planted or erected stone that serves as the sacred object (*ulfaa*, some times known as *ulfoo*) for them. This shows that the butter was given to them by *Waqqa*. Butter is the good thing; it builds up the human body and makes the body happy when eating it. Therefore, according to *Obbo Negesa Nagawo*, they anoint that *Sida* stone with butter, which symbolizes that they are anointing *Waqqa* who gave them that butter, and they also anoint butter on the sycamore tree (*Oda*) by assuming that it is the gift of *Waqqa*. This process of anointment of the butter on the *Sida* stone or *Oda* tree is known as *Muda*. The *Muda* ritual (which literally means anointing ritual), does not mean that they believe in and worship this *Sida* or *Oda* tree, instead they do this as they are symbols for *Waqqa*, not as *Waqqa*.

The ritual of putting a piece of meal under the tree or near a lake before they eat is known as “*Daddarba*” where dropping the drink that brought to the area before taking it is called “*Dhibayu*”. This *daddarba* and *dhibayu* ritual that are undertaken at Hora Arsadi during *Irecha* ritual symbolizes the love they have towards their creator, *Waqqa*. They do that to show their feeling of love towards their creator.

Picture 2: The partial view of the *Oda* tree near Hora Arsadi and where the *Muda* ritual is practiced (photo by the Researcher, taken in February, 2011 and June, 2011 left to right)



During the *Irecha* ceremony, they hold Green grass (known as “*Marga Jiidhaa*” in Afaan Oromo), flowers and also other cultural objects for different reasons to give thanks to *Waaqa*. For instance, *Obbo* Negesa Nagawo said that on the *Irecha* ritual, all *Abba Gada* (Gada leaders), all members of the *Gada* age sets according to their age group, and the Oromo elders (both men and women elders) participate in the *Irecha* ritual by holding wet green grass, flowers and their respected cultural objects, like, for example, *Abba Gada* holds *Bokku* and *Alange* (whip). *Alange* (whip) is the object that is held by the *Abba Gada*, made up of rhino skins and it symbolizes law. Whereas elderly women hold *Chachu* (necklace of beads, cowries and ivory worn by women), *Challe* (bead), *Siiqqee* (cultural stick of women), *Okole* (traditional milk container), etc and they sing the traditional songs which say “***Maareyoo Maareyoo yaa maree mareechituu, kan barana abaaboon kan bara egereen nu gahii yaa rabbi***” – which literally means “it comeback again and again after a year and the *Waaqa*, like this year, please also arrive us to the next year in a bright season” and they go to the *Malka* (riverside) during *Irecha Birraa* and to the mountain side during the *Irecha Tullu*.

Then at the *Malka* they call each other in terms of their genealogical seniority for blessing. Before the blessing ceremony takes place, the reconciliation process is undertaken. They declare forgiveness to each other; the one in conflict is named by “*waaqa dhugaa*” (by the name of God the truth). Because everybody is assuming that the place is the sacred place and the place of *Waaqa*, thus, they forgive each other; if they refuse, *Waaqa* may condemn them, and for the sake of truth and

to become free from sin. If the conflict case is serious and needs intermediaries for reconciliation, they appoint the elders and order them to resettle their conflict, based on the indigenous law; the appointed elders are punishing the wrongdoer and ask for compensation for the innocent one according to the truth of their statements. Then, after the reconciliation process is over, they proceed to the blessing ceremony.

According to the reports of the informants among the local elders and Birru Tsagaye (2009:29) the blessing verses to *Waaqa* among the *Tulama* Oromo are as follows. The phrases recited on this occasion portray the monotheistic nature of the Oromo traditional belief. When the elders bless by reciting the following phrases, the participants repeat a part of the blessing expression, meaning “let it be”.

Kan Eebbisu (the blessing elders)

Kan Jalaa Qabu (hirmmaattota)

Hayyee hayyee yaa waaqa uumaa yaa waaqa uumamaa

Yaa waaqaa sagaltaman garbaa

Yaa waaqa Tokkicha maqaa dhibbaa,

Waaqa caffee tuma

Waaqa shanan gadaa Oromoo

Waaqa Odaa Nabee

Yaa waaqaa Hora Arsadi uumte

Waaqaa tulluu cilaaloo

Waaqa jahan Hora Galaan

Waaqa tulluu jahan tuulama

Waaqa gurraacha gara garbaa

Leemmu garaa taliilaa

Gooftaa hundaa olii

Gooftaa ofiin of bulchu

Gurraacha gungumaa

Kan nagaan nu oolche nagaan nu bulchi

Irraa gora nu oolchi

Dongongora nu haa oolchu

Xiqqaan keenya haa guddatu

Guddan keenya nuu haa jiraatu

Walaalaan keenya nu haa beeku

Beekan keenya nu haa bulu

Manguddoon keenya nuu haa turu

Manni kan abbaa mana, Sanyiin kan abbaa facaasee haa ta'u

Kormi cirri haa ta'u

Goromsii haa rima'u

Gadaa kan roobaa nagaa

Barri kan quufaa gabbinaa haa ta'u

Nuti jennee rabbi haa jedhu

nu bulchi

nu oolchi

haa oolchu

haa guddatu

haa jiraatu

haa beeku

haa bulu

haa turu

haa ta'u

haa ta'u

haa rima'u

nagaa

haa ta'u

haa jedhu

The blessing elders

Those who respond (participants)

Oh God the creator and God of whole nature	
God of ninety <i>Garba</i>	
One God with hundred names	
God of the <i>Chaffee</i> assembly	
God of the five <i>Gada</i> classes of Oromo	
God of <i>Oda Nabe</i>	
God who created Hora <i>Arsadi</i>	
God of <i>Chilalo</i> Mountain	
God of Six <i>Galan</i> clans <i>Hora</i>	
God of six mountains of <i>Tulama</i>	
Waqa, the black whose stomach is ocean	
Your stomach is pure	
The lord who is above all	
The lord who administers himself	
The black who is roaring	
You, who keep us peacefully during day, keep us in the night	keep us
Keep us from mistake	keep us
Save us from mistake	save us
Our children shall be grown	be grown
Give longevity to the adults	give them
Our people are being intelligent	being intelligent
Give longevity for our intelligent people	give them
Give longevity for our elders	give them
House is being for house fathers	let it be
Seed is being for whom seeded it	let it be
The bull being a " <i>Chirri</i> " (hippopotamus bird)	let it be
The heifer being pregnant	let it be
<i>Gada</i> is being rain and peace	let it be
The year being year of surplus and prosperity	let it be
What we have said, the God shall also saying it.	Being said

After the blessing ritual, they approach the water body of Hora Arsadi, and they perform the *Irreeffannaa* ceremony. *Irreeffannaa* literally means giving great respect, assuming that the object is honorable and deserves worshipping. This '*Irreeffannaa*' is performed by holding green grass and flowers; people touch the water and then touching their head with that grass and flowers and wet it with water. Humidity represents being blessed and having prosperity. By the leading prominent figure, *Abba Gada* (Gada leader) and *Abba Malka* (the blessing father - is a person who is appointed to bless the community on the *Irecha* ritual and on other different rituals and meetings), the participants are carrying bunches of lovely grasses and flowers in their hands and they praise, bless and pray to *Waqa*. Soaking the bunches of green grasses and flowers in their hands after thanksgiving song, blessing and *Irreeffannaa* rituals are over, they lay them over there

and return back to their home with joyful songs. The young boys sing as well as girls by forming groups.

According to *Obbo* Balay Shifara, the person who is responsible in blessing, during the *Irecha* ritual is *Abba Malka* (Blessing Father) and *Abba Gada*. *Abba Malka* is a person who was elected by the general Gada assembly from the most senior clan or lineage for the blessing of the community on the *Irecha* ritual and on any other gatherings and ritual ceremonies. He is considered as having “*ulfoo*” (sacred object) and as a religious leader.

4.2 The Purposes of the *Irecha* Ritual

There is a debate on the purpose of the *Irecha* ritual whether it is religious ritual, secular and/or both. But, in anthropology, there is no boundary between religion and culture; religion is part and parcel of culture. However, according to the understanding of the people under study, there are some rituals that are restricted to religious purposes and some rituals totally free from religion. Therefore, based on this argument, the informants of this research were divided into three in terms of their argument on the purposes of the *Irecha* ritual: one group says that it is celebrated only for religious purposes and is a religious ritual, whereas the second group says that it is celebrated not for the purpose of religion, rather for non-religious indigenous cultural purposes. There is also another group which claims that there is a combination of the above mentioned two purposes.

For instance, according to *Obbo* Balay Shifara, the purpose of the *Irecha* ritual is celebrated only for religious purpose; people come to *Hora Arsadi* for praying to *Waqqa*. *Obbo* Chala Sori also is of the opinion that the main target of the *Irecha* ritual is religion. According to him, within the worshipping system of the Oromo, there are plenty of cultural manifestations. Each activity done in the ritual is the interpretation of Oromo culture, more than their religion. On the *Irecha* ritual, formerly, there was the naming system for the newly born children, the *Abba Gada* also taught the people how to live with each other without conflict, how the youngsters should respect the elders, and about the indigenous laws. Homicide does not belong to the Oromo culture, as people refrain from killing each other. Cultural songs are sung on this day, and a horse riding ritual is performed more colorfully on this celebration, having two purposes: one for playing and the other for the training for war. According to him, on this day the *Kallacha*, *Chachu*, *Siiqqee*, *Challe*, etc. are coming out. Therefore, the *Irecha* ritual, according to him, is a religious ceremony, but each object held and activity done on the celebration reflects more the culture than the religion.

Those who say that the *Irecha* ritual is a religious ritual justify their argument depending on the activities which are done at *Hora Arsadi*. The main ritual activity is the process of thanksgiving and praying to *Waqa*. Praying is the process of communicating with God. Therefore, if there is the process of praying to *Waqa* and giving thanks to their master and creator, this process is a religious process, so they interpret it as religious ritual.

The other argument of those who assert that the ritual is a non-religious, indigenous cultural ritual, is that it is secular in nature. According to this argument, most of the participants are the followers of different religions like Orthodox Christians, Protestants and Muslims. If it would be a religious ritual, why would the believers of other religions participate? Therefore, on this line of argument, there are common cultural beliefs that are free from religion and which are unifying factors for the Oromo identity. For example, *Obbo Dabebe Girma*, *Abba Muda* of *Gada Tulama*, an informant of the study, and *Obbo Asefa Waqtola* said that everything done in the *Irecha* ritual at *Hora Arsadi* is cultural, rather than a religious activity. They want to see the area only for the sake of water or wetness. According to the same informants, it is the devotional place, why people are washing in that water, did not put aside their shoes from their feet during entering to the area like Orthodox Christians or Muslim and/or why they do not worship there, i.e. if they said that *Hora Arsadi* is a religious place; each individual should have to worship, to show respect and give the necessary religious value to the area. Thus, for the same informants, it is totally free from religion and it is a secular ritual celebration.

According to this argument, even if they are the followers of different religions, the Oromo attend the *Irecha* ritual because it is their culture. This argument disproves the idea of Hailu Ejersa (2009: 75) that states that Christians and Muslims follow *Irecha* for preaching their religion and also to criticize the *Irecha* ritual. Indeed, Christians and Muslims are participating in *Irecha* ritual not for preaching and critics rather as their culture.

Among the total survey distributed in Bishoftu town for dwellers to respond to the purposes of the *Irecha* ritual, the majority of the respondents who had participated in the *Irecha* ritual were arguing that it has cultural purposes. The result of the survey, depending on the named purposes of the *Irecha*, is shown in the following table in detail. I am aware of the influence of a questionnaires structure on the given answers. In this particular case, the problem is obvious, that the hundred

respondents thought in a few categories about the *Irecha* ritual. I am trying in the conclusive part to clarify that *Irecha* is a multidimensional ritual (see p.102)

Table 3: Survey Results on the Purposes of the *Irecha* Ritual

Purposes of the ritual	Frequency	Percent
Cultural	43	43
Religious or to worship	27	27
Both (religious + culture)	3	3
Recreation	16	16
Other	2	2
Not responded	9	9
Total	100	100

The above table shows that the participants of the *Irecha* ritual are attending the ritual with different purposes. The majority of the participants are attending the ritual by assuming it as part of their cultural heritage (43%) rather than a religious ceremony (27%). There are also some participants who attend the ritual ceremony by taking it as recreational center, which constitutes about 16%, while 2% are attending for other purposes like to keep security and other personal business.

The third argument is that the *Irecha* ritual is the ritual which manifests both religious and the secular celebration at the same time. For example, *Obbo* Negesa Nagawo and *Obbo* Tadese Mul'ata said that the *Irecha* ritual is celebrated for two reasons: religious and cultural purposes. According to *Obbo* Negesa Nagawo, "every religion emerges from culture, if there is no culture, there is also no religion". Therefore, the *Irecha* ritual is celebrated as indigenous cultural ritual as well as for religious purposes. Among the respondents of the research, those who responded by supporting this argument are very few; they constitute only 3% (see table 2). According to this argument, within any culture there is a belief system that is religious in nature. Religion is part of culture. Even if the initial purpose of the *Irecha* ritual is religious, it manifests more the culture of the society.

Therefore, according to this argument, the culture considered as secular and the religious action which is profane in nature are intermingled in the Oromo culture; it may be difficult to draw a boundary between this two opposite (profane and sacred) aspects of the society in the Oromo tradition. *Obbo* Alemayehu Hayile reported that culture is the universal set, whereas religion is the subset. Therefore, within the Oromo culture in general and the *Irecha* ritual in particular, culture and religion mix up and it is impossible to show their boundary. The leaflet prepared by the OCTB

(2008) asserts this argument by saying that the *Irecha* ritual ceremony contains in itself religious, cultural and philosophical world views that admire the spiritual powers of *Waaqa*.

Obbo Alemayehu Hayile reported that currently the *Irecha* ritual held at Hora Arsadi is becoming the day of the Oromo people as a whole, showing their unity and seeing each other besides their diversified political views and religions. By putting aside their religious and political perceptions, the Oromo society celebrates together the *Irecha* ritual once a year at Hora Arsadi. As a result, the followers of different religious organizations are participating in the ritual because of its being Oromo.

Most of my key informants are inclined to the religious spirituality of the *Irecha* ritual that includes a number of cultural practices of more cultural than religious nature. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents categorized the *Irecha* ritual as non-religious indigenous cultural celebration. However, the question remains “why different religious followers, for example, Orthodox Christians, Muslims or Protestants, attend the *Irecha* ritual celebration?” It still requires more detailed investigation. Thus, I would like to invite Oromo scholars to do more detailed ethnographical investigation on the *Irecha* ritual celebration to clear the confusion on the nature of the ritual.

4.3 Types of *Irecha* Rituals

There are two types of *Irecha* rituals with different purposes and at different places where the Oromo people give thanks and pray to *Waaqa*: *Irecha Malka* (at a river side) and *Irecha Tullu* (on a mountain). According to *Obbo* Chala Sori, these two types of *Irecha* are the formal and common ones among the Oromo people found everywhere. In addition to the formal one, there are also other informal *Irecha* rituals such as “*Irecha Boro*” (the *Irecha* ritual celebrated at home), and *Irecha Qaalluu* (the *Irecha* ritual celebrated at the *Galma* or worshipping place of *Qaalluu*).

4.3.1 *Irecha Malka*

The *Irecha Malka* is a ritual celebrated immediately after the end of the rainy season and a weekend after the Meskel festivities of Orthodox Christians. It lies on Sunday following Meskel. It is sometimes known by the name *Irecha Birraa*. This is done at the end of September, when the darkness of the rainy season with its foggy days is passed and leaves place for the bright season or the blooming new season to come. This *Irecha* ritual has different themes. Among these, one is for thanksgiving and praying. On this *Irecha* ritual celebration, they thanks the *Waaqa* by saying

“*Waaqa ganna dukkana keessaa nu baaftee birraa aduun nu gesse akkasumas kan faaafne nuu biqilchitee nu agarsiifte siif haa galatu*” – which literally means: thanks to *Waaqa* who passed us through the dark summer season to the blooming autumn season or bright season as well as who has grown our seeds which we planted during the dark summer season.” Thus, it is the thanksgiving month for their *Waaqa* and it is taken as the annually recurring holiday. On this ritual they are also praying to *Waaqa* for the sake of peace and surplus harvest in the future. (*Obbo* Negesa Nagawo, *Obbo* Balay Shifara and *Obbo* Chala Sori).

The second main reason why they celebrate this *Irecha Malka* is because during the summer season people cannot visit each other because of the heavy rain and the filling of rivers which cannot be crossed. Until the recent period, there were no bridges and comfortable transportation services throughout the year. Therefore, the people living at far distance stayed without seeing each other for two to three months. During *Irecha Malka* they can meet again. Thus, it is the time when relatives, families and clans are able to meet each other.

The purity of the water during the summer and the bright season is of great difference. During the summer season, large rivers are filled and they are impure because filled with heavy erosion that contains different dirty things. According to the Oromo belief, they do not undertake the *Irecha* ritual at this season, because of this reason. They celebrate the *Irecha* ritual during the bright season in which the water bodies become purified and they perceive that if they celebrate the *Irecha* ritual at pure water side, *Waaqa* accepts their thanksgiving and praying.

Another theme of the ritual celebration is that it is a transition rite (rite of passage) from the dark summer season to the bright autumn season. Therefore, the ritual celebration is also called the rite of passage or the transition from the dark old summer season to the bright New Year.

The *Irecha* ritual celebration day is sometimes known as “*Ayyaana Birraa*” (the *Birraa* holiday), whereas the others are call “*Dhaddacha Saaquu*” (traditional court opening season); because during the summer rainy season, the judges could not sit in the open court, to see the cases. During this time, mountains and fields are covered with flowers and crops whose colors are so attractive to the farmers and pastoralists that they see it as the indication of the month of hope and prosperity. The main reason why they are celebrating the ritual at river banks is that they believe water is the source of life.

According to Maskaram Assaged (1998: 87), this *Irecha Birra* is held for three consecutive weeks starting from the official *Irecha* ritual celebration, but the number of participants is decreasing from the first week's official celebration. After the official celebration is held, the next consecutive weeks are celebrated specially by the local *Qaalluu*. Thus, the official celebration of *Irecha Birraa* held at Hora Arsadi is also serving as the opening ritual for the *Irecha* that is celebrated by the local *Qaalluu* at the same place and also for the *Irecha* ritual that is celebrated in different areas throughout the region.

The *Irecha* ritual that is practiced at a river side or *Malka* symbolizes the Oromo history, they were pastoralists and resided most of the time around the river where they got water for their cattle. Thus, *Irecha Malka* recalls the history of the Oromo in ancient times in general and still is in use in some areas in the regions like Borana, Guji, and Karrayu pastoralists in particular.

4.3.2 *Irecha Tullu*

Irecha Tullu is the ritual ceremony conducted on the top of the mountain. This is another place where people thank *Waqqa* as well as praying to *Waqqa*. "*Irecha Tullu*" literally means "giving thanks and praying to *Waqqa* on the mountain". The Oromo community climbs up to the mountain and thanks *Waqqa* who has created that mountain. It is performed at the beginning of the spring season (*Arfaasaa*) usually in the month of March, approximately six months after *Irecha Malka*, to pray for awaited rain.

During thanksgiving as well as praying, it is a must of holding green grass; even if people do not get green grass, they hold the leaf of other green trees like leaves of "*Mi'eessa* (*Pygeaum africanum*), *Birbirsaa* (*podocarpus gracilior*), *Kalaalaa* or *Hindhe* (ever green plants) (key informants). The main purpose of this ritual is praying for rain. It is also the period when the peasants start farming. If there is no rain during the spring season, it may be difficult for their cattle as well as for planting seeds. If the dry season is elongated above the normal situation, it exposes their cattle to death due to the lack of feed. They also pray to *Waqqa* to get normal rain and for peace during the coming summer season, and for the normal growth of their seeds.

Unlike the *Irecha Malka* of Hora Arsadi, there is no such official place (mountain) to celebrate this *Irecha Tullu*; rather it is celebrated on each local mountain. However, the Chuqqala (*Ziquala*) mountain is a relatively common place for this *Irecha* ritual celebration. Hailu Ejersa (2009: 63) notes that "the people of the study area regard the mountains that are found around Bishoftu town,

as the nearest part of the earth to *Waqqa*, why they preferred to celebrate the ritual on it". He further states that the Oromo believe that *Waqqa's* spirit resides at sacred mountains of the area.

Why the Oromo people selected these two areas, riverside and mountain, for the *Irecha* ritual is another question which seeks an answer. *Obbo Chala Sori* said that, 'according to the Oromo legend and belief, *Waqqa* has done different miracles in those areas. The Oromo believe that the first man, called *Horo*, was created on the mountain. The first man, *Horo*, became man and woman and was divided into male and female for the first time at *Malka* (riverside). As a result, they also believe that the reproduction system of human beings started at the riverside. These areas are sacred for them and are also the residence of the spiritual being, and if they pray to *Waqqa* at these places, *Waqqa* accepts their praying and gives positive response to them. Because of this mysterious origin of the first man and the start of reproduction of human beings, they selected these two areas for the *Irecha* ritual celebration.

4.4 The Required Objects from the Participants of the *Irecha* Celebration

There are some requirements expected from the participants according to their personal abilities to do depending on the Oromo tradition. The first and foremost requirement is the ritual wearing of traditional clothes if they have, but is not obligatory if they have not. Then, they should hold grass and flowers which show that they are going to the *Irecha* ritual celebration. In addition to grass and flowers, each participant should hold cultural objects, according to his *Gada* position.

In the *Irecha* ritual ceremony, the *Abba Gada* and *Abba Malka* are of vital importance and they hold the sacred objects according to their position. *Abba Gada* holds *Bokku* and *Alange*, and they attach the *Kallacha* on their heads whereas other *Gada* members hold *Alange* (a whip). The women hold a *Siiqqee*, *Chachu*, *Challe*, *Okole*, *Qabee*, while those who have a spear hold a spear (the husband), those who have a horse, come with their equipped horse like "*Gaachana*" (Shield). The youths hold a stick that motivates their songs by hitting them to each other.

On the *Irecha* celebration day, the youths wear beautiful clothes and decorate themselves more than on ordinary days, especially if they are unmarried, for mate selection purpose. The girls also wear their most attractive clothes and decorate themselves more than usually. According to the Oromo tradition, the girls are not going out from their home except to attend such an *Irecha* ritual, which creates the best opportunity and chances to select their mates.

In addition to different cultural objects held that day, there are also different customs to be respected. According to *Obbo* Balay Shifara, during the *Irecha* ritual celebration each individual should show great respect to Hora Arsadi. Hora Arsadi is the sacred place and the place of *Waqa*; therefore, to enter the place of *Waqa*, each individual should have to refrain from sex, and menstruating women are forbidden to attend. Therefore, it should be respected according to the *Safu* (norms and values) of the indigenous Oromo culture.

4.5 The Place Where the *Irecha* Ritual is Celebrated

Starting from the early period, there are different places where the *Irecha* ritual and other rituals were celebrated. For instance, *Obbo* Chala Sori reported that most of the above mentioned rituals did not have a specified place for its celebration. For example, *Qame* and *Meskel* rituals are celebrated among the small neighborhood including extended family's compound, without having an official place like the *Irecha* ritual of Hora Arsadi.

However, according to the Oromo culture, river crossing points, lakes which are known by the name Hora, large trees and different mountain sides are the places where Oromo's different rituals are undertaken. Among these places, most of the time, *Hora* is the preferred place to celebrate "*Irecha Birraa*" held during the autumn season. *Hora* has the greatest respect among the community under study for different reasons.

Hora: The word "*Hora*" literally means lake, but there is a slight difference between *Hora* and *Haroo* (lake). There are basic factors which make a *Hora* different from a *Haroo*, (*Haroo* directly meaning lake). *Hora* is a lake which has unique characteristics and by giving serves to the community in several ways. According to the informants' report, it is a water body which has special minerals that can give healing services. The people perceived that lakes that are assumed to be *Hora* are giving healing services for humans as well as for their cattle and also they said that these lakes are enriched with salt mineral why it gives the healing services. When someone is seriously sick he/she wants to the *Hora* nearby and drinks that water. Then, the local people assured that as the diseases are gone out from their body in the form of vomit or in the form of toileting. The informants also witnessed that as it may not be vomit them if they drunk that *Hora* without disease, like that of those who have disease. According to the informants' report, this case is also true for cattle and it also serve as fattening the cattle.

The people say that the *Hora* is “*ulfoo*” which literally means sacred and reverent lakes, why they celebrate their ritual (especially the *Irecha*) at these respected and reverent lakes. There are six *Horas* where the *Irecha* ritual is celebrated in and around Bishoftu town, such as *Hora Huluka*, *Hora Jijiga*, *Hora Hadho* (*Hora Magarisa*), *Hora Arsadi*, *Hora Kilole* and *Hora Finfine*.

These six lakes are known by the name *Hora* among the local communities and are perceived as sacred and reverent. Except *Hora Finfine*, presently they are assumed as the sacred and reverent places for the *Irecha* ritual ceremony in the area. According to the informant *Obbo* Negesa Nagawo, formerly “*Hora Finfine*” was among the accepted places to celebrate the *Irecha* ritual; but, nowadays it is occupied by the government and it is administrated by the Addis Ababa City Hot Water Administration Agency. Currently it is known by the name “*fil wuha*” (hot water).

In addition to the above mentioned *Hora*, there are a lot of *Malka* (river side) where the *Irecha* ritual and other rituals can be celebrated. For instance, among the *Irecha* ritual places found in near and far distance from *Hora Arsadi* are: *Awash Malkasa* (around Adama), *Malka Awash* (Awash riverside), and at other riversides. On this, *Obbo* Negesa Nagawo reported that there are 28 riversides (*Malka*) where *Irecha* ritual is celebrated in Liban Chuqqala district. There are also many places in Ada’a district. Each local village can celebrate the *Irecha* ritual at their local riverside or at any water body after the official *Irecha* celebration at *Hora Arsadi*. It is also celebrated colorfully at *Malka Ateetee* (near Burayu town), *Malka Jawwee* (West Shewa Zone, Jaldu Wereda), *Malka Oda Maaruu* (Ilubabor Zone) and other riversides (*Obbo* Chala Sori, informant). Thus, this information is in opposite with Maskaram Assaged (1998: 87) that says *Hora Arsadi* is the only place where *Irecha* ritual is celebrated.

The day they celebrate the *Irecha* ritual is different from one place to another. For example, the *Irecha* ritual which was celebrated in 2010 at *Hora Arsadi* was held on October 04, whereas the *Irecha* ritual celebrated at *Malka Ateetee* was held on October 11, 2010. Therefore, the day the *Irecha* ritual is celebrated may be decided by the *Abba Gada*, *Qaalluu* or other local elders within the range of at the end of September to the mid of October months immediately after the *Irecha* ritual celebration at *Hora Arsadi*; because the *Irecha* ritual at *Hora Arsadi* is considered as the opening ritual for other *Irecha* ritual celebration in the region.

4.6 Hora Arsadi and the *Irecha* Ritual Celebration

According to the Oromo legend, the celebration of the *Irecha* ritual at Hora Arsadi is a matter of a long period of time. There are a lot of speculations on the relationship of *Irecha* ritual and Hora Arsadi; why, when and who celebrated the *Irecha* ritual for the first time at Hora Arsadi.

Hora Arsadi was selected for the *Irecha* ritual as the official place of the ritual celebration because of different reasons. The first reason, according to the informant *Obbo* Negesa, is that Hora Arsadi lies in the center of the other *Hora* found in the area. It is also the center for the "Sadeen Ada'a" clan of the area in particular, and for the Tulama Oromo in general. Another reason is that the Hora Arsadi is considered as more sacred than the other *Hora* in the area. *Obbo* Alemayehu Hayile reported that Hora Arsadi is sacred; it becomes sacred on the basis of the *Gada* proclamation in addition to miraculous and mysterious events happening in it. The Hora Arsadi serves the people in healing them from diseases and also healing their cattle and fattening them when they drunk the water. One of the informants, *Obbo* Balay Shifara, witnessed that a lot of miracles are done at Hora Arsadi. An individual, without children came here and made a vow; then after a year, he/she returns with a child and the gifts they had promised. This shows that the Hora Arsadi is serving as holy water.

Another story why the *Irecha* ritual at Hora Arsadi is the official place for the ritual, according *Obbo* Chala Sori, is related with the history of the local community. The oral tradition of the area tells that among the six sons of *Galan*; *Liban* was the elder and the Hora Arsadi was at that time part of his territory and he used to water his cattle from that *Hora*. The first *Abba Malka* of the area descended from the *Liban* clan. According to the oral tradition of the area, that first *Abba Malka* had prayed to *Waqqa* at that sacred lake. The first *Abba Malka*, before he became *Abba Malka*, got seriously sick and even alienate from the society for eight days for fasting and then after, he was got alive under large tree known as *Birbirsaa Fooqaa*- the tree currently found in Bishoftu town near Hora Arsadi. As a result, it assumed that *Waqqa* kept his life for eight days, and then he went to Hora Arsadi with his people to give thanks to *Waqqa*. The name of this first *Abba Malka* was "*Iarsadi*". The name of the lake, Hora Arsadi, is derived from this name.

But currently, the *Abba Malka* of the area is not from the *Liban* clan, the office has been transferred to *Ada'a*. *Ada'a* was the younger brother of *Liban*. According to *Obbo* Chala Sori, because of the conflict between the two brothers, *Liban* and *Ada'a*, the *Liban* left the area and resettled around the

Chuqqala (Zuqala) Mountain in the southern direction from Bishoftu town (the current Liban Chuqqala District). So, the *Ada'a* got the chance to become *Abba Malka* of the area. The current *Abba Malka* of the area is from the *Handa* clan (the elder son of *Ada'a*).

The nature of the Hora Arsadi is slightly different from other lakes in the area. The Hora Arsadi does not show much difference between the dry season and the rainy season, i.e. it decreases little during the dry season and also adds little during the rainy season. There is also no contributor river or spring that discharge its water to this Hora. It is surrounded by mountain plains with a dense forest which make it more attractive than the other Hora.

There is also another speculation on why Hora Arsadi is the official place for the *Irecha* ritual. There are three sacred lakes around Bishoftu town: *Hora Kilole*, *Hadho* and *Arsadi*. Among these, only Hora Arsadi, found in the town, the other two are found in the rural areas outside Bishoftu town. Therefore, according to *Adde Bachu Fenta*, the geographical position of the Hora Arsadi might have contributed to its officiality for the *Irecha* ritual.

The other idea is related to its closeness to *Oda Nabe*. This sacred lake is found at near distance from *Oda Nabe*, which is found on 10 km distance from Bishoftu town in western direction near Dukem town. According to OCTB (2008), a leaflet on the *Irecha*, *Oda Nabe* is one of the Oromo religious, political and historical centers of ancient times. *Oda Nabe* is the place where the general *Gada* assembly of the *Gada Tulama* is held. It is the center and place of handing over the *Gada* authority, the place where the indigenous law is amended and announced, and the place where the *Muda* ceremony (anointment ritual) is held. Therefore, its closeness to this *Gada Tulama* general assembly may also contribute to the officiality of Hora Arsadi for the *Irecha* ritual celebration (*Adde Bachu Fenta* and *Obbo Asefa Waqtola*).

Picture 3: Partial view of Hora Arsadi with surrounding environment (photo by the researcher, taken in February 2011 and June 2011, respectively)



4.7 *Qaalluu* and the *Irecha* Ritual

4.7.1 The Emergence of *Qaalluu*: Mythology of the *Tulama* Oromo

The Oromo people have their own oral tradition and a lot of legends transferred from generation to generation with relation to their history, religion, administrative system and life-style. One of the informants, *Obbo* Negesa Nagawo, narrated, among a number of Oromo oral traditions, the story of the *Qaalluu* institution according to the Oromo *Tulama* as follows:

According to the Oromo legend, in ancient days, *Waqqa* was living with the people on earth. At that period, people were righteous and *Waqqa* easily granted everything they asked Him. If they asked for rain, *Waqqa* gave them rain, if they asked to stop it, He stopped it. Then later, when human beings started to do evil things like speaking false, conflicting with each other, ropping each other, *Waqqa* became angry and decided to leave them behind and went away.

As they heard about this, they started to ask each other what they shall do. There were four persons who communicated with each other about the going away of *Waqqa*, such as *Gada*, a pregnant woman, the *Qaalluu* and an elder man. They decided to follow *Waqqa* and to beg him to return back if He was willingful to return back with them. Then, they started to run after *Waqqa*.

After having run a long distance, *Qaalluu* stayed in one village to smoke “*Gaayyaa*” (hookah or tobacco pipe) – a pipe made up of pumpkin (*Buqqee*) or clay. Currently this object is found in the *Qaallicha*’s home. The left three persons continued their running to reach *Waqqa*. After some distance, like the *Qaalluu*, the pregnant woman was left in a village to give birth. The left two continued their running and after some distance the elder man was tired and sat down under an *Oda*

(sycamore) tree. Then, *Gada* continued his running lonely to reach on *Waqa* and he indeed reached Him.

As he got *Waqa*, he asked Him to stop. *Waqa* asked *Gada* why he had stopped him. *Gada* answered that he was sent to Him by the community. *Waqa* asked *Gada* why he was alone. *Gada* told him that as they were starting to run, the other three were left behind. Then *Waqa* ordered *Gada* to tell the message to the three left behind. *Waqa* sent a message to *Qaalluu* saying “please speak the truth, in the village you left to smoke *Gaayyaa*; guide and advice them, teach them and be a teacher in that village, and keep the culture and values of the people”. *Waqa* also sent a message to the pregnant woman, saying: “she has left her home for me, please tell to the village that they should slaughter for her “*Jibicha*” (literally meaning a young ox which has not started to give farming services) during her delivery and make her happy, not to disturb her, and keep her smoothly and carefully”. To the elder man *Waqa* also sent a message which said that “please resettle the issue of homicide and conflicts and disputes under that *Oda* tree depending on the truth and speak for truth”.

Finally, the *Waqa* told *Gada*, as he is the one administering the country: lead the people, keep the culture, and keep the *Gada* period and cycle to handing over the power as well as to give it. “Please keep your *Gada* cycle, do not pass your *Gada* cycle period and do not leave your *Gada*, teach and keep the country, and guide the people”. After having completed His message, *Waqa* left him, continued His journey, and was gone from the human beings for ever.

According to the oral tradition of *Tulama* Oromo, since the departure of *Waqa* from them, they started to administer the people by the *Gada* system, resolving conflicts by local elders, asking advices from the *Qaalluu* and show due respect to women (especially pregnant ones). Since they got these orders from *Waqa* on His departure from them, *Gada* and *Qaalluu* became interrelated. *Gada* appoints the *Qaalluu*, *Qaalluu* also appoints *Gada*, i.e. they appoint each other for different positions. Formerly, *Qaalluu* was considered as the right and perfect one next to *Waqa*, because he is assumed to be righteous. At that time, the people could get what they want when they prayed to *Waqa*, and even if they curse somebody, it might affect the concerned individual.

4.7.2 The Role of the *Qaalluu* among the Community

Qaalluu has a great role to play in the *Gada* system in giving advice to the *Gada* leaders and by mobilizing the people for the *Irecha* ritual and for other indigenous ritual practices. The *Qaalluu* supports the *Gada* system by giving advice and guiding as well as teaching indigenous Oromo laws,

customs, and values. He also gives blessings to *Gada* members when they entered into *Luba* (*Gada*) stage and take the power from the proceeding *Gada* members. For instance, *Abba Muda* is elected from the *Qaalluu* as religious leader and also to anoint the *Gada* leaders when they get political position.

Abba Muda is a person who has the power to anoint the *Abba Gada* and to lead each local *Qaalluu* in the *Gada* system, and he is elected by General *Gada* Assembly (*Chaffee*) on the basis of his traditional religious background. He is elected from the family who has the real and true *Qaalluu* that is transferred from generation to generation within that family. He is the religious leader in Oromo culture. *Obbo* Bayana Sanbato, key informant and current *Abba Gada* of *Tulama*, reported that the *Qaalluu*, according to Oromo tradition, is hereditary, and is transferred from father to son within one family.

The *Qaalluu* also serves the society in giving names to newly born children. Particularly, the followers of the Oromo indigenous religion bring their children to the *Qaalluu* and ask him to name and bless them. According to the informants report, formerly the *Irecha* ritual, which was being held at *Hora Arsadi*, was serving as name giving ritual to the newly born children. This name giving ritual is termed as "*Hammachisa*". *Hammachisa*, according to Hailu Ejersa (2009: 53), is "naming of children for the purpose of assimilating the newly born baby to the *Qaalluu*'s membership".

Obbo Balay also reported that the *Qaalluu* serve the society by solving the problems brought to him. Formerly, the *Qaalluu* was considered as righteous and *Waaqa* showed him a solution for each case, so most of the time people were bringing different cases to him. The individual whose case had been resolved by the *Qaalluu* brought gifts to that *Qaalluu* without any enforcement. But nowadays, some *Qaalluu* have started to deceive the society for the sake of the benefits that they get from the people and they also changed the voluntarily given gifts into obligations. According to *Obbo* Negesa Nagawo, this practice is not acceptable by the Oromo culture and religion; it is stranger to the Oromo culture and religion.

The *Qaalluu* has also a great role in conflict resolution among the Oromo community in general and the study area in particular. There are different known mechanisms of conflict resolution in Oromo tradition such as through *Jaarsummaa* (the process through which the local elders resolve the conflict based on the indigenous laws and customs) and through the *Qaalluu* institution. The

Qaalluu has his own elders appointed to this conflict resolution duty. The *Qaalluu* elders see the case and give the decision to the disputants based on the customary law. If the disputants refuse to accept the decision given by the *Qaalluu* elders, the *Qaalluu* directly gives them the solution and tell them how they have to reconcile. The disputants must accept this decision in the fear that if they refuse, they may be cursed.

Obbo Chala Sori said that in the *Gada* system, the *Qaalluu* is seen as the religious leader whereas the *Gada* is seen as the administrator of the society. *Qaalluu* are more responsible to preserve the culture and cultural objects of the people. For example, currently, most of the “*ulfoo*” or sacred objects such as *Kallacha*, *Chachu*, *Challe*, *Siiqqee*, etc, are found at the *Qaalluu's Galma*.

According to *Obbo* Balay Shifara and *Obbo* Chala Sori, the *Qaalluu* is always at his home, however, on the *Irecha* ritual, he comes to *Hora Arsadi* for praying and thanksgiving to *Waaqa*. The *Qaalluu* has a spirit that have been given him, and it has also a home in which it is confined to the *Qaalluu's* services, called “*Galma*” (*Gada Melba* 1988: 20). The direct meaning of the word *Galma* is “hall”, but, according to this context, it is “a home constructed for the purpose of the spirit serving that *Qaalluu*, and is also *Qaalluu's* residence”. It is taboo for people to get in, except some people who have the spirit called “*Ayyaanaa*” and a few individuals of the family who fulfill the pre-requirements. Women during menstruation and persons having had sexual intercourse are also prohibited to enter.

4.7.3 Categories of the *Qaalluu*

Obbo Negesa Nagawo, the informant, categorized the *Qaalluu* into five types: *Hayicha*, *Ragdicha*, *Qaallicha*, *Qaalluu lallabdu* and *Bilbil-qil'ise*. *Obbo* Chala Sori also agreed with the existence of these different types of *Qaalluu* based on their merits.

1. *Hayicha*: the name “*Hayicha*” is derived from the local term “*Hayyuu*”, which literally means “intelligent” and it implies that he is knowledgeable. The *Hayicha* is considered as knowledgeable about the indigenous laws, customs, norms and values. He is always at his home, he does not cross the river or he does not climb over the mountain. Everybody can go to him to ask him something or to get some advice. He has no spiritual forces which laid on him and could change his normal human nature; it is thought that he is gifted with more intelligence. He is a person who has a *Bokku* at his home

2. *Ragdicha*: a person who is assumed to “know everything”. He gives advices, and he is also assumed to know everything which may occur in the future and also remembers what was done in the past. He tells about the future. Like *Hayicha*, there is no spiritual force laid on him that could change his normal personality during fortune telling, and he can also remember about the recent past. The name ‘*Ragdicha*’ (which literally means prophetic) implies that he knows about the future. He tells you the fate of each individual and tells you if you may encounter some problems in future. *Ragdicha* serves the society specially by telling about the season or year. He tells the society that this type of season or year is good or bad, directs them to something in order to survive or to escape from bad seasons or years.

3. *Qaallicha*: like *Ragdicha* and *Hayicha*, he is always at his home. Most of the time people go to him for the sake of advice when they may be faced with some problems. When they want him, they assume that he tells them the truth for their problems. According to *Obbo* Negesa Nagawo, if the *Qaalluu* really believes in *Waqqa* and is considered as righteous, he has a closer relation with *Waqqa* than the ordinary people, he may tell them true solution to their problems.

There are two forms by which *Qaallicha* gives advices and key solutions for his clients: First, like *Hayicha* and *Ragdicha*, by his human nature without any spiritual forces, he takes decisions, gives advices and solutions based on his personal and spiritual merits. Second, unlike *Hayicha* and *Ragdicha*, the *Qaallicha* might get the spiritual force, which makes him fall down on the floor /ground and change his normal action, behavior and perception. After they get the spiritual force residing in the person, the *Qaallicha* starts to see each case brought to him within specified period of time, until the spiritual force residing in him has gone. This type of *Qaallicha* is known as “*Qaalluu Fagdu*”.

According to the Oromo tradition, a *Qaalluu Fagdu* is accepted, if he is in the way and order of *Waqqa*. Nowadays, there are a number of *Qaalluu Fagdu* without any spiritual force who are deceiving the people, for the sake of income, prosperity, dignity and respect. *Obbo* Chala Sori reported that the *Qaalluu* liar are always ordering the followers to bring gifts to him and also tell them that they are condemned if they fail to do what he orders them, whereas the real *Qaalluu* are not asking for gifts and simply advise them without requesting any gifts unless the clients bring him gifts on the basis of their willingness. The true *Qaalluu* are telling the people only what *Waqqa* shows them. Currently, there are very few true *Qaalluu*. Most of them, these days, according to

Obbo Chala Sori, are deceivers and target to accumulate wealth on the false basis by the name of the *Qaalluu* Oromo.

Peoples perceive the spiritual force residing in a person as *Waqa*. For instance, *Obbo* Shumi Dadhi, my informant, told me that he has a *Waqa* which resides in him. He reported that he has the spiritual force called "*Ayyaanaa*" that is residing in him and also a number of followers. Thus, he is interpreting himself having a *Waqa*, but how do the other people perceive him? The name of his *Qaalluu* is called "*Gofta Wasanu Gofta Jabe*". He told me that the cases brought to him are seen after he got that spiritual force residing in him. For example, he interpreted the situation and himself in Afaan Oromo as "*baayeen dhibama ture, erga waaqni narratti bu'een fayye, yeroo waaqni bu'ee dhibamaa garasaatti fidan ni fayyisa, horiin yeroo dhibame immoo waan akkanaa godhaa jedheen itti hima ni fayyan*"- literally translated as "I was much sick, when the *Waqa* resided in me I was healed, when the *Waqa* laid down on me and brought the sick to that *Waqa*; he heals them: when the cattle is sick, he tells them what they have to do and if they have done properly what they were ordered, the cattle is healed".

4. *Qaalluu Lallabdu*: this type of *Qaalluu* is preaching by going here and there within the people without any order given him/her. The word *Lallabdu* literally refers to preaching, or the process of informing or transferring the modified or newly developed law by the *Chafe* to the society, and it also refers simply to talking loudly about something necessary or unnecessary. *Qaalluu* of this type are preaching to the people this and that, sometimes it happens to be true. But the people does not consider them as truth teller. According to *Obbo* Negesa Nagawo, most of the time, they are telling about the longevity of drought, or when the rain will come and the drought will end.

5. *Bilbil-qillisee*: This type of *Qaalluu* is the lowest one and found everywhere. This type of *Qaalluu* is begging, and if he/she curses, the cursed person may be affected, and if someone touches/injures him/her, he/she may affect the person, so, the informant *Obbo* Negesa Nagawo interprets them in Afaan Oromo as "*kadhaan bulti, abaarttes ni qaqqabsiifti*" - which literally means "she leads her life by begging, and also if she curses she may affect an individual". Unlike *Hayicha*, *Ragdicha* and *Qaallicha*, such *Qaalluu* does not have any permanent place. This type of *Qaalluu* does not enjoy everyone's esteem and they are perceived as the lowest. They can be found everywhere even in the churches and mosques, and they talk something at any place.

Obbo Negesa Nagawo said that all of these *Qaalluu* get their personal merits from *Waqqa*. As a result, they are known by the name “*Ayyaantuu*”, which literally means an individual who has got a spiritual force from *Waqqa* and is lucky. According to the belief of the local people, ‘*Ayyaantuu*’ is a lucky person who has got such spiritual possession and such personal merit from *Waqqa*. And they call the spirit that resides in the individual “*Ayyaanaa*”. According to Tilahun Gamta (1989), *Ayyaanaa* is a deity or divinity that is believed to bring death, disease, happiness, etc. all that together.

According to the informants’ report, nowadays, there is no such righteous and perfect *Qaalluu* who stands for truth rather those who stand for false and for personal benefits. Currently, some *Qaalluu* themselves and the believers interpret the *Qaalluu* as *Waqqa*. But, according to the Oromo legend and history, *Qaalluu* is a human being, but he/she gets the spiritual possessions from *Waqqa* and some personal merits which make them wiser than others.

Obbo Bayana Sanbato reported that the direct meaning of the word *Qaalluu*, according to the Oromo tradition, is “wise”; from this meaning, in different parts of the Oromiya region, for example, around *Borana* and *Jimma*, people use this term to notify the intelligence of the person rather than giving the connotation of a god or powerful spirit. But this meaning is not that much familiar among the central Oromo, particularly the Tulama Oromo. They attribute the *Qaalluu* to spiritual beings, god or as worshipping an idol. In the *Gada* system, *Qaalluu* is referred to as the intelligent person who got merits from *Waqqa*. According to *Obbo* Bayana Sanbato, Oromo believe only in *Waqqa* and the *Qaalluu* who is considered as intelligent. The actual *Qaalluu Fagdu* is not generally accepted among the Oromo. He claims that his father was Oromo, but he did not believe in and worship to *Qaalluu*.

In addition, *Obbo* Alemayehu Hayile states that the Oromo people who are *Waaqeffanna* donot worship *Qaalluu*, they only believe and worship *Waqqa*; but they can ask for advice how to worship and belief in *Waqqa*. In general, they believed in *Waqqa* and led by the *Gada* system, get consultations on their religion from the *Qaalluu*. He said that the Oromo never worship *Qaalluu* and any nature; the *Qaalluu* himself is subject to the universal master and creator, *Waqqa*.

4.7.4 The Role of the *Qaalluu* in the *Irecha* Ritual Celebrations

During the *Irecha* ritual, the *Qaalluu* participates in the ritual as a member of the society to celebrate the *Irecha* by holding green grass, flowers and other respected objects according to his

Gada grade. In the traditional Oromo religion, the *Qaalluu* and the *Abba Malka* are on the top of the hierarchies. In the *Irecha* ritual, the *Qaalluu* gives instructions and directives of where about and time of the implementation of the ritual.

According to the informant *Obbo Chala Sori*, a week after the *Irecha Malka* ritual, the *Qaalluu* is going to the closest water body or *Malka* found in/around their vicinity, there he performs the *Irecha* ritual. Therefore, the *Irecha Malka* held at *Hora Arsadi* is considered as the opening ritual of other *Irecha* rituals performed at different places. The *Irecha* ritual which is celebrated by the *Qaalluu* at the local *Malka* does not accommodate the whole people, like the *Irecha* ritual of *Hora Arsadi*. The *Irecha Malka* ritual held at *Hora Arsadi* is the only ritual in the region which accommodates the whole Oromo people and also tourists from different corners of the world.

Obbo Chala Sori also mentioned that the *Qaalluu* has no power in the *Irecha* ritual celebration which is held everywhere. The most powerful persons in the *Irecha* ritual everywhere are *Abba Gada* and *Abba Malka*. Even on the *Irecha* ritual that is performed by the *Qaalluu*, the persons who have power and responsibility of blessing the congregation are *Abba Gada* and *Abba Malka* (see also Hailu Ejersa 2009: 83). They call the *Gada* members according to their seniority in genealogy to bless the congregation.

There are some disagreements among the *Waaqeffanna* followers towards the *Qaalluu*. During the focus group discussion, a debate was raised on whether *Waaqeffanna* followers believe and accept the *Qaalluu* or not. Among the group of the discussants some of them said that there is no any relation between *Qaalluu* and *Waaqeffanna*: “we believe only in *Waaq* and we do not need other intermediaries; *Qaalluu* is not part of our religion and culture”; whereas the others among the group said that since the *Qaalluu* is among the Oromo culture and tradition; “we believe in *Qaalluu* as he has more intelligence and more personal merits given to him from *Waaq* to solve the serious problems of the community and also to advice the *Gada* leaders”. Therefore, the *Irecha* ritual is the celebration of thanksgiving and praying to *Waaq*, which is celebrated by *Qaalluu* (as an individual Oromo) and by any person who believes in *Waaq*.

4.8 The *Irecha* Ritual and the *Gada* System

According to the informants *Obbo Negesa Nagawo* and *Obbo Balay Shifara*, the *Irecha* ritual is a religious ceremony that is led by religious leaders in the Oromo tradition, the *Qaalluu*. But the *Gada* system is a system of administering the whole political system of the people. *Abba Gada*

controls the overall activity in the ritual. If the individuals enter in conflict, he resolves the problems. Therefore, *Abba Gada* is responsible in facilitating and guiding the overall activities of the *Irecha* ritual, because people assume that he, as the governor of the society, has everything under his control, including the *Irecha* ritual.

In the *Irecha* ritual, the *Gada* members as individuals and as group members (lineages, clans, extended families or others) participate in the *Irecha* ritual. During the ritual celebration, the *Abba Gada* is more responsible than any one in coordinating and guiding the community and also in developing rules and regulations for that ritual celebration. Among the *Gada* system, one is the *Irecha* ritual that the *Abba Gada* is responsible to undertake and guide. On the *Irecha* ritual celebration day, the *Gada* leaders teach the community about peace and the indigenous law, and also tell them how they can live with each other harmoniously, honestly and friendly without conflict or disputes. Traditionally, the law formulated by *Chafe* (is the general assembly in *Gada* system that make a law, parallel with the modern politics of parliament) was reaching the whole society on the *Irecha* ritual celebration at the congregation of Hora Arsadi by the *Abba Gada* of the period. On the other hand, if the year is the *Gada* transferring year, they announce the newly appointed *Abba Gada* to the people on this *Irecha* ritual at Hora Arsadi.

Abba Malka is elected by the *Gada* assembly based on his personal discipline and genealogy (be from the senior clan). The main responsibility of *Abba Malka* is blessing the community during the *Irecha* ritual celebration and also on any ritual celebration. Therefore, the *Gada* system and the *Irecha* ritual are interrelated. The ritual is organized and led by the *Abba Gada* according to the indigenous laws of the people. The rules and regulations necessary for the *Irecha* ritual celebration are formulated and proclaimed by the *Gada* assembly.

In short, in the *Gada* system, the responsibility to formulate and proclaim the laws with regards to the *Irecha* ritual celebration in particular and any other ritual in general, are given to the *Gada* leaders and each activity undertaken in connection with the *Irecha* ritual celebration is guided and controlled by the *Gada* leaders. Thus, the first figure in the *Irecha* ritual is *Abba Gada* to coordinate and facilitate each activity of the celebration. *Abba Malka* is another important person at the *Irecha* ritual. This shows that these two personalities have the essential roles in the *Irecha* ritual and are the most powerful.

4.9 Gender Participation in the *Irecha* Ritual

As oral traditions and some recorded Oromo history show, there are clearly classified gender roles among the Oromo in general and also on the *Irecha* in particular. For example, Asmarom Legesse (1973: 19) authenticates the existence of these gender roles between the sexes, in his study of Borena Oromo "men are in control of military and political activities. Only men can engage in warfare. Only they can take part in the elections of leaders of camps or of age-sets and gada classes. Men lead and participate in ritual activities. However, ritual is not an exclusively masculine domain: there are several rituals performed by women."

The above idea indicates that as there are specified men roles or responsibilities, there are also responsibilities confined to women. In the case of ritual, he states that ritual is not only done by men, but there are also several rituals that are performed only by women. For example, in the study area, the *Ateetee* ritual is a ritual that is only performed by women and for women.

Additionally, Asmarom Legesse (1973) also states as there is a deviation of gender roles in Borena, in meetings. He notes that "women are not barred from attending these outdoor meetings. If they do attend, they appear as witness rather than as participants." (1973: 20). He also asserted that the Borena women indirectly air their feelings or indirectly criticize the decisions if it is problematic or unacceptable among the women through work songs that have "some commentary on some infelicitious expression heard in men's meetings or a direct criticism of some unjust or unwise decision the men are contemplating (1973: 21). According to Asmarom Legesse (1973: 21), men are also merited to "make decisions concerning ritual and all the economic activities associated with the performance of rite", but this is done only in "consultation with women". This is also true among the Oromo of the study area and I restrict myself to the *Irecha* ritual and women participation of the study area.

In the *Irecha* ritual, women participate equally with men and they hold some crucial and colorful cultural objects that are in their possession and are considered as sacred. In addition to the green grass and flowers, like men, they have also cultural objects only held by them. For instance, women hold the *Siiqqee*, *Chachuu*, *Challee*, *Okole*, butter, etc. on the *Irecha* ritual celebration. These objects have their own symbolic representation (see chapter 5). The objects are only held by women and it makes them more impressive than men in decorating the celebration.

There is also a belief that *Waqqa* is more hospitable towards the praying of women if they are praying to him by holding these sacred objects than that of men. Thus, the main role of women in the *Irecha* ritual is decorating and giving a beautiful note to the celebration by wearing cultural clothes and different culturally colorful and symbolic objects, as well as decorating ornaments.

In the *Irecha* ritual a married man who does not attend the ritual with his wife, unless serious problems face them, will be excluded or faced with other sanction. This is not only on *Irecha* ritual celebration, but also at each ritual and on each occasion. For example, if an individual is invited to attend a wedding ceremony, if he does not attend with his wife, he may also be excluded. According to the indigenous Oromo culture, it is a must to celebrate any occasion as a couple. Sometimes, when a woman wants something from her husband, and he refuses to do what she wants, she uses such an *Irecha* ritual occasion and she tells him, "I do not go to this ritual unless you fulfill what I have been telling/requesting you". Then the only solution for him is fulfilling what she asked of him (informant *Obbo Chala Sori*).

According to *Obbo Chala Sori*, women are more powerful than men; for instance, during the *Irecha* ritual celebration, they are going in front of *Abba Gada* and *Abba Malka*. If they are stopped on the road, the whole people following them are stopping and nobody is passing by. Even, if they decided not to participate in that *Irecha* ritual celebration, the *Abba Gada* is obliged to transfer the celebration to another day or is even obliged to cancel the celebration. The local community assumed that without women, there is no *Irecha* ritual and the ritual celebration is not full and the thanks given to *Waqqa* and the praying is not accepted. On the *Irecha* ritual, according to the informant *Obbo Balay Shifara*, the power of anointing butter on the "*Sida*" or a tree, is primarily given to women, and then her husband may do so.

In any ritual, including the *Irecha*, and on some other occasions, even if it is traveling on foot, the women are going in front of all, when people cross the river, the women are crossing first of all and in any situation it accommodates both sexes, the women are got great respect. They have also a basic role in guest entertainment within the home at anytime and equally with men in guest entertainment performed outside the home, especially on different occasions, like the *Irecha* ritual.

However, there is one argument that denotes that the Oromo culture does not give equal gender participation. Those who raise this argument see it related to the blessing role. According to *Obbo Chala Sori*, blessing, restricted to men, is not the only aspect that witnesses gender inequality.

There are restricted and precisely specified gender roles in the community. Accordingly, women have their own roles like holding the sacred objects, going in front of the people, etc, where men have the unique role of blessing.

Obbo Bayana Sanbato reported that always women and men, especially husband and wife, do not participate on any occasion separately among the Tulama Oromo. He says that even during the general *Gada* assembly, the couple goes to the *Oda Nabe* together. But the wives do not participate in the decisions making by the *Chaffee* directly. According to the indigenous Oromo culture, women do not participate in decision making in the *Chaffee* assembly. The law was made and declared only by men, who are the member of *Chaffee*.

Women have a great role in the preparation of cultural foods. Each food in general is prepared by women in the region. Among these food, specialties are prepared more deliciously on special occasions like *Irecha* ritual, wedding ceremony, etc.

In general, the wife of *Abba Gada* is "*Haadha Gada*" (meaning *Gada* mother). This shows that there is a politics that accommodates both sexes with different gender roles within the society. In the *Gada* system, the gender equality is relatively assured, if the husband is in a high social position; the wife is also powerful, respected and honored equally together with her husband. Nowadays there are different laws on gender that are developed by the Federal Government. In this regard, the indigenous laws are open and flexible to incorporate the newly established laws of the nation in to their indigenous laws through law amendment.

4.10 The Symbolic Meanings of the *Irecha* Ritual

The activities done on the occasion of the *Irecha* ritual have their own symbolic meanings with the arbitrary meaning that are given to each practice. The *Irecha* ritual celebration shows the belief system of the society and the cultural practices related to their creator, *Waqqa*, and it also shows the cultural practices of the *Gada* system. Each activity done during the ritual has its own symbolic representation. Celebrating the *Irecha* ritual has its own symbolic meanings among the Oromo people in general and the society under study in particular and has different significances: it creates the sense of unity or belongingness among the adherents and also participants, it also symbolizes a peace creating ritual within the society i.e. if there is no peace there is no *Irecha* ritual. Different symbolic meanings of the ritual have been discussed previously. Thus, here the main focus is on the symbolic representation of the objects that were not discussed in detail.

There are a number of cultural objects held by the people during the *Irecha* ritual. These cultural objects are held by different peoples depending on their status, position, age, and sex. Some of these cultural objects are: green grass, flowers, *Alange* (a whip), *Chachu*, *Challee*, *Siiqqee*, *Kallacha*, milk, butter, *Okole*, etc. What we discussed in the literature part is correct, stating that a symbol is a sign that has a complex series of associations, but there is no direct relationship or resemblance between the sign and the object it signifies. Their relation is based on convention and is arbitrary. For example, the *Abba Gada Kallacha*, which is attached on the head of *Abba Gada*, symbolizes human fertility, but there is no biological or social relationship between the object (*Abba Gada Kallacha*) and what it symbolizes (human fertility).

In addition to the cultural objects, there are also a number of cultural dishes (meals, food items) brought to the ritual for different purposes. For example, some food stuff is brought to the area only for feeding, whereas some others are brought to the area as votive gifts for those who vowed to bring that food. According to *Obbo Balay Shifara*, among the foods and drinks brought to the area are: bread, coffee, cattle or sheep to slaughter, to mention only a few. Those who bring their cattle or sheep are slaughtering them there and they feed the people who are participating in the *Irecha* ritual. According to the informants' response, some of the symbolic meanings of the objects that are held during the *Irecha* ritual are given as follows:

Water: is the source of life, symbolizing the admiration for the creator and his creation, thanking *Waqqa* for everything what he has done for them in the vicinity. The main reason why the Oromo people celebrates the *Irecha* ritual at *Malka* is because water is their source of life; cattle are depending on water and without water it is difficult to plant seeds. Therefore, to admire these miraculous gifts of God, the society comes together near the water body to offer thanks to their *Waqqa*.

Green Grass (*Marga*): represents the gifts, thanks and the prayers directed to *Waqqa*. Grass is the food of cattle, given to them by *Waqqa*. Therefore, to give thanks to *Waqqa* they hold grass to show their respect and love. It also shows wetness present during the summer season and their wish to live in a wet environment. Another symbolic representation of green grass is the future prosperity they wish to have. Traditionally, the livelihood of the Oromo people was based on animal husbandry, they were pastoralists. During that time, to water their cattle and for the sake of pasture,

Therefore, *Alange* represents “*Abba Seera*” (father of law) and justice. The law which was made by *Chafe* was proclaimed and transferred to the society by the *Abba Gada* who holds this *Alange*. It shows that he is father of law and stands for the sustenance of justice in the society. *Alange* by itself represents the law of *Gada*. In the *Gada* system, the *Abba Gada* does not make a law without holding the *Alange*. During any occasion, each *Gada* member or *Luba* is holding the *Alange* to signify that he has the power to make and also amend the law.

***Siiqqee* (cultural stick of women)** (literally means shaft): is the elongated, thin and straight stick that is held by women. In Oromo tradition, women are known and respected with their *Siiqqee*. A woman starts to become “*Haadha Siiqqee*” (*Siiqqee* mother), from her wedding day or from her marriage ceremony. *Siiqqee* represents the right of women in the community. This *Siiqqee* is not held simply every day and everywhere. There are a number of special occasion when and where it is held. For instance, during the *Irecha* ritual, women hold the *Siiqqee*. It is also believed that the *Siiqqee* is the symbolic representation of reconciliation and peace.

In addition to the special ritual celebration, the women hold their *Siiqqee* if they are faced with some problems, like war or drought, and when they want to pray for *Waq*a's forgiveness. If the right of a woman is violated by an individual or even by her husband, the local women will go with the neighboring women through the village holding their *Siiqqee*. This shows that they claim justice. Then, the local elders come together to solve the problem and immediately punish the wrong-doer in front of the *Siiqqee* holding women. Therefore, the *Siiqqee* represents the rights of women.

Hororo: a long stick which is held by the youth, particularly by the *Folle* age grade. This *Hororo* stick is long and thin and represents growing more in the future. Why the *Folle* age grade is holding the *Hororo* stick, according to *Obbo* Bayana Sanbato, is because they are going to grow up towards the *Gada* stage in the future.

***Bokku* (Scepter)**: a scepter held by the *Abba Bokku* as the symbol of *Gada* Authority. In the *Gada* system, the *Abba Gada* holds a *Bokku* during the proclamation for the whole society that was made by the *Chafe*. The first *Bokku*, according to the Oromo oral tradition, given to them from *Waq*a dropped from the sky. But nowadays, it is made up of branches of the olive tree. In addition to the *Bokku*, the *Abba Gada* wears cloths that signify his authority and social position among the people. The *Bokku* is also called the *Abba Gada* stick and only held by him. *Obbo* Bayana Sanbato said that

according to the *Gada* system and the Oromo indigenous culture, the *Bokku* is only held by *Abba Gada*; it is the symbol of the position of the *Abba Gada*. Nobody else can hold the *Bokku*. It has also been reported that currently there are a number of individuals who are not *Abba Gada*, holding the *Bokku* by pretending that they are entitled to this sign. Indeed, in terms of culture, it is their culture, but there are different cultural objects that are restricted to some social positions. Among these items, the *Bokku* is the one that is restricted to the social position of *Abba Gada*. The *Abba Gada* stick is called "*Ulee Abba Gada*" in Afaan Oromo. The shape of this stick looked upon the top, symbolizes the male sex organ (penis), and sometimes it can look like the female sex organ (at the top edge of the stick, it is branched into two, which represents the female sexual organ). Therefore, the *Abba Gada* stick, called *Bokku*, symbolizes human fertility. They hold it to give reverence and thanks to *Waaqa* who created the human beings and also helps them in their fertility through his miraculous creation.

Picture 4: The picture of the previous and current *Abba Gada Tulama* (from right to left) (photo by the researcher)

picture of current *Abba Gada Tulama*



Kallacha*:** there are two types of *Kallacha* in the *Gada* system: one is that *Kallacha* attached on the heads of *Abba Gada*, called ***Abba Gada Kallacha (*Gada* leaders *Kallacha*), and the other is the *Kallacha* that is believed to have dropped from the sky as a gift of *Waaqa* (*Kallacha waaqaa bu'e* - literally meaning the *Kallacha* which has dropped from the sky) and people have great respect and reverence for this *Kallacha*.

Obbo Dabebe Girma reported that the *Kallacha* which dropped from the sky is more sacred than that of the *Abba Gada* and there is a home built only for the residence of this *Kallacha*, and that within that home, there is even a bed (*Siree* - in Afaan Oromo), where the *Kallacha* is residing. Like the *Qaalluu*'s home, this home of *Kallacha* is also called *Galma*. Any person who wants to

enter the house of that *ulfaa* (*Kallacha*), should have to keep himself from anything that is prohibited to him. If he fails to do so and to respect the norms and values, he may be punished through different miraculous events. For example, *Obbo* Tadesse Mul'ata reported that he has seen one unbelievable event after a woman had entered to the *ulfaa* home during her menstruation. On the following day, a number of snakes were rotating in his compound, which he never seen before.

Picture 5: The *Galma* of *Kallacha* found in the compound of *Obbo* Tadesse Mul'ata (photo by the researcher, taken in February, 2011)



Obbo Warqu Sida, my informant, narrated the story of the *ulfaa* that dropped from the sky. According to the Oromo legend, during the ancient period, the people were slaughtering one man once a year at Hora Arsadi. The man to be slaughtered was selected from the community randomly. If someone refused to do so, it was believed that he will be cursed and might face a hard punishment from *Waaqa*. Through that selection based on chance, once the fate to be slaughtered fell on a man who was the only son of his mother, but she could not have a chance to refuse. The other people told her that as she had to refuse, but she agreed to give her son. Then, they brought her son to the Hora Arsadi to be slaughter. During that time, a white sheep dropped from the sky with a bell on its neck. The people stopped slaughtering the boy and the sheep was given to them. After that, they brought the case to the wise (*Beekaa*) person to explain the situation, to know about that sheep and to do the necessary and the right things expected from them. The wise person then told them that they should have stopped slaughtering man, instead told them for the time being: "please slaughter that white sheep instead of the boy, in future slaughter a white bull, not a man". Since that day they stopped slaughtering human beings and started to slaughter a bull once a year at Hora Arsadi. During the time when the white sheep dropped from the sky with a bell, one person was feeding his cattle around that area and the people were given the bell to be taken with great care and

that person also accepted that bell. From that time, they started to hold that bell as *ulfaa* called “*Kallacha*”; and they say that the *Kallacha* dropped from the sky.

Obbo Warqu Sida also reported that his clan descends from the person who took that *ulfaa* (*Kallacha*) that dropped from the sky and that this *ulfaa* is still in their clan. He also told me that they still slaughter a bull once a year at the home of the person who holds that *ulfaa*.

There is also another story related to the *ulfaa* called *Kallacha* that dropped from the sky. *Obbo Shumi Dadhi*, informant of the study, narrated how the *Kallacha* dropped from the sky which is different from the former narration. According to him, the *Kallacha* dropped from the sky in a stormy rain and fell into the *Okole* (traditional milk container) of a cattle milking woman. Then they took it by assuming that it has been sent to them from *Waqqa* as a gift, and they showed due respect and care for it.

The *Abba Gada Kallacha* is made of leather, metal, wood or any other thing to shape men’s sexual organ (penis) and this object is attached on the head of the *Abba Gada*, as a symbol of fertility. It may be an icon, according to Raymond Firth’s categories of symbols. According to the indigenous Oromo tradition, a person who has a *Kallacha* does not enter in conflict with others, does not get angry, does not deceive anybody and always speaks the truth. This shows that the *Kallacha* represents the truth and is a sacred object that keeps justice within the community.

Chachu: also a symbol of fertility, which is mostly worn by the wives of *Gada* leaders. It is made of leather and decorated with a number of small beads of different colors that are attached to the edges of that leather. The *Chachu* is a type of cultural cloth made of leather and worn by women on their shoulders, open on the front and decorated with small beads at its lower edges. This *Chachu* has a large number of colorfully decorated small beads that represent the wish of the Oromo people for fertility. Wearing that *Chachu* means: please let us grow like the number of beads attached to the *Chachu*. *Obbo Dabebe* also said that this *Chachu* is most sacred and respected, even during the dry season the community prays to *Waqqa* by wearing this *Chachu*. It also serves as female attire and is a symbol of beauty.

Chachu and *Kallacha*, according to the indigenous tradition, served for different social aspects. For example, it has a great role in conflict resolution, particularly in a homicide case. When two groups or individuals in conflict refuse to resolve the conflict, the local elders, religious leaders and/or

Gada leaders go to the refused group and beg them for reconciliation by holding these *Chachu* and *Kallacha*. In the tradition, nobody could refuse these *ulfaa* objects, and if refused, he/she might be cursed. Therefore, these sacred objects, *Chachu* and *Kallacha*, have a great role in resolving serious conflicts like homicide, burning of homes, etc.

During the *Guddifacha* (adoption) ritual process, the child requesting family go to the family of the child with their elders by holding *Chachu* and *Kallacha*, to show their respect and also to promise the future well-being of the child (the requesting family promises to let grow up the child like their biological child by giving the necessary love and affection, whereas the giver family promises not remembers or not taking back that child and to give it to them based on the truth) and to assure and legalize the adoption process.

Challe: worn at the women's neck as a symbol of a female spirit and sacred object used to pray to that female spirit. The women wear the *Challe* at their neck during their spiritual ceremony, particularly on *Ateetee* ritual. The *Ateetee* ritual is a ritual which is dominantly celebrated by females as their spiritual ritual for the sake of human and cattle fertility. They also put the *Challe* on the neck of pregnant women during her delivery to decrease her pain in the name of the *Ateetee* spirit. According to *Obbo Chala Sori*, the Oromo assume that the *Ateetee* is the mother of the Oromo people. He said that, according to the Oromo legend, *Ateetee* was the wife of first man called *Horo* and the mother of his son *Oromo*. As a result, the women celebrate the *Ateetee* spirit as their spirit.

In addition, *Challe*, like *Chachu*, also symbolizes fertility and reconciliation. It is a little different from *Chachu*. *Challe* is made of very small beads with different colors that are attached together on a very thin and flexible rope that is comfortably worn around the neck. When a woman seems to be infertile, they put on her neck this *Challe* and pray to *Waqa* to give her a child. It also represents the fertility of the cattle for those who have cattle. Sometimes, it is also worn by women and girls for beauty reasons on different occasions.

Okole (traditional milk container) and *Gaadii* (a type of rope used to bind together the legs of cows during milking time): represent a symbol of prosperity in cattle possession.

Gaachana (Shield): another traditional object that may be held on the *Irecha* ritual celebration in particular and on other ritual celebrations in general. It is most of the time held by horsemen.

Traditionally, this object serves during war and it is held by soldiers to defend their enemies' and also to counter attack. Therefore, with relation to its services in the community, this object symbolizes the bravery of the community. Related to this brave behavior, there is a saying in Afaan Oromo that "*sodaattuun Gaachana hin qabattu*"- literally meaning "the coward does not hold a shield".

4.11 Significance of the *Irecha* Ritual

There are different benefits obtained from celebrating the *Irecha* ritual for Bishoftu town and the surrounding peoples in particular and for the whole Oromo community in general. The first significance of the *Irecha* ritual, according to *Obbo* Negesa Nagawo and *Obbo* Balay Shifara, is to visit each other. The transportation service which was serving the local community was pack animals like horse or mule. This day is not only bringing together the closest relatives, but also the many Oromo people meet on the *Irecha* ritual of the bright season at Hora Arsadi. It consolidates the relationship between the Oromo communities that dwell far away from each other (see also Hailu Ejersa 2009: 102).

The second main significance of the *Irecha* ritual is that it is a very important day for conflict resolution or to bring reconciliation between conflicting groups or individuals. Among the processes during the *Irecha* ritual, one is the system of '*Araaraa*' (literally meaning reconciliation process or resettling the conflicts). This "*Araaraa*" ritual is done before the blessing ritual is undertaken. Among the tasks of the "*Gaayyoo* Assembly" (General assembly of Gada) held at *Chaffee*, to be renewed a law of reconciliation has which is partly performed in this *Irecha* ritual.

On the *Irecha* ritual of the bright season held at Hora Arsadi the elders, or the *Abba Gada*, declare the reconciliation process for the individuals or groups in conflict to forgive each other before they are go praying and thanksgiving. The elders or the *Abba Gada* said that "*Waaqaaf jedhaa walitti araaramaa*" - literally meaning "Please forgive each other in the name of God" because of the disputants' fear that if they refuse the reconciliation, they may be cursed by *Waaqa*. Therefore, they forgive each other on this day.

During the fieldwork, I participated on one program prepared by the *Waaqeffanna* association, which was held in *Ganda Golbicha* at the home of the former *Abba Malka* of the area, *Obbo* Tadese Mul'ata. I stayed with them for half day. First of all, they have the program which says "*Gaaddisa Araaraa*" (literally meaning Shade of Reconciliation) and there is also a committee for this program

that includes three individuals. This *Gaaddisa Araaraa* committee came in front of the congregation and asked the question that says “*kan wal-loltan ykn kan walitti mufattan yoo jiraattan koottaa Araaramaa?*” literally meaning “the individuals who are in conflict or dispute, please come here and forgive one another for reconciliation?” Continually, the committee said that “*Waaqeffannaan jaalalaan beekama, haraarri negeenyaaf*” literally meaning “*Waaqeffanna* is known by love, reconciliation is for peace”.

But there were no individuals who stood up for reconciliation because the individuals in conflict hide themselves. Then the committee asked the congregation to give or tell them the names of individuals in conflict before they pass to the blessing ritual. As a result, one individual stood up from the congregation, went to the committee and told them secretly the name of two individuals in conflict. Then the committee called these two individuals. Firstly, they called *Guta* and *Gamachis*, and they came to the committee and forgave and kissed each other by standing in front of the congregation to testify their reconciliation. Then the committee additionally got secretly the names of two other individuals in conflict, *Firomsa* and *Ayyano*. Like the former ones, they were also brought in front of the congregation and forgave each other and asserted their reconciliation by kissing each other.

To assure and show their reconciliation, the committee had given them a bunch of grass and they kissed each other by holding the grass in their hands. Then the disputants said “we are in minor conflict, and now we have forgiven each other,” and the congregation witnessed their forgiving by saying “*elili*” - (a word used to reflect their happiness and also sometimes used to motivate during sing songs) and hand shaking for them. Following the same process, around 36 individuals, who were in conflict, have reconciled on that program. Finally, the *Gaaddisa Araaraa* committee concluded its program with blessing.

Picture 6: Previous *Abba Malka* with Young *Waaqeffanna* Followers’ Association members (photo by the researcher, taken in February, 2011)



The same is also true for the *Irecha* ritual held everywhere. Therefore, the *Irecha* ritual is very important for conflict resolution; it serves as the conflict resolution mechanism and the ritual celebration place is the place of reconciliation within the community.

Another significance obtained from the *Irecha* ritual is its tourism attraction. In the *Irecha* ritual, especially which is held at Hora Arsadi, there are a lot of tourists who come from the worldwide. It serves as tourism attraction ceremony in the country. With relation to its tourism attraction, Bishoftu town is the first and forefront beneficiary. For example, in 2003 E.C., approximately around 3-4 million people attended the *Irecha* ritual at Hora Arsadi. Therefore, Bishoftu town provides different services for the attendants of the ritual who came from across the world and is earned relatively large income. For instance, *Obbo* Chala Sori, one of the informants reported that on the *Irecha* ritual, Bishoftu town could get an income which might be greater than or equal with the annual income of the town. He said that "I understood from the individuals who came to our office and reported the income they got that day". According to his report, one woman reported to them that she got 50,000 Ethiopian Birr on that day from the selling of water by "highland plastics by cooling it in the refrigerator". She witnessed that as she never got that much income throughout the year as well as in her life. Another person reported to *Obbo* Chala that he got 6,000 Birr on that *Irecha* ritual celebration day from the selling of a meal prepared only from one sheep meat, what he had never got before in his life on one day. Whereas, another individual told him that he got 1000 Birr profit from the selling of traditional clothes, which he never got it in his life on one day. Therefore, *Obbo* Chala concluded by saying that the town is obtaining an income on the *Irecha* ritual celebration day which is equal or greater than the annual income of the town.

The *Irecha* ritual also serves as cultural promotion day. Each activity undertaken on the *Irecha* ritual shows the Oromo culture. It is also a good chance to recall the disappearing culture during the past autocratic regime and to revive the culture. Therefore, it facilitates the situation to show the Oromo culture to the tourists attending the ritual ceremony and to different worlds that watch and hear it through different local and international media. It introduces the Oromo people to other ethnic groups in general and to ethnic groups which are neighbors with the Oromo in Ethiopia specifically.

The *Irecha* ritual is also contributing to the fast urban infrastructural development of Bishoftu town. To accommodate the whole people coming from different parts of the region to celebrate this ritual

and the tourists who are coming to visit the ritual, the city administration motivated to develop urban facility which generated more income to the town. For example, *Adde Bachu* reported that most of coble stone roads within Bishoftu town were constructed during the eve of the last year *Irecha* ritual. The other urban development facilities like hotels, transport services, water supply of the town, etc. have been developed more fastly related to the *Irecha* ritual. It also facilitates and promotes different investment activities within the town and the surrounding villages.

The *Irecha* ritual is providing a great deal of contribution to the environmental protection in the Oromo indigenous culture. The place where the *Irecha* is celebrated is considered as the sacred place and each plant found on the area is also a sacred object. As a result, the community conserves the environment found around Hora Arsadi. For example, during my field work, I observed the area and it is a well conserved area and the area is covered with dense forest. Therefore, it is very easy to guess what is happening in terms of environmental protection, if there are a number of places like that of Hora Arsadi for the *Irecha* ritual celebration. Not only the *Irecha* ritual in Oromo culture contributes to environmental conservation, but in Oromo tradition, each has great respect for the surrounding nature, particularly large trees that serve for shade have been conserved since centuries.

Traditionally, the place served the community for naming ceremony for those who belief in *Waqqa* or in the traditional belief system. According to the informants report, this system of naming the newly born child seems to be decreasing currently; it may be because of the expansion of modern religious institutions like Christianity and Islam. But still, there are cases that use this occasion of the *Irecha* ritual at Hora Arsadi, for naming a child.

The *Irecha* ritual also gives a solution to those who are in problems, like health problem, lack of fertility and others. The individuals who are in trouble and believe in this system, come to Hora Arsadi and pray to *Waqqa* and also vow to give something if they receive what they want. Currently it also becomes the recreation center for different people. It also creates the best opportunity to transfer messages and teach the community different contemporary issues like about the HIV/AIDS disease.

4.12 Changes and Continuities of the *Irecha* Ritual

Before the introduction of “modern” religions like Christianity and Islam, the Oromo believed in *Waqqa*, but after the introduction of those religions, the Oromo religion and culture as a whole was

dominated and influenced by these religions. Among the inhabitants of the study area, the dominant religion is Orthodox Christianity. The religion was introduced to the area before a long period, through different mechanisms. Thus, since its introduction, it has continued to influence on the indigenous ritual practices including the *Irecha* ritual, based on its doctrine that discourages any ritual practices and belief system those have been held out of the church. The Islam religion has also the same influence on the indigenous ritual practices in the study area. Serious problems were faced by the Oromo people during the past autocratic regimes. Therefore, there are a number of changes and continuities that faces the Oromo culture in general and the *Irecha* ritual in particular.

The first problem faced by the Oromo culture in general, and the *Irecha* ritual in particular, was the political and religious domination of the Ethiopian past autocratic regimes. During the past regimes, the governors made proclamations that dominated and even tried to eradicate the indigenous religious systems and the administration system of *Gada* in general and the *Irecha* ritual in particular. On this, Hailu Ejersa (2009: 87) states that “the Amhara rulers despised the Oromo religion and forced the people to accept their own religion ... they cut down sacred trees, burned Galma, they also threw ritual beads into the river, and called the Oromo traditional religion as worthless”. For instance, according to key informants’ reports, Emperor Haile Selassie I declared that any indigenous ritual including the *Irecha* ritual at Hora Arsadi should not be observed. In light of this, Hailu Ejersa (2009: 94) explains that “Emperor Haile Silassie I was one of the prominent figures of the Solomonic dynasty who had suppressed the Oromo culture and religion”. Such problems also continued during the Derg regime. The *Irecha* ritual was officially forbidden and considered as backward culture (Hailu Ejersa (2009: 97). Thus, during Derg regime, it also continued to threat such traditional practices severely.

According to Hailu Ejersa (2009), the separation of Tulama and Macha Oromo was undertaken after the conquest of Oromo by Amhara rulers. He points out that “before the conquest, the *Tulama* and *Macha* Oromo were together and the community was entirely homogenous in almost every aspect of its life” (Hailu Ejersa 2009: 89). Most of the Oromo rituals in general and the *Irecha* in particular, tended to disappear after the conquest and were forgotten for a long period of time. Even the vestiges of the past culture observable today do not totally reflect the original ones, because most of its performance as well as its purposes are forgotten. This is the main problem existing these days concerning the *Irecha* ritual. As I think, the debate on the *Irecha* ritual originated from this past outside interference that resulted in the forgetting of the ritual. However, after the current

constitution has been formulated, the indigenous belief system or indigenous religion started to be revived in the region. But again, by fear of political problems, it again vanished. After a long struggle, some few years ago, the *Irecha* ritual started to be celebrated again at Hora Arsadi (informant; *Obbo* Nagasa Nagawo). During the past few years, it was celebrated at the regional level. Currently, especially the youngsters' focus on studying their culture and wish to become more acquainted with the indigenous beliefs and ritual practices.

Another main problem which faced the *Irecha* ritual celebration was that, for a long period of time, the people were celebrating this ritual without *ulfaa* and *Abba Malka*. The *Abba Malka* left the area as a result of the political conflicts with the central government and escaped to Gojjam for a long period of time. After a long period of search, they got that person and brought him to the area with too needed *ulfoo* in 1995 E.C. (Information of *Obbo* Chala Sori and Nagasa Nagawo). Then, when the *Abba Malka* returned from exile, he had forgotten the Afaan Oromo and was not able to bless the people in Afaan Oromo. According to the Oromo tradition, the *Abba Malka* should have a wife to hold/carry different *ulfoo* such as *Chachu*, *Kallacha* and *Challe*. The people got him married and slaughter a bull to bless his home. However, the *Abba Malka*, whom they brought from Gojjam, was not able to learn again the Afaan Oromo to bless the people and he also divorced from his wife, during the time she was pregnant, and he also showed some unexpected behavior in the community. As a result, the *Gada* assembly discussed the case and decided to change the *Abba Malka* of the area by proclamation and it then nominated a new *Abba Malka*. During the past two years, the *Irecha* ritual was led by the newly elected *Abba Malka*.

This process of reelecting the *Abba Malka*, if the first one is misbehaving, is known as "*Magarfachu*". It is the process through which the Oromo people redevelop their *Abba Malka* and also their *ulfoo*. When this *Magarfachu* process is undertaken, they reelect from their senior clan and from the clan of the first *Abba Malka*, the *Handa* clan.

However, I was informed that still that *ulfaa* is in the hands of the first *Abba Malka*. According to the Oromo culture, the *Abba Malka* should have to keep that *ulfaa* with great respect and reverence by yearly slaughtering cattle to that *ulfaa*. But, the changed *Abba Malka* has not fulfilled the requirements towards *ulfaa*. The *Gada* assembly is with ultimate authority in the Oromo culture. They have the power even to change an *ulfaa* and to develop another one.

However, *Obbo* Chala Sori and Alemayehu Hayile reported that this *Irecha* ritual celebration later resulted in problems between the governing party and the participants, especially young peoples' groups. Under the shade of the *Irecha* ritual, some groups started to mobilize a political strategy of the OLF (Oromo Liberation Front) by holding the flag of the OLF, and then it resulted in the revanishing of the *Irecha* ritual celebration by the Government. On the *Irecha* ritual, in the recent past, there was a fear that if the Oromo youth comes together for the ritual, the Government would perceive them as organized only for political purposes and not for celebrating the ritual. As a result, the Government repeatedly banned them from celebrating the *Irecha* ritual. Indeed, there were some groups who came to the *Irecha* ritual celebration mainly targeted for political movement. But currently, according to *Obbo* Negesa Nagawo, this political movement by the name "Waaqeffanna" is decreasing and the government also reduced its control on them. After the *Abba Gada* condemned them and said "a person who comes to the *Irecha* ritual for the purpose of his own political mobilization is a person who is struggling to eradicate the Oromo culture. A person, who names himself an Oromo, should have to stop his political mobilization on the *Irecha* ritual." Therefore, again with this consensus, it was allowed and started to be celebrated with more slender and colorful celebration than the first one. Currently, not only youths who celebrate the *Irecha* ritual but also elders, women, children and tourists who are coming from different parts of the world are taking part in the celebration.

Traditionally, every individual among the community knew the rules and regulation about their culture in general and the *Irecha* ritual in particular, but nowadays because of different factors, the knowledge about the *Irecha* ritual is confined to rare elders. This may hinder the future of this ritual and as a result creates different debates about it.

On the other hand, *Obbo* Shumi Dadhi said that currently the followers' of protestant religion is discouraging the traditional practices of the *Qaalluu*. He said that they insult them by saying that they are following and worshipping Setan. He also said that now they are more ashamed to practice their traditional practices for the fear of the Protestant's insults. This is asserted by Hailu Ejersa's (2009: 93) idea that "they have already converted most of the youth, the indigenous ritual practices of *Irecha* and other rituals are under high risk".

Obbo Bayana Sanbato, informant, reported that the activity currently performed at the Hora Arsadi, out of the annual ritual on each day, is not reflecting the culture of the Oromo; that it is alien to the

Oromo culture. But some people perceive it as Oromo culture. This is a misunderstanding of the Oromo culture in general and the *Irecha* ritual in particular. During my field work, I observed that there were a number of activities done at Hora Arsadi. For example, I observed on Saturday morning a small group of individuals who were celebrating the coffee ceremony under the *Oda* (sycamore) tree near Hora Arsadi. They put pieces of food under the tree and also dropped a kind of drink under the tree that they had before they drink it. *Obbo* Bayana Sanbato said that the Oromo eat and drink what they take to Hora Arsadi only on the *Irecha* ritual. Without the *Irecha* ritual the Oromo do nothing at Hora Arsadi.

The *Irecha* ritual is also perceived differently by different social groups due to a lack of appropriate awareness about the ritual. For example, the followers of different religions, such as Protestants, Muslims and Orthodox Christians perceived it as worshipping to the water body, rivers or to trees and categorize it as worshipping the nature. Indeed, this perception may be true for some individuals who are worshipping the Hora Arsadi and other trees seemingly representing the Oromo culture. But those individuals who do this do it only for their own sake and belief. According to the Oromo traditional religion and belief system, they do not worship nature as perceived by others, but only *Waaq*.

Different people come there from different places to bring their gifts. The informants also told me that there are a number of individuals who worship the area and who put different materials as a gift near the Hora Arsadi water body, the things they are putting near the Hora Arsadi are diluting the water and polluting the environment (e.g. pouring alcoholic drinks to the lake and throwing pieces of meal into the lake). This is a serious problem affecting the environment. Therefore, in addition to the problems related to the Hora Arsadi and the Oromo culture, there are also environmental problems in the area, which should be seriously controlled. Those individuals who worship the area in the name of the Oromo culture are those who have misunderstood the Oromo culture and have their own individual belief system. What they are doing in this area does not show the Oromo culture at all.

Another change facing the *Irecha* ritual is that traditionally the ritual was celebrated at Hora Arsadi without any cooperation and coordination. However, currently, it is celebrated in a modernized and more organized way. There are responsible bodies to organize and facilitate the celebration, starting from the government bodies to local responsible individuals.

Hailu Ejersa (2009: 101) notes that the emergence of modern education and technology in the rural study area have their own negative impact regardless of their positive aspects, especially by migrating the rural labor force to the urban centers for the sake of a better life. According to him, this migration, especially of young labor groups, may result in the change of the way of life, ideology, and religion, which overshadows the *Irecha* ritual in particular and traditional ritual practices of the Oromo in particular, and may result in decreasing the traditional ritual life. It may also result in the losing of the continuing generation in such traditional ritual life. On this, Hailu Ejersa (2009: 102) further notes that “it is worthnothing that some aspects of urbanization are enforcing change in the traditional ritual practice of *Irecha* and other beliefs systems”.

Additionally, Hailu Ejersa (2009: 103) states his fear for the future of Hora Arsadi, as the result of new resorts that are flourishing in and around the lakes and Horas in the study area. He states that “if these resorts are expanded, the ritual of *Irecha* would face problem”. During my fieldwork, I also faced the existence of this problem in the study area. For instance, I observed that as Hora Arsadi has two entrances: the first one is already occupied for recreational purposes and they charged some amount of money, as entrance fee, whereas only the second entrance is open for all. If it is given to the investors’ for the sake of investment, like the Kuriftu resort, the existence of the *Irecha* ritual at Hora Arsadi is underquestion.

The Contributing Factors to Its Renaissance

There are a number of contributing factors for the recent revival of the *Irecha* ritual celebration. Some of them are the following:

1. The first contribution that promotes the *Irecha* ritual celebration is the attention given to it by the Government, for different reasons, such as to develop the ritual and to make it the center of tourism attraction and also to ensure the freedom given to traditional practices. The *Irecha* ritual currently got more attention and acceptance from the Regional Government as well as from the Federal Government. For example, previously, there were no official people participating in the *Irecha* ritual; but since 2000 E.C., the government officials, the President of the region, and other officials have attended and participated in the *Irecha* ritual and they also spoke to the congregation.
2. The second contributing factor for the revival of the *Irecha* ritual is the technological developments. In the changes of *Irecha* ritual celebrations, for example, media and related

technologies and fast transportation services are contributing to the increasing participants of the celebration.

3. The third contribution to the enhancement of the *Irecha* ritual is the mass media. For example, among the mass media the magazine prepared once a year by the *Waaqeffanna* Committee about the *Irecha* ritual from 1992-95 E.C. was the leading one. This magazine promoted the *Irecha* ritual within the Oromo people widely across the region. The national and regional media like the program about the *Irecha* ritual that have been transmitted by television and radio are creating more awareness within the community about the ritual.
4. The fourth contribution to the recent evolution and revival of the *Irecha* ritual is the constitution of the country that promotes and allows any citizen to believe and follow any religion he/she wants and to practice traditional cultural practice of the regions and follow freely the religion what he/she likes. But, there is a claim on its application that sometimes it puts some requirements for the allowance and registration under ministry of justice and it is dependent on politics.
5. The fifth contribution is the development of community awareness towards local culture. As a result of mass media, magazines, news papers and different studies done on the Oromo culture in general and the *Irecha* ritual in particular, the community become more acquainted with its culture to practice it and to celebrate their ritual.

CONCLUSION

This study tried to investigate the *Irecha* ritual and its symbolic meanings, significance and value focusing on the Tulama Oromo in and around Bishoftu town. The study revealed that every activity performed by the Oromo people has its own symbolic significance and value within the framework of its culture. The practicing of the *Irecha* ritual has both manifest and latent functions for the Oromo community.

One of the major results of the study shows that the *Irecha* ritual is a ritual that is performed for different purposes rather than for one specific purpose. It is the ritual celebrated for thanksgiving, praying to *Waqqa* for health, peace and harmony among the people and also to nature, for rain, and surplus harvest. The *Irecha* ritual that is celebrated at the end of September is different in purpose with that of *Irecha Tullu*. The main purpose of *Irecha Tullu*, unlike *Irecha Malka*, is to beg for the normal rain during the next summer season.

The main purposes of *Irecha Malka* is one of thanksgiving to *Waqqa*, who helps the people during the dark summer season and who gives normal and expected rain, and also who shows them the grown plants of the seeds they planted during the summer season. And the other is celebrated as a result of their peaceful transfers from the old year to the new bright year as well as from the rainy season to the bright blossom season. Thus, it is the ritual that also celebrates the rite of passage from the old year to the New Year and from the rainy season to the bright dry season.

The study shows that the *Irecha* ritual is celebrated in a combination of religious and cultural paradigms. Most of the key informants agreed that it is a religious ritual (sacred ritual), whereas the majority of the respondents argued that it is a non-religious, cultural ritual (secular ritual). There are also some informants and respondents who said that it is the combination of both. This controversy on the *Irecha* ritual, whether a religious ritual or non-religious, cultural ritual, might have resulted from the political and religious domination which the Oromo people faced during the past different regimes and also the assimilation of indigenous belief systems to different religious beliefs, especially with the Christian religion, Islam and different other worldviews.

The *Irecha* ritual is playing a multi-dimensional role among the Oromo people in general and Oromo of Bishoftu and the surrounding in particular. It is a great ritual in creating inter-cultural collaboration by bringing together the Oromo people who have developed different cultures at the same place for the same purposes and also create close friendships between other ethnic groups and

the Oromo, on the *Irecha* ritual. It has also great role in creating harmonious relationship of human beings with their environment.

The *Irecha* ritual is currently becoming one among the well known tourist sites of indigenous ritual practices of the country, Ethiopia. Thus, it is the source of an income generating sector for the country, Ethiopia in general and the Oromo of Bishoftu in particular. The *Irecha* ritual also serves Bishoftu town as income generating sector, and urban infrastructural development.

The *Irecha* ritual is becoming the ritual which is used to promote Oromo culture in general and also is used to show the identity of the Oromo to a worldwide community.

There is a certain confusion among different groups of the society on the indigenous belief system of the Oromo, especially in regard to the relationship of the *Irecha* ritual and the *Qalluu* institution. According to the indigenous Oromo belief, *Qaalluu* is a religious institution that is assumed and believed to nominate the religious leader. It is also believed that it is endowed with more knowledge about the indigenous culture and cultural practices and has an intimate relationship with *Waqaa* to solve people's problems and to give advice to the Gada leaders, and also to the community as a whole. However, the youngsters of the area do not believe in the role of the *Qaalluu* in the Oromo tradition. Unlike in the traditional, indigenous belief, they perceive the *Qaalluu* as an "idol". But the elders believe in worshipping the *Qaalluu* as he is the intermediary between *Waqaa* and human beings, whereas the youths perceive it in a different way, and they believe in one *Waqaa*. According to the indigenous belief, *Ayyaannaa* is residing in a person, and then a person who gets that spirit is called "*Ayyaantuu*" (possessed by a benevolent spirit).

The study shows that currently, there are only a few *Qaalluu* that can be spiritually possessed, based on the truth that the Oromo believe in, rather there are a number of *Qaalluu* that are deceiving and confusing the community for the sake of personal benefits and privileges. Thus, the Gada leaders should take corrective actions on this issue to solve the problems related to the *Qaalluu* institution.

There are different cultural items that are held by the people on different occasions according to the social position of the individual in the Gada system. But presently, there is contravention of the rules and respects towards those cultural objects as a result of lack of appropriate awareness about the symbolic meanings of each cultural object. For example, according to the Oromo tradition and custom, in the Gada system, *Bokku* is only held by *Abba Gada* and it is his symbolic manifestation of having power. But recently, the *Bokku* started to be held by anybody, breaking the custom.

The study also shows that there is a problem that is created by a misunderstanding of the indigenous belief and worshipping system at Hora Arsadi. There are a people who are worshipping and believing in Hora Arsadi and also perceive it as god and powerful. This may create confusion that the Oromo believe in *Waaqa* or in nature like lakes, big trees, mountains, etc. and it also creates a negative connotation of the indigenous belief. According to the indigenous belief system, Oromo people only worship and believe in one *Waaqa*, the creator and master of all. However, presently, there are some people who are saying that *Waaqeffannaa* means believe and worshipping nature, and they start to perform activities that are not part of the culture and practice of the indigenous Oromo belief. Thus, there is an urgently need of corrective action to eradicate these erroneous activities, especially performed at Hora Arsadi.

There are some indications for the revival of the *Irecha* ritual. But there is also a lot of confusion concerning the *Irecha* ritual that might have resulted due to past political problems faced by the Oromo community. Therefore, this study cannot offer a conclusive argument. Further studies are required to verify and amplify the findings of the present study.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Guiding Questions for In-Depth Interviews

A. English Version

I. Personal Information

1. Name: _____
2. Age: _____
3. Sex: _____
4. Marital status: _____
5. Job: _____
6. Religion: _____

II. In-Depth Interview Questions

1. Do you know the traditional belief system of the Oromo community? Please would you tell me some relevant aspects for you personally, concerning this belief?
2. There are a number of gosa or clans in the Oromo community. Which types of gosa inhabit around and in Bishoftu town?
3. What types of indigenous social institutions or associations exist in this community and what are their roles in overall aspects of the society?
4. What are the ritual ceremonies that are practiced in this area? Would you tell me some of them?
5. Is there a special place for these ritual practices?
6. What does Irecha mean?
7. How is it performed, why and when is it practiced? How many times it conducted per year?
8. What is the purpose of the Irecha ritual: is it more for religious or secular purpose?
9. Would you think that this Irecha ritual is a religious ceremony? If you say that it is a religious ceremony, how can you interrelate it with the Oromo religion?
10. Is there any relationship between the Irecha ritual and the *Qaalluu* institution? If yes, how can they be interrelated?
11. To attend the ritual ceremonies, are there any criteria expected from the participants?

12. Are there any special objects that are held by the practitioners and participants during the Irecha ritual ceremony? And what do they signify or represent or what are their symbolic interpretations?
13. Is there any connection between the Irecha ritual and the Gada system?
14. Why has the Hora Arsadi (Bishoftu) been selected to be the official place for the Irecha ritual?
15. Are there other places where this Irecha ceremony could be conducted out of Hora Arsadi?
16. What are the benefits obtained from practicing as well as attending an Irecha ritual?
17. Who can practice this Irecha ritual? Is there equal gender participation?
18. How can women participate in the Irecha ritual and what are their roles in this ritual practice?
19. What are the changes and continuities facing the ritual practice of the Oromo community in general and the Irecha in particular?

B. Afaan Oromo Version

I. Odeeffannoo Dhuunfaa

1. Maqaa: _____
2. Umurii: _____
3. Saala: _____
4. Sadarkaa gaa'ila: _____
5. Gita hojii: _____
6. Amantii: _____

II. Gaaffiwwan Qorannichaa

1. Waa'ee ittiin bultee aadaa oromoo beektaa? Yoo beekte wanta barbaachisaa dha jettu hanga beektu natti himtaa?
2. Uummanni oromoo gosa hedduu qaba. Kanaafuu, gosa isa kamtu baay'inaan magaalaa Bushooftuu fi naannoo ishee jiraata?
3. Gosaawwan waldaa aadaa kan ta'an ykn gumiiwwan adda addaa naannoo kana jiran maalifaati? Gaheen isaan waliigala uummataaf qaban hoo maalinni?
4. Kabajni ayyaana adda addaa naannoo kanatti kabajaman ykn gaggeeffaman maalifaati?
5. Kabajaawwan ayyaana kanaatiif bakki addatti beekamaa ta'ee fi filatamaa ta'e jiraa?
6. Irreecha jechuun maali jechuu dha?

7. Akkamitti, yoom fi maaliif kabajama ykn raawwatama? Waggaattis yeroo meeqa kabajama? Yeroo kabajamuus maali sababa godhateeti?
8. Kaayyoon kabaja ayyaana Irreechaa maali? Amantiidhaaf moo amantii kan hin taane aadaa oromootiif?
9. Ayyaanni Irreechaa kun ayyaanaa amantiiti jettee yaadaa? Yoo ayyaana amantiiti jette, amantii oromoo waliin akkamitti wal-arga ykn wal-qabata?
10. Walitti dhuufenyi ayyaana Irreechaa fi Qaalluu jiddu jiru jiraa? Yoo jiraaate walitti dhuffeenyi ykn wali-quunnamtiin isaan qaban maali?
11. Kabaja ayyaana Irreechaa hordufuuf ykn irratti hirmaachuuf wanti hirmaattota irraa eegamu jiraa? Yoo jiraaate maalifaati?
12. Meeshaaleen adda addaa gaafa guyyaa ayyaana Irreechaa gaggeessittoonnii fi hirmaattootaan qabataman ni jiruu? Yoo jiraatan akka aadaa orommootti maali agarsiisu ykn maali bakka bu'u ykn immoo mallattummaan isaanii maalifaati?
13. Walitti dhufeenyi ayyaanaa Irreechaa fi sirni gadaa qabu maali?
14. Horri Arsadii (Bushoofuutti kan argamu) sababa maaliitiif bakka beekkamaa fi filatamaa kabaja ayyaana Irreecha ta'uun filatame?
15. Hora Arsadiin ala bakki kabajni ayyaana Irreecha itti adeemsifamu ni jiraa? Yoo jiraaate essafaati?
16. Faayidaan ayyanaa Irreechaa raawwachuu akkasumas hirmaaachuu irraa argamu maalifati?
17. Namni ayyaana Irreechaa kana gaggeessu fi raawwatu eenyu dha? Hirmaannaan wali-qixxuummaa saalaa ni jiraa?
18. Dubartootni haala kamiin ayyaana Irreechaa keessatti hirmaatu? Akkasumas gaheen isaan ayyaana Irreechaa keessatti qaban maali fakkaata?
19. Jijjiramni ayyaanaa oromo muudate waliigalatti ni jiraa? Akkasumas kan ayyaanaa irreechaa muudatehoo?

Appendix B: Research Questionnaire

A. English version

I. Personal Information

1. Age: _____
2. Sex: A. male B. Female
3. Marital status: A. Single B. Married C. Divorced
4. Educational Background:
 - A. Illiterate
 - B. Elementary school complete
 - C. Secondary school complete
 - D. College certificate
 - E. College diploma
 - F. Bachelor degree
 - G. Above bachelor degree
5. Religion:
 - A. Orthodox Christian
 - B. Protestant Christian
 - C. Catholic Christian
 - D. Islam
 - E. If other, please specify _____
6. Occupation:
 - A. Civil servant
 - B. Farmer/Housewife
 - C. Business/businesswoman
 - D. Daily laborer
 - E. If other please specify _____
7. Ethnicity: _____

II. Research Questions

Select and encircle from the given alternatives those that fit your own choice and write the detail of your responses for open ended options and questions.

1. Have you some hints about the *Irecha* ritual?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
2. If your response is "yes" for question number 1, please write your understanding about the *Irecha* ritual.

3. Have you ever participate in an Irecha ritual?
 A. Yes B. No
4. If your response is "yes" for question number 3, for what purpose have you participated in it?
 A. For non-religious traditional (cultural) purpose
 B. For religious purpose or to worship
 C. For tourism or recreation purpose
 D. If other, please specify _____
5. Would you think that the Irecha ritual has some significance for the local community?
 A. Yes B. No
6. If your response is "yes" for question number 5, please list down the main importance that the local community gains from the Irecha ritual celebration.

7. Do you think that there are any differences between the current Irecha ritual celebration and previous ones?
 A. Yes B. No
8. If your response is "yes" for question number 7, please specify those differences.

9. Does the Irecha ritual invite female participation in the practices and attending equally with males?
 A. Yes B. No
10. If your response for question number 9 is "yes", what are the roles of female participants in the Irecha ritual practice? Please illustrate some main roles of females in this ritual practice.

A. Afaan Oromo Version of the Questionnaire

I. Odeeffannoo Dhuunfaa

Gaaffiiwwan armaan gaditti kennamaniif kan deebii yaadaa keenyaa ta'a jettan filachun deebii isatti maraa.

1. Umurii: _____
2. Saala: A. Dhiira B. dhalaa
3. Sadarkaa gaa'ilaa: A. hin fuune B. fuudhe C. fuudhee kan hiike
4. Sadarkaa barumsaa:
 - A. Dubbisuu fi barreessuu kan hin dandeenye E. Diplooma koollejjii kan qabu
 - B. Sadarkaa tokkoffaa kan xumure F. Digrii jalqabaa kan qabu
 - C. Sadarkaa lammaffaa kan xumure G. Digrii jalqabaatii ol kan qabu
 - D. Sertifikeetii koollejjii kan qabu
5. Amantii:
 - A. Kiristaana Ortodoksii E. Musliima
 - B. Kiristaana Proteestantii F. Kan biro yoo ta'e barreessi _____
 - C. Kiristaana Kaatoolikii
6. Gita hojii:
 - A. Hojjetaa mootummaa D. Hojjetaa guyyaa (dafqaan bulaa)
 - B. Qotee bulaa E. Kan biro yoo ta'e barreessi _____
 - C. Daldaalaa
7. Saba: _____

II. Gaaffiiwwan Qorannichaa

Gaaffiiwwan armaan gaditti kennamanii fi kan filannoo qabaniif, kan deebii yaadaa keenyaa ta'a jettan filachun deebii isatti maraa. Kan bakka duwwaa ta'aniif immoo yaadaa mataa keessanii bakka duwwaa kenname irratti barreessuun deebisaa.

1. Waa'ee ayyaana Irreechaa odeeffannoo ta'e qabdaa?
 - A. Eeyyen, qaba B. Lakki, hin qabu
2. Yoo deebiin kee gaaffii lakoofsa 1 "eeyyen" kan jedhu ta'e; waa'ee ayyaana Irreechaa waan beektu fi barbaachisaa dha kan jettu, akka mataa keetti gabaabsii barreessi.

-
-
3. Hanga ammaatti kabaja ayyaana Irreechaa irratti hirmaattee beektaa?
A. Eeyyen, hirmaadheera B. Lakki, hin hirmaanne
4. Yoo deebiin kee gaaffii lakoofsa 3 “eeyyen” kan jedhu ta’e; kaayyoo maaliitiif hirmaachuu dandeesse?
A. Waan ayyaana amantii oromoo ta’eef ykn waaqeffachuuf
B. Waan ayyaana aadaa ykn duudhaa oromo ta’eef
C. Bashannanaaf ykn do’annaaf
D. Kan biro yoo ta’e barreessi
5. Ayyaanni Irreechaa kun faayidaa ummata naannoof qaba jettee yaadda?
A. Eeyyen, faayidaa qaba B. Lakki, faayidaa hin qabu
6. Yoo deebiin kee gaaffii lakoofsa 5 “eeyyen” kan jedhu ta’e; faayidaa inni qabu hanga beektu barreessi.
-
-
7. Kabaja ayyaana Irreechaa yeroo ammaaf kan durii jidduu garaagarummaan jira jettee yaadda?
A. Eeyyen, garaagarummaan jira B. Lakki, garaagarummaan hin jiru
8. Yoo deebiin kee gaaffii lakoofsa 7 “eeyyen” kan jedhu ta’e; garaagarummaa jiru hanga beektu barreessi.
-
-
9. Ayyaanni Irreechaa hirmaannaa dubartootaa wal-qixa gochaawwan adda addaa ayyaana Irreechaa fi hordoffii ayyaanichaa keessatti dhiiraa waliin qixa affeeraa?
A. Eeyyen, walqixa affeera B. Lakki, waliqixa hin affeeru
10. Yoo deebiin kee gaaffii lakoofsa 9 “eeyyen” kan jedhu ta’e; gaheen dubartootaa ayyaana Irreechaa keessatti maalifaa akka ta’e hanga beektu barreessi.
-
-
-

Appendix C: Description of Key Informants

1. *Obbo* Negesa Nagawo Badhadha is the previous Abba Gada Tulama and the current Abba seeraa (Law Father) and law advisor of Abba Gada. He is 60 years old. He lives in Liban Chuqqala District, Adulala Town, 01 Kebele. He has an elementary level education and can write and read in Amharic. He has a remarkable rhetoric skill about the indigenous Oromo culture. He is a farmer and also merchant.
2. *Obbo* Balay Shifara Teka is the Guard of Hora Arsadi and plant conservator of the Hora Arsadi (for 17 years). He is 55 years old. He lives in Bishoftu town. He has eight children and his religion is Orthodox Christianity and *Waaqeffannaa*.
3. *Obbo* Chala Sori is a worker in Bishoftu Town Administration in Culture and Tourism Office and the head of the technical supporting and controlling of culture and tourism organization, sub-section of the office, and he is also member of the present Gada Tulama. He is 53 years old. He lives in Bishoftu town, 02 kebele. He is a researcher on the traditional Oromo culture. He has three children and is followers of *Waaqeffannaa*.
4. *Adde* Bachu Fenta is the personnel at Ada'a district administration in culture and tourism office, she is the head of culture and tourism resources study sub-section. She is 33 years old. She is the followers of the Protestant religion.
5. *Obbo* Alemayehu Hayile is worker at Oromiya Regional State in Culture and Tourism Office and team leader of the historian and he is also a researcher of the Oromo history. He lives in Addis Ababa city.
6. *Obbo* Shumi Dadhi is an elderly man of 66. His family depends on farming agriculture. He interprets his religion as believe in *Qaalluu*. He lives in Garbicha rural peasant association, Ada'a district.
7. *Obbo* Tadesse Mul'ata is the previous abba Malka of the area. He is 58 years old. Currently he is the employee of East Africa Factory. He lives in Golbicha rural peasant association, Ada'a district. He lives according to the indigenous Oromo culture. The sacred object (ulfaa) called *Kallacha* of the area is found on his hand. He is a person who was on exit for a long period of time in Gojjam to escape from the autocratic ruler of the period by holding the sacred object. He

returned back to the area in 1995, after 27 years exile, after a long period trial of the community to returning him to the area. Currently, he is speaking little Afaan Oromo language.

8. *Obbo* Warqu Sida an elderly man aged 80 years. His family is based on farming agriculture. He lives in Golbicha rural peasant association, Ada'a district. He is the followers of *Waaqeffannaa* religion and he lives according to the indigenous Oromo culture.
9. *Obbo* Bayana Sanbato is 50 years old. He is the current Abba Gada Tulama. He lives in Qurqura and Dembi rural peasant association, Ada'a district. He has completed his secondary level education. His family pursues farming agriculture. He is the manager of the rural peasant association where he lives in. His religion is Orthodox Christianity and he lives according to the indigenous Oromo culture. He is a knowledgeable person about the indigenous laws and culture of the Oromo Tulama.
10. *Adde* Zinash Kebede is 40 years old. She lives in Bishoftu town, 01 *Kebele*. She lives according to the indigenous Oromo culture. She is a merchant and hotel owner in Bishoftu town, Kebele 01. She is follower of *Waaqeffannaa*.
11. *Obbo* Asefa Waqtola Guluma is 42 years old. He lives in Bishoftu town, 02 *Kebele*. He works in Awash International Bank, Bishoftu Branch. He is follower of *Waaqeffannaa*.
12. *Obbo* Dabebe Girma is the current Abba Muda of Gada Tulama. He is 43 years old. He pursues farming agriculture. He lives in Udee rural peasant association. He is the followers of both Orthodox Christianity and *Waaqeffannaa*.

Appendix D: List of Key Informants and Places of Contact

No.	Name	sex	Age	Job	Place of contact
12	Alemayehu Hayile (<i>Obbo</i>)	M		Worker of Oromiya Regional State, Culture and Tourism Bureau	OCTB
5	Asefa Waqtola Guluma (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	42	AIB, Bishoftu Branch	AIB, Bishoftu Branch
4	Bachu Fenta (<i>Adde</i>)	F	33	worker of Culture and Tourism Office of Ada'a District	ADCTO
2	Balay Shifara Teka (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	55	Guard	Hora Arsadi
8	Bayana Sanbato (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	50	Farmer + Abba Gada Tulama	Abba Gada Tulama Office
3	Chala Sori (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	53	Member of Gada Tulama and worker of Culture and Tourism Office of Bishoftu Town	BTCTO
6	Dabebe Girma (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	43	Farmer + Abba Muda	Abba Gada Tulama Office
1	Negesa Nagawo Badhadha (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	60	Farmer + merchant	Adulala town
11	Shumi Dadhi (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	66	Farmer	Tadese Mul'ata home, Golbicha rural Kebele,
10	Tadese Mul'ata (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	58	Worker in industry + previous Abba Muda	Tadese Mul'ata home, Golbicha rural Kebele
9	Warqu Sida (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	80	Farmer	Tadese Mul'ata home, Golbicha rural Kebele
7	Zinash Kebede (<i>Adde</i>)	F	40	Merchant	Abba Gada Tulama Office

Appendix E: List of FGD Informants and Places of Contact

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Job	Place	Religion
1	Abishu Obse (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	31	Farmer	Bishoftu	Waaqeffannaa
2	A dugna Hirpho (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	28	Artist	Bishoftu	Waaqeffannaa
3	Asagido (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	39	Civil servant	Bishoftu	Orthodox
4	Bachu Fenta (<i>Adde</i>)	F	33	Civil servant	Bishoftu	Protestant
5	Bekuma Dabale (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	26	Civil servant	Bishoftu	Protestant
6	Chala Sori (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	53	Civil servant	Bishoftu	Waaqeffannaa
7	Daraje Getacho (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	25	Civil servant	Bishoftu	Orthodox
8	Desita Gemeda (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	57	Civil servant	Bishoftu	Orthodox
9	Dinsire Shifaraw (<i>Adde</i>)	F	43	Civil servant	Bishoftu	Protestant
10	Elsa Asafa (<i>Adde</i>)	F	27	Civil servant	Bishoftu	Orthodox
11	Fromsa Kebede (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	23	Farmacist	Bishoftu	Waaqeffannaa
12	Getacho Bajjiga (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	32	Civil servant	Bishoftu	Orthodox
13	Hanbisa Gonfa (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	25	Civil servant	Bishoftu	--
14	Melkame Tanashe (<i>Adde</i>)	F	27	Civil servant	Bishoftu	--
15	Nawal Mohammed (<i>Adde</i>)	F	26	Civil servant	Bishoftu	Muslim
16	Ragasa Chalchisa (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	28	Civil servant	Bishoftu	Waaqeffannaa
17	Reta Negera (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	53	Civil servant	Bishoftu	Orthodox
18	Roba Nagu (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	29	Secretary for Abba Gada office	Bishoftu	Waaqeffannaa
19	Selamawit Mulatu (<i>Adde</i>)	F	27	Civil servant	Bishoftu	Orthodox
20	Tadase Balda (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	40	Civil servant	Bishoftu	Orthodox
21	Tadase Lama (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	30	Civil servant	Bishoftu	Waaqeffannaa
22	Teshome Waqayo (<i>Obbo</i>)	M	50	Civil servant	Bishoftu	Protestant

Appendix F: Photos (taken by the researcher during the fieldwork)

Picture 1: Some of the key informants at *Ganda* Golbicha, local elder and at Bishoftu town and Ada'a District culture and tourism offices



Picture 2: Some of the Members of FGDs



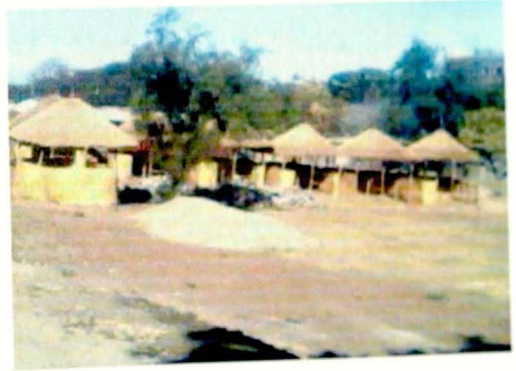
Picture 3: Gathering of Gada Tulama Members



Picture 4: Some of the *Waaqeffannaa* association members



Picture 5: Office of Abba Gada Tulama



Picture 6: The Researcher and his friends under the oda tree near Hora Arsadi



DECLARATION

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

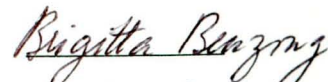
Name Bayissa Negesa Faye

Signature 

Date 11/11/2011

This thesis has been submitted with my full approval as the advisor.

Brigitta Benzing (professor)

Signature 

Date 11.11.2011

