CHAPTER-5

MORAL CONCERNS FOR OTHERS AND ONESELF

Morality is said to be the visible indicator of human culture as well as the mirror of the nature of the individuals and peoples. It is considered as the universal measure of the spiritual and cultural perfection of the human subject as the supreme goal and absolute value. It is by knowing a person’s morals that one can best understand him or her. There is a body of opinion that undergirds the idea that respect for human life, interest, right; dignity, freedom and development are the central concerns of morality. Seen in that perspective, the Oromo people have safuu for the respect of these values. At the same time, the human properties of mind, speech, work, creativity, aesthetic attitudes, laughing, desires, will, temperament, and conscience undergo historically determined changes which differ in their cultural meaning. This raises the concrete question of the nature and main characteristics of moral culture. Accordingly, this chapter is purported to show the application of the principles entailed in safuu, so to say, the Oromo moral diktat attempts to bring to light as to how the principles of safuu are applied to the human relationships and interactions. Thus, the first part of the chapter deals with how Oromo treat others, the second is concerned with how the Oromo were treated by others, and the third part is intended to show the reaction of the Oromo against the unfair treatment.

5.1. How do Oromo Treat Others?

It is appropriate to first raise the question, how Oromo would like to be treated by others? This would make the evaluation of the moral quality of their actions and behaviours easy. Certainly they would like to be treated humanely, fairly, compassionately, equally, honestly, sincerely, etc. In other words, “Just like any other people Oromo would also like to be treated with the best possible respect. Because respect is the inalienable desire of mankind.” (Chaalaa) Would they also like to treat others the way they would prefer to be treated? This is the theme of the following series of topics. We begin with the moral life of Oromo families, where the relations and treatments are very immediate and intimate.

5.1.1. Families and their Moral Life

Families are the basic units of Oromo society. There are relationships between the members of each family and among different families. Every member in a family stands in a certain relation to the other member. One could be a husband or wife, father or mother,
brother or sister, son or daughter to the other. Standing in certain relation means treating others, or being treated by them. It is safuu that more governs the relationship and treatment of family members than legal rules. The caring, sharing and loving attitude that one has towards the other is understood and explained in terms of safuu. Safuu plays an important role in shaping or cultivating a desirable character trait in the family members and in guiding their ways of acting towards one another. Since families are formed mainly through marital life, it is imperative to consider what moral value does marriage carry for the Oromo society.

5.1.2. Oromo Concept of Marriage

Marriage is one of the most important moral institutions, whereby the question of doing right or wrong, good or bad first takes its root. Its formation involves treatment. The couples treat each other. They also treat others. It is imperative to examine how moral this treatment is. It may show what strength or weakness the morality of a certain society has. “Marriage is more or less a lasting relationship between at least one male and one female that extends beyond the conception and bearing of children [if, indeed, there are children]. (Grcic, 1989: 240) It is found at the heart and root of any society. The moral standing of family members immensely influences the attitude and behaviour of the given society.

What value does the Oromo society ascribe to marriage? In his attempt to explain the moral value of marriage Dagaaga maintains: Fuudhaaf heerumni, marriage in the Oromo society, is believed to be an important social institution that brings the two opposite sexes into unity for the purpose of making them have one single life sustained by two pillars. Opposite sexes need each other, because one without the other is meaningless. I can say a husband and a wife are two persons with one soul, since one lives in the other. Borbor also holds that in Oromo society husband and wife are two individuals in one soul. When one is in discomfort, the other feels pain; in contrast when one feels joy the other also shares it. This is really the case because they share the same soul. Thus we Oromo value marriage as one of the most important and basic institutions, in which one takes care of the other. It is an institution of love, respect and personal development.

According to these two informants, marriage makes the two partners complete in one. Oromo elders believe that unmarried woman and unmarried man are incomplete individuals. Since man without wife or a woman without husband is not a full person marriage makes the life of a couple complete by supplying the missing link. The essence of being a social being lies to some extent in being a husband and a wife. It is a married person who has a moral
responsibility more than the unmarried one. In connection to this Doyyo comments, “Oromo attribute high value to marriage. I do not think that man lives as a human without it.” Melise on his part reports, “According to our Gada, husband and wife are coupled not only to exchange sexual pleasure but more importantly to share all the benefits and burdens of life. They rise and fall together. They share joy and pain.” Almost all informants believe that in marriage the couples are not two rather one – because one is in the other walkeesa jiru. Marriage, in their view, fulfils life and hence it is more satisfying than lonely life.

What is the purpose of marriage exactly? For many informants the purpose is procreation, and for others procreation is the secondary effect, not the ultimate purpose. Still there are others who argue that the purpose of marriage cannot be explained in terms of one or two things, for it serves many good purposes. The following response of Chaalaa more or less reflects the positions of the other informants. Marriage has many purposes to serve. Apparently we need a person of opposite sex for our biological urge. This urge seems to be the main thread that ties the two sexes together. In actual fact, this can even be satisfied without getting married. For that matter, this is not the specific feature of humans. Thus marriage has some more social, moral, generational and cultural purposes to serve. Humanity needs it because it helps life to flourish across all aspects of activities. That is the reason why it is highly respected in Oromo culture.

Another informant considers the purpose of marriage from a different perspective. “Maatin han'dhuuraf bu 'ura haawaasaa ti, a family is the heart and root of a society. It is around this nucleus i.e., family that the society keeps developing itself.” (Tamiru) Indeed marriage is the frame of all relations and interrelations. Almost all people of all knowledge, professions, capacities and qualities have come through this social and moral institution. But why marriage is believed to be an important moral institution? Informants responded in various ways. In particular Dagaagaa says, Waaqa, god created humans with biological needs such as hunger, thirst, sex, etc. He also created us as women and men purposefully for each other. Humans are created with a desire that makes the two opposite sexes need one another. Thus god likes us to live in union and continue life and generation through it. In having each other, men and women get not only sexual satisfaction but also they procreate their own kind. Even after our death we will continue to live in our children, grand children, etc. as our parents, grandparents do still live in us.
Individuals die but life continues through the chains of generations. This makes marriage a moral and sacred institution. The position of Jaatanii makes this point more clear and secular. Marriage is a legal and moral institution, in which two human individuals who have interests, rights, freedom and dignity are intermingled. These are values that are derived from human values. Each partner has value that the other partner ought to respect. The ceera, moral norm of our tradition makes us to respect each other. Wives and husbands may be different in interest, perception, attitude, activities, capabilities, etc. and as a result a clash may arise between them. But ceera makes them to have mutual understanding and tolerance. It is a moral institution at where we learn what is right or wrong, good or bad; and it is also where we always apply this knowledge.

According to many of the informants morality has more weight than legal mechanism in the management of marital life. Actions, reactions, interactions and behaviours of the married couples are more accessible to the moral judgment than they are to the legal institutions. It is the moral judgment or discretion of the partners that decisively govern the actions they perform and the behaviours they exhibit towards each other. Dorsis comments, “In marital life mutual understanding is incontestably important. Marriage is more a sacred ties and a moral bond than a legal relationship.” When many of their private affairs fall outside the reach of public institutions what one partner does to or for the other is always under the purview of moral judgment. There are no details of problems of life beyond the domain of moral order. This is why the Oromo informants consider marriage as moral institution.

Stuffed by various biological, psychological, social and economic desires, ambitions and temptations, marriage could be challenged by egoistic inclinations. Morality safeguards it, by making the couples to keep the virtues like truth, promise, fidelity, honesty, affection, care and respect for one another. “In Oromo society,” Dewo maintains, “marriage has strong safuu. It is this safuu that keeps it from being threatened by infidelity, lie, dishonesty, promise breaking, stealing, promiscuity and the like.” In general, according to the tradition of Oromo, the moral quality of marriage lies in its desirability. It is presumed to satisfy the desires of the couples and the society. It answers and solves the biological, human, economic, moral and social questions and problems, and as a result it bears a certain degree of satisfaction to the parties involved. Taken from this angle it is an important institution of safuu.
Recognizing the value of marriage, protecting and respecting it by itself is moral. Indeed, this is what Oromo shares in common with all mankind in the world. The point however is establishing whether or not all the different kinds of marriage are moral. The way the human quality of those who are involved in it is taken care is the most crucial. In some cultures marriage is a simple contract that two individuals enter into, and may breakup in a simple way when the affinity of the two partners loses ground. In some other cultures it is a strong and serious institution. In Oromo culture, it has relatively a firm root that cannot easily be uprooted. Its strength mainly emanates from the vital moral value that society attributes to it, and it is this value that keeps it from easily breaking.

The history of the world witnesses that there were and are different kinds of marriage. Although humanity apparently appreciates monogamy as morally desirable one, there are other forms marriage such as polygamy and polyandry in different parts of the world. In the Oromo society traditionally both monogamous and polygamous marriage are permissible. But what does Gada say about this? Chaalaa reports that Gada does not teach or recommend either monogamy or polygamy. It does not judge that ‘this’ or ‘that’ type of marriage is morally desirable or undesirable. We observe that both monogamy and polygamy are being practiced in Oromo society. Even the Abba Gadas could marry two or more wives. It is the economic status of the husband that has a decisive role in limiting the number of wives. No husband is praised or blamed for being either monogamous or polygamous. He receives a serious blame only if he fails to materially support and fairly treat his wives. But the same does not hold true for women – the society does not permit them to have more than one husband at a time.

In polygamy and more specifically polygyny more than one female are engaged to one husband simultaneously through marriage. This type of marital life, in Oromo society, is practiced very widely among the followers of the traditional religion and Islam. Some followers of Christianity also practice it although they are not as many as Waaqefflatota or Muslims. The important questions that a rational mind, however, raises are why one needs to marry several wives at a time? Can he treat all the wives fairly and equally? At least can he meet their biological urges? According to the contention of Chaalaa polygamy seems to be immoral, but it has not come into practice without sound reason.
The following is the account about the polygamous practices of Borana and Guji Oromo based on the narration given by Doyyo, Borbor, Chaalaa and Jaatanii. In Borana and Guji the major reason why a man marries more than one wife are three. One is the ‘failure’ of the first wife to bear a child. Traditionally if a couple is unable to get a child the problem is always attributed to the wife. No one has the least doubt that the husband could also be the cause for the problem. The second reason pertains to the management of herds. When the number of the heads of cattle increases one wife alone cannot afford to milk and take care of all the cows. This is a clear indication that the husband has adequate wealth to support more than one wife, and the present wife needs another wife who can support her. Thus a husband can marry as many wives as possible depending on the number of heads of cattle he owns, and on his wisdom of fair treatment. The third reason for the practice of polygamous marriage is more of historical. According to the narration of the above named informants in the history of the Oromo people, there was time when women outnumbered men. This left women unmarried. For Oromo unmarried women or men are incomplete. It is believed that it also gives rise to many other social problems. This necessitated for an Oromo man to get married to more than one wife at a time. Probably it was out of this necessity that marrying more than one wife for a husband, and having one common husband for wives arose.

Polygamy is a controversial subject particularly from moral viewpoint. [For that matter, monogamy itself is a debatable one although it is generally considered as the desirable.] Is polygamy a kind of marriage that equally and fairly treats both the husband and the wives? Do the wives have as much right, dignity and freedom as their husband does? One can get mixed feelings when the moral quality of this practice is critically analyzed. Apparently it entails moral goodness in one sense and moral badness in another sense. When polygyny addresses some of the problems that the wives encounter it becomes more moral than immoral. We can take for example the wife who fails to give birth to a child. Generally, in Oromo society, when a wife faces such a problem in most cases her marital life is threatened with dissolution. In Borana and Guji, however, such problem does not threaten the wife’s marital life although it causes her a feeling of discomfort and un-fulfilment.

In both Borana and Guji children are the sources of honour for the wives. A lack of child is tantamount to disgrace. The wife feels that she is dishonoured for her failure to bear a child. As Legesse (1973: 18) witnesses, “The Borana woman wants children more than
anything else in the world...” This chronic problem of a ‘barren’ wife could be settled when the first born son by the second marriage is adopted to her. It is the moral duty of the husband, the second wife and the family in general to offer the first born son of the second wife to the senior wife (presumed infertile). This makes not only her feel comfort but also all the other parties feel honoured.

The other moral goodness of polygamy, in the context of Borana and Guji, lies in the care and concern for the well being of the wives. The husband who wants to marry more than one wife should make himself sure that he has adequate wealth to support all the wives equally and fairly. This is not left to the discretion of the husband alone. It is also the moral obligation of the concerned families, communities or clans to take care of it. The wives should not suffer from poverty and malnutrition because of the miscalculation and excessive ambition of the husband.

Polygamy could further be considered moral when men commit themselves to marry more than one wife in the time when the number of women outbalances the number of men. If their number denies them the right and opportunity to have monogamous marriage, then the only left marital alternative is polygamy. Polygamous arrangements “developed in cultures that experienced a scarcity of one or the other sexes so that one- on- one paring was not possible.” (Grcic, 1989: 241) Although it may not be as satisfactory as monogamy is, it is by far better than remaining without getting married. “… a community with a preponderance of females over males may have a rule permitting polygamy” (Pojman, 2005: 80). In support of this A.C. Grayling also says, “Polygamy is the logical choice wherever women outnumber men.” (Grayling, 49) In a situation where there are no other alternatives, doing only what is possible is the way out, and hence it is moral in a specific situation. On the basis of mentioned reasons we say polygamy is justifiable. But it is worth noting that the same is not true of polyandry even if the same conditions that necessitate it (polyandry) are there.

Can we say that the polygamous practices of Borana and Guji are free of moral vices? Does a wife have the right of being treated as much as her husband does? What a woman as a wife needs from her husband is not only material provisions but also other physical, psychological and spiritual comfort. In other words, as a human she needs other things such as care, love, respect and comforts of diverse sorts. How one husband, in polygamous ties, avails himself to the needs of his wives at the same time?
The polygamous marriage practiced in West Shawaa, Wallagaa, Jimmaa and Hararghe is less considerate to women than the one practiced in Borana and Guji. In the first place in these regions people do not have as good reasons to pursue polygamous marriage as the Oromo of Borana and Guji do. One reason that they usually cite is the failure of bearing a child that very often is accounted against the wife. The second reason is religious belief. Followers of Islam claim that they are allowed to marry as many as four wives. In deed not only Muslims but also those who claim to be Christians themselves do it. The practice is pursued without taking into account the economic resource of the husband. Even if he has that capacity the husband may not be morally bound to fairly distribute resources to his wives. For various reasons some get the lion’s share and others less. Many informants unanimously agree that the most families engaged in polygamous marriage, in these Oromo communities, have precarious life. Some wives together with their children might have been left to the uncaring and wanton treatment of their husbands. The basic problem is that the Oromo men of these regions have abandoned some of the human values entailed in the Oromo sa’iyya or traditions.

In Borana and Guji where the indigenous values and culture are dominant there is more moral concern and care for women, whereas in West Shawaa, Wallagaa, Jimmaa and Haraghee where the exotic values and cultures are stronger than the indigenous ones there is less moral concern and care for women. The wives do not have a sound moral right to claim, and the husbands do not have a meaningful moral obligation to fairly and equally manage their wives and children. But still it must be noted that the moral concern and care Oromo men of these regions have for their women is better than those men in some other cultures do.

In almost all kinds of marriage arrangement a girl is expected to remain virgin till she gets married. This is considered to be morally desirable on the part of the girl while the bride groom, however, is not expected to remain with his virginity till his marriage. Even in most cases boys are implicitly encouraged to make sexual practice before their marriage. But if a girl is found to have lost her virginity she faces a serious blow. In some extreme cases she is sent back for good to her parents, and in many other cases, she is tolerated although it gives discomfort to the bride groom and his family. This suggests that there is some sort of double standard in treating men and women, which is morally unfair.
5.1.3. Ways of Undertaking Marriage and Morality

Marriage is the dynamic element and basis for the creation and flourishing of human families. It is the heart and root of any human society. Although a universally accepted institution it is, the way it is undertaken is largely culture-specific. The culture-dominated mechanisms of marriage either enhance or hinder the flourishing of good life. It is said at the outset of this topic that marriage is a moral institution. Are the mechanisms that various Oromo communities use moral? Do they take care of the rights and well beings of the marrying individuals? Do they consider the partners as human beings with equal values?

The ways and means Oromo use to arrange marriage vary from one community to the other. This gives rise to the question, which kind of means and ways are morally decent and respectful, and which ones are not? According to narration of Borbor, Jaatani and Chaalaa there are about six known ways of undertaking marriage in Borana and Guji. These are traditional marriage, hawaadii, hirba, heeruma, butta and dhaala. The traditional arrangement is praised to be the desirable one by the community although there are some modifications today. The reason why there are many different ways of undertaking marriage itself has moral weight. Some are done in accordance with the norms of the society and others are against these norms. But why those which are against the norms are pursued?

Lack of time and scarcity of wealth, uncertainty of getting one another through the normal procedures and the anxious feelings of being left without getting married are the main reasons for some people to resort to mechanisms that violate the norms of the society. The actors very well know that their move is undesirable in view of the existing social norms. They prefer it only because the socially accepted ways are not feasible. They also know that this anomaly can be corrected by subsequently adopting the social mechanisms devised for such informalities. Although the means is undesirable the end sometimes, however, is desirable.

Of all the mechanisms Buti or Butta is the most intolerable act. It is a serious violence of human rights. In some of Oromo communities, school girls, women of different status were made victims of this act. Even sometimes loss of life occurs. Thousands were prevented from becoming what they could become because of this violence. In areas where such violence is committed women in general girls in particular are perpetually haunted by fear and insecurity. They have no sound freedom to freely move and live. Men do harm to women, what they do not want anyone to do to their own selves. This is a serious impediment
immediately to the personal development of women and ultimately to social progress, and hence immoral.

All the marriage mechanisms employed by the Oromo communities of the study sites, except Asseenaa or Heeruma, are devised in favour of the male side. Even in Borana and Guji where the rights of women are relatively taken care of better than anywhere else, the mechanisms are to some extent partial. They do not equally treat both, since the male side takes the active part and female part has a passive role in the process. The male side has full right to choose the prospective wife, the time and the mechanism of the marriage, but the female has either no or little right to consider her own choice. In other words, the mechanism of marriage is largely designed in the best interest of the male side, which may not be in the best interest of the female side. This makes the value of women extrinsic.

The kind of marriage that is apparently desirable is the traditional one, as mentioned earlier. It is arranged mainly according to the likings of the parents, not according to the desires, tastes, choices and knowledge of the couples. It means after their marital engagement the couples are made to live not the life of their own choice but that of their parents. This may create a problem. The taste of the parents and that of the offspring may not be the same. More important problem, however, is the perception of parents focuses largely on the external parts of the marrying couples when what should decisively be the internal ones. In this point we are not suggesting that parents should not get involved in the marital engagement of their offsprings. The indispensability of their involvement cannot be denied.

Our contention is that the couples must actively participate in the whole processes of their marriage. They must be free and equal in considering all the cost and benefit of their marital life. They should go into the hands of each other not as strangers, but rather as persons who have sound knowledge of each other. It is really preferable if the proposal comes from the couples and endorsed by the parents. If that is not possible, both the prospective husband and wife should be given certain right and freedom to get acquainted with one another, and actively take part in the process of making their marriage possible. Consciously arranged marriage is more fruitful than the unconsciously undertaken one.
5.1.4. The Moral Life of Family

How deep the moral concern and respect of the Oromo couples for each other, and their children is, a topic that needs particular consideration. A family may contain husband and wife, children and other close relatives. In Oromo society “Ideally, one family consists of one adult male,” and probably “several wives and unlimited number of children.” (Legesse, 1973: 18) The moral weight of the married couples may vary from one community to the other. It is determined by the value that the family members attribute and the attitude they have towards each other. Whether they treat each other fairly and morally or the otherwise depends on this. How the husband treats his wife or the wife treats her husband is the decisive issue in determining the moral quality of marital life. This moral treatment can also be reflected in the life and relations of the society. Thus it is worth to discuss how Oromo couples treat each other.

5.1.5.1. Husband and Wife

In Oromo moral order the husband and wife are considered as two persons with the same soul. The couples share hope and hardship, failure and success, ambition and joy. To the question what is one couple to the other couple, Daadhitu Bayana the only woman informant says, “They are the beauty and strength of one another. The beauty of wives is reflected through the strength of their husbands. And the strength of husbands depends on the management of their wives. A woman without husband lacks grace and respect, and a man without wife lacks strength.” (Lekepmte, 2008) Dorsis shares the idea of Daadhitu. He says, “Husband and wife are the sides of the same coin. One side exists as long as the other side is there. But there has to be mutual understanding between the two. It is the harmony of their thought that protects their marital bond from different vices.”

How does one exactly respect the other in moral terms? Borbor strongly contends: Instead of asking me whether I respect my wife or not much better to ask if I need her to respect me. Undoubtedly I need my wife to respect me. I want her to take care of me. That is why I married her. My wisdom tells me that I should also do the same to her. She needs the same care and concern from me. That is why she married me. I am responsible to respect her interest and right just as she does my own. There is no reason why I am respected, and my wife is not. Respecting her is tantamount to respecting myself. Believe me; I respect my dear wife not only because she is my wife, but also because she is human being deserving respect just like me. Responding to the same issue Chaalaa says, “Oromo men treated their wives
according to Gada principles. For Gada all human beings are equal regardless of sex, colour, ethnicity, material wealth, social role and place. It taught us to avoid discrimination of any human beings.”

One can raise a question - what is the rational foundation for Gada to advocate the equality of men and women. In an attempt to answer to this question Chaalaa again says: Oromo believe that men and women are born equal. Both are *ilmaan namoota*, human beings. No one of the two is superior or inferior. Just as men are fathers, brothers, husbands and sons to women these women are mothers, sisters, wives and daughters to men. What good reasons do we have to discriminate women when half of our identity as men is obtained from women, and that of women is also received from men? That is why Gada forbids such discrimination.

But when the reality on the ground is examined it proves the opposite. What is being said is morally desirable whereas the reality of life experience is somewhat contrary to this. Thus as being seen from the present experience of marital life it is difficult to avoid the supremacy of men over women even in Borana and Guji [although it is not as harsh as it is elsewhere]. On the basis of his observation, Tamiru says, “I do not really deny the reality of women. I know that they are treated not the way they ought to be treated. They do not participate in important public gathering. Even if they take part they do not dare to express their ideas. Thus I see that there is anomaly in treating women.” Dagaagaa adds, “I think wives are not inferiors to their husbands by nature. Superiority and inferiority do not arise from the nature of humans; rather they are the creation of the sentimental feelings of men. This is morally abnormal.”

But when did male domination emerge in Oromo society? Chaalaa answers: When Gada was fully in operation a little more than one century ago, there was no male superiority over female that we now experience. Of course, there was division of labour between husbands and wives, men and women, depending on the suitability of their personality for work. It contained no domination. Wives being mothers are more intimate to their kids than their husbands. Menstrual period, pregnancy, feeding breast and nursing a child make them to stay most of their time at and around home. Men who are relatively free from these chores can go away and work. The fact that she stays at home, however, does not at all make her inferior to her husband, rather it renders her as the most important pillar of the family.

This may force one to pose the question, “If the male domination over female was unknown to the Gada system from where did it come to the Oromo culture? To answer the
question Chaalaa continues his narration: This was injected into the Oromo culture when Gada ceased to be fully operative and became powerless to be assertive in the most areas of Oromo land. When the Oromo land was conquered by the Abyssinian warring regimes all the rules and values of the Gada were turned down; and alien values that were largely the opposites of the indigenous values of the Oromo were introduced to the Oromo land. It was through the introduction of this alien culture that male domination was infused to the Oromo life and relations.

The accounts of Jemal and Teib confirm the idea of Chaalaa: The unfair treatment of women that we now experience in Oromo society did not arise from the indigenous system of Oromo culture rather it was adopted from the Abyssinian culture. Oromo used to equally treat both men and women even several centuries before the advent of the western democracy. Our elders told us the truth of this. The practical experience of Borana and Guji Oromo of this day could be the good examples for the veracity of this assertion. We lost our Gada which was the system of equality to the autocratic rule of the Abyssinians and violently received their culture of inequality.

The male domination that is imposed on women is not rhetoric rather practical. How does this domination manifest itself? “Gada strictly teaches that the married couples should treat each other equally and respectfully. But nowadays we sometimes observe some husbands are ill-treating their wives.” (Abdulkerim) According to the contention of Borbor these days there are husbands who beat up, insult or harass their wives. This is an odd behaviour that occurred very recently. The main reason for this problem is drinking. Nowadays people drink and get intoxicated. This makes them violate our ceera, moral value. They ill-treat not only their wives but also they become quarrelsome and extravagant even to the community.

The moral quality of the treatment of couples must also be considered from the side of the wife. How does a wife treat her husband – like a superior, inferior or equal? What is the degree of respect that she has for her husband? Jaatani witnesses, “Oromo women of Borana in general are humane, sympathetic and nonviolent. They unconditionally respect their husbands; and unceasingly toil to change the life of their families for the better. Personally I see no serious moral vice that they commit against their husbands.” Borbor adds, “Oromo wives are good in general. One moral defect I see in some of them, however, is adultery. Although not all wives commit it, it is impossible to deny the existence of such undesirable
practice. In Borana one undesirable tradition we have is Jaalle jaalto. Having extramarital sexual affair for both women and men is almost considered as a norm, although Gada does not permit it. Some wives commit this. I must tell you that those women, who commit this, do commit it because of the pressure from the male side. However, it is increasingly decreasing now.

In Chaalaa’s account, “Both the Borana and Guji wives do not commit serious violence against their husbands.” The women in regions beyond Borana and Guji have less respect for their husbands when compared to the Borana and Guji women. Even these wives do treat their husbands better than the women of some other cultures. Daadhitu says: We women think that our husbands are our shelters, care takers, beauty and honour. A woman without a husband lacks all these good qualities. Our beauty and grace is mirrored in and becomes vibrant through our husbands. This makes us to treat them even in a more humane spirit. Oromo wives are duty-bound. They toil from dawn to dusk to improve the living conditions of their families. We have deep concern for our husbands and children. Taken in general, Oromo wives are more moral, according to the accounts of many informants, towards their husbands than the Oromo husbands are towards their wives.

At this juncture we would like to write the narration of a friend, about the case in point since it shows the general orientation of Oromo wives towards their husbands. Our friend (Temesgen Ababu, Addis Ababa: 2008) narrates about his recent experience of his father and mother. His mother is aging and increasingly growing weak while his father is still believes that he is strong. Temesgen heard that his father arranged a new marriage with another woman who was by far younger than him. He did it, without the knowledge of his children. “When I heard the rumour” he says, “I informed my younger brother. Both of us got nervous about the alleged arrangement. We thought that our father was mistreating our mother. We decided to go and talk to him before it gets too late.”

He from Addis Ababa and his brother from Lekepmte [Wallagaa] went home to assess the conditions of their parents. They talked furiously to their father, and their father got angry with them for they were responding to him outrageously. He continues his narration, “Overhearing our conversation our mother intruded, and stopped us talking. With a soft language she said to us, ‘Come on in, I will tell you what happened.’ We followed her. She said, ‘You are wrong in talking to your father like that before asking me whether his new marriage arrangement is without my knowledge or not. I do not even know how you came to
learn this arrangement. Now I ask you to apologize, and thereafter I will explain how the idea of this marriage came into existence’. As she advised us we apologized.”

Thereafter their mother told them, “Look my sons, I was the one who initiated your father to make a new arrangement with another woman. He did not have even a dream of such arrangement before. It was I myself who raised the issue. After thoroughly discussing we made a detail agreement between ourselves’. Temesgen explains the story further, “She touchingly said to us, ‘Now it is time for me to act and behave towards him as a mother, not as a wife. I ceased to be an active wife. But he still claims to be strong on his part. He needs a woman that behaves as a wife towards him. I do not want to see him being punished for my failure to be a wife. Hereafter he is my third son next to you two. I had been his wife, sister and mother ever since I got married to him. Now I am too weak to be his wife, but my motherly and sisterly behaviour towards him gets stronger’.”

In an attempt to explain what happened after that Temesgen gives the following narratives. “We accepted her with appreciation because prior to this, we did not think that she had the knowledge of the arrangement and also such deep concern for our father. Now on the basis of their terms of agreement our father got married to a younger woman, as arranged earlier. We again went there to check whether things were moving smoothly or not after the new marriage. We found that our mother as a senior leads the family mentally and our step mother as a junior receive instruction from our mother. We were happy with what we experienced although we do not know for how long this lasts.

“On the very day we planned to leave,” continuing his narration Temesgen reports “mother called all of us – my father, step mother, I and my brother. Let me tell you particularly one striking expression of her that touched us. She said to our step mother, ‘Listen to me. His mother gave this man [pointing to our father] to me – to take care of him as a wife, sister and mother. Obviously his mother is no more in life. And I have become too weak to discharge these responsibilities. I was sick over the last several months. And I saw this man standing alone, helplessly while I was in sickness. This disheartened me. That is why I myself initiated this marriage. Therefore, I gave this man to you, just in front of my children as his mother gave him to me. Personally I promise that I will treat you as my daughter or sister, not as an opponent. Treat him as I have been treating him, and treat me like his
mother, not as his wife. There should not be any malicious feeling between us’. I want you all to know this."

In his concluding remark our friend said: Prior to this incidence I had no deep concern about Oromo moral value. After this incidence, I started closely observing the actions and behaviours of Oromo to know whether this value is a shared value. Among the Oromo I personally know, ninety percent of them are law-abiding, truthful, honest, friendly and incorruptible. We can say that Oromo have immensely humanized values. Particularly one needs to appreciate the moral concern that Oromo wives have for their husbands. I wish all the husbands also have the same visa-a-vice their wives.

5.1.5.2. Parents and Children

One serious area of human relations that safuu is concerned with is the relation existing between parents and children. "The institution of marriage and the family concerns not only the rights of husbands and wives but also the rights of children." (Grcic, Ibid: 241) How ought Oromo parents to treat their children? How should children behave towards their parents? The kind of treatment existing between parents and children is largely affected by the attitude one has for the other. Just as parents have rights and duties towards each other, they also have the same towards their children. Children too, have moral rights and duties towards their parents. All have safuu for each other.

In the Oromo tradition, children are the reliable asset for the family, community and generation. They could be the asset of immense value only if they are well cultivated. Borbor asserts, “Can you get good harvest by sowing bad seed, or by throwing good seeds on bad soil? Children are just like that. Unless you invest good things in them now you may not be successful in making them persons of desirable character later.” The strength and goodness of a society itself lies largely in the fact of how children are brought up. A family that implants good things in the mind of children really does good thing to many parties – to the child, parent, family, community, generation and humankind. Gada teaches the Oromo parents to bring up their children gently. They ought to instil moral righteousness, goodness and justice in the mind of their children.

Oromo think that children receive the first lesson from their parents. The first language they use is their parents’ language and the first person they imitate in their actions
and behaviours are their parents. The way the parents treat each other itself has a tremendous impact in shaping the personality of children. "...children will not be happy in a marriage in which the partners are unloving and vicious to each other and their offspring." (Grcic, 1989: 242) Uncaring family teaches its children more about evils or violence than it does about good or harmony. Of course the Oromo parents have deep moral concerns for their children. No doubt that any parent wishes all the best for his/her children. But some parents raise their children contrary to their wish. Dewo contends that many of us follow wrong way of raising our children. Just as any parent we want our children to be good and knowledgeable. We want them to be such without ourselves being good.” Chaalaa shares the same opinion: “We must be careful in using language, behaving and acting in front of our children. We can persuade our children to be good and to do right only if we are like good teachers and exemplary to them.”

The different age-sets or grades of the Gada system define what parents ought to do in order to properly raise their children. Children learn how they ought to act and behave towards their parents and others while passing through the different age sets. They acquire immense knowledge of their traditions and moral uprightness from the life experience of the age-sets. Corresponding to each grade there are oral educations to be offered, and entrusted responsibilities to be discharged, physical exercises to be practiced by the members of the grade. The first grade is Dabballe (0-8), the second one is Foolle (8-16) and the third one is Kuusa (16-24). These three are mainly the grades of children and youth.

The rights and duties these children and youth have and the behaviours they exhibit towards their parents, adults and communities is determined largely by this grade arrangement. The care and concern parents, adults and communities have for these children and youth is also defined in the light of this Gada stipulation. Commenting on this Dagaagaa holds, whatever we teach to our children is based on our Gada. Gada prescribes that the officials of the system including the Abba Gada advise children to act and behave in good manner. They should wish them all the best. They must not beat up, curse or use bad language against them even if they get nervous due to unworthy deeds of these children. This is the fundamental norm that parents and adults pursue towards children. But although the female offspring have as full attention as the male ones for care and decent upbringing from their parents, they do not have the privilege of passing through different Gada age-sets.
The Oromo people, in general, revere children. One basic purpose why marriage is necessitated, in their belief, is for bearing children. This has unparalleled value. It consolidates the marital ties and ensures the continuity of generation. The family that does not have at least one child because of this or that reason, is more vulnerable to distress and divorce than the family that has raised a child. Thus in the context of Oromo tradition children are highly loved, cared for and granted the best from the family they belong to. Duubee remarks, in the traditional Oromo such as Borana and Guji parents are not only parents but also teachers. Their families are not only the basic institutions of life but also schools where children start learning the intricacies of life. Borana and Guji teach their children everything about their traditions, history, normative values, religion and *safuu* or *ceera*. The traditional value that we are now talking about is itself, what is handed down to us and preserved through this oral education.

This may prompt one question. Can it be said that all families could meaningfully discharge the responsibility of teaching children? Responding to this Duraa says, families are not all the same in their perceptions. Some are better than the others. But there is one important thing that all the families are required to have. For the good upbringing of children the husbands and wives should be the loving and caring couples. The way the husband treats his wife, and the way the wife looks at her husband has a tremendous influence on the personal development of their child. The probability of raising a good child in a vicious family is low.

With people of some different cultures the distance between parents and children is analogous to the relation between the superiors and inferiors. The parents are making themselves superiors to their children, and compel the latter to respect and accept their superiority. But with Guji and Borana this is different. Borbor contends, Borana raise their children by bringing them closer to them, not by distancing them from themselves. They treat them on equal footing with adults and teach them whatever makes them good. Orally they are taught the history of Borana, folktales, proverbs and short stories. Chaalaa adds, we tell them how Gada functions. We instruct them to tell the truth, to be honest, to obey the law, to respect and help others, not to bear false witness, not to use bad languages against any one - no matter whether big or little, not to have any malicious and vicious attitude towards others. Through this oral education we transmit the knowledge of the past to the present, and from the present to the next generation.
For Borana and Guji Oromo the exclusion of children from conversation is unfair. When serious conversations are made among the adults children are allowed to quietly attend it. Through this conversation knowledge and experiences of the past are orally transmitted to the present, and that of the present goes to the future generations. Generally the Borana and Guji Oromo do not have the norm of levelling adults and children as higher and lower, superiors and inferiors rather as seniors and juniors or teachers and pupils. In other regions of Oromiya where the Oromo people are mixed up largely with the cultures of non-Oromo societies children are treated as inferiors. Most parents have some forceful attitudes towards their own children. They think that, it is undesirable and a blander to consider children as equals. Children, for example, are not allowed to take meals with or before their parents and seniors. In some cases the quality of meal prepared for children could be of inferior in quality when compared to that of the adult parents.

One serious problem of raising children in Oromo society pertains to the method of educating their children. On one hand the Oromo want their children to be better, greater and wiser than themselves, and on the other they want their children to accept whatever is handed down to the past. They do not prepare them for the challenges of the future but simply to make them know whatever of the past. Indeed it is harmful if parents indoctrinate their children “into their own beliefs and values to the degree of destroying the child’s future autonomy” (Grcic, Ibid: 242). Parents should not teach their children that the way they have been is the only way ever existing. Rather they ought to guide them in the right direction that enables them find their own way to the future world.

5.1.6. The Status of Women in the Oromo Gada System

The question of how men and women treat one another is one of the most important moral issues of all times. Human history witnesses that women have not been treated on equal footing with men for long time in the course of human development. What place do Gada and safuu give to women? How ought women to be treated? Some people contend that Gada or even safuu does not recognize the rights of women as equal to that of men. Is this thesis true? To answer this question Chaalaa gives the following narratives.

I am aware of the contention. Some people argue that Gada does not recognize the right of women on equal basis with men. But as far as I know Gada does not deny the right of women. It never considers them as inferiors. It rather believes that both men and women are the creations of Waaqa. Both safuu and Gada stem from this. Waaqa has not created one as
superior and the other as inferior. According to some traditions man and woman are created respectively superior and inferior. To the Oromo traditional religion, however, this is not true. Waaqa has not created men and women unequally. Oromo believe that Waaqa is impartial. The concern Gada has for women emanates from this belief. Duube explains the concern Gada has for women: to me, there is no system that has as deep concern and respect for women as Gada does. It is, for example, stipulated a law that women who is in her period (menstrual) shall be granted a leave of seven days. It is believed that this is what Waaqa gave her; it is a gift, not a curse. One who makes her work while she is in her period is liable to punishment. As it is her blood that she loses she deserves sincere care and help. She must be given good food and affordable comfort.

But many questions can be posed in reacting to the above response. Does Gada really have such a deep concern for women? If Gada recognizes the equality of women and men why the former do not actively participate in the Gada system equally with men? Why don’t they become Gada officials? Is it because they are incapable of handling the responsibilities entrusted to them, or because they were denied to have any role in the Gada structure and function? To answer the questions Chaalaa gives the following long narration: It is true that women do not have important role in the Gada system. This is the only point that the critics of Gada use to contend. The main reason why women do not actively participate in all the activities of the Gada is not discrimination but the law of nature. On one hand Gada takes into account the heavy duty women do have as mothers and wives, and on the other it considers the inconvenience they encounter when they go away from home. Parental loads together with the laws of nature hold back women from taking part in Gada activities. People do not notice this fact.

Gada is not a luxuries business rather a strenuous exercise. It entrusts heavy responsibilities to the lubas. It is mandatory that the Gada officials attend all ceremonial, ritual and social performances. Some of the days of such occasions are fixed- they cannot be performed either before or after that fixed day. Particularly there are some special ritual ceremonies for which all the Gada officials stay away from home for at least twenty seven days. Women cannot afford to attend such undertakings. They are not only wives but also mothers who nurse and look after their kids and managers of the household. This is one reason why women do not take part in all the details of Gada activities.
It is natural for women who are in their active age to encounter monthly menstrual period. This deprives them of the opportunities that men enjoy. On top of this, in the past Borana women used to dress ‘gorfoo’, traditional clothes made of hide. It is a kind of wearing that does not fully cover the body of women. With this kind of clothing women cannot conveniently attend the long and frequent meetings of the Gada elites. Furthermore women would become pregnant. If, for example, a woman is assumed to be Abba Gada and if it happens that she gives birth on the very day of the Gada ceremony in which her presence as Abba Gada is a must, how could the ceremony take place? Thus it is not easy for women to actively participate in the Gada undertakings because of biological and maternity factors.

Can this be really a profound reason for women not to take part in the Gada system? After all Gada is a man-made system. It could be argued that if there had been the will to make them the active participants of the system; all the rites, ceremonies and ritual activities could have been adjusted in a way they could accommodate women. For example clothing could be changed, time could be adjusted conveniently, and social and biological constraints could be managed. More importantly should the right of women be compromised because of maternity and other biological factors? According to the contention of Doyyo, “What matters most is the way they are treated, not whether they take part in the Gada business. There is nothing that women lose for not actively taking part in the Gada offices. In their absence the Abba Gadas raise and address issues pertaining to women”.

Chaalaa comments to reinforce Doyyo’s account: Let me tell you one incidence that could be cited as a best example. In the recently held Gumigayo, Gada authorities raised one question pertaining to women. It was the question that women do not dare to raise. They said the number of ‘haftu’ meaning unmarried women, is alarmingly increasing. Elders thought that this was a serious challenge to Borana people. They said, ‘Their hair is turning gray before experiencing married life. It is the social and moral duty for all of us that girls who are either our sisters or our daughters shall get married. Almost all of us cannot be comfortable when there are many girls getting old without going to bed with men of their love. Let us ask one another and help them get married. The remedy of this problem is in the hands and minds of Borana men.’ This shows that there is no male domination over women in the true sense of the word in Borana and Guji Oromo. Whatever problem they face in life is linked more to their nature and maternal responsibility than it is caused by male superiority.
In some places of the country it is hard for women particularly for girls to freely move from place to place. They could be harassed. Sometimes they are physically, psychologically or verbally assaulted. What about in Borana and Guji Oromo communities? We again go to the narration of Chaalaa for the answer: I would like to answer this by way of comparison. I do not dare to say that women are as free as they ought to be even in these regions. But compared to the conditions of women in some of non-Oromo cultures and even in Oromo communities beyond Borana and Guji they are by far free to live, move, believe and express their thoughts. Particularly girls before marriage are absolutely free to move from place to place. The community fully recognizes their freedom of movement. Any act or behaviour against their freedom is immoral and hence is liable to condemnation and punishment. But I know that other women are not as free as girls are for they may face sexual harassment or molestation.

Some people contend that Oromo parents treat their daughters and sons unequally. They are believed to ascribe high value to the sons and less value to the daughters. The critics take very often the right of inheritance as evidence. A married daughter does not have a legitimate right to inherit her parents while a son undoubtedly has that right. The contenders say that this act is immoral. In response to this four informants namely, Doyyo, Borbor, Chaalaa and Jaatani give the following narration: In both Borana and Guji married women do not have the right to inherit their parents. This right is granted only to the sons. Because of this some people may think that Oromo parents do not equally treat their sons and daughters. If daughters are not granted the right that the sons enjoy then the sons are treated as superiors and the daughters as inferiors. Although this treatment appears to be sexually discriminatory in actual fact it is not. In the light of Chaalaa’s argument, there is nothing that makes the daughters inferior and the sons superior. Both of them are equals, and hence should be treated equally. But there is one thing that some people do not notice. The moment a daughter leaves her parents and gets married to a man she loses the right she has on her parents and acquires the equivalent or even more right from the family to which she is married. She gains from her marriage whatever she loses on her parents’ side. Thus women in Borana and Guji Oromo societies inherit not their parents but the family they get married to, or the clan to which the marital family belongs. It must, however, be noted that her parents offer her gifts.
Jaatani further explains Chaalaa’s contention. A married daughter has no more legal and moral right on her parents. The right that she claims on her parents ceases to exist as soon as she leaves the family that she is born to behind, and joins the family and clan she is married to. She encounters no loss of right but its transfer from the family of birth to the family of marriage. But this does not mean that the parental-offspring relationships stop. The moral duty and right between the two still remains intact, what changes is the legal right and duty.

In other regions of Oromia a discrimination of women is obviously experienced. There are acts and behaviours that violate the human and moral rights of women. Rape, abduction, beating, various physical assaults, psychological torment, preventing them from attending public gatherings and going to schools considering them as things of instrumental value and viewing them as entirely dependent on men are some examples. All these are against their interest, freedom, life and development. Commenting on this Daadhitu says, women are not as free as men are. Particularly girls are not free to travel a long way alone. There is a possibility of being raped, beaten up, abducted and molested or in general ill-treated by a man or even group of men. Because of this, it has become the norm of our society not to let a girl go far unless she is accompanied by someone. This shows that women’s freedom of movement and rights are insecure.”

These are evil practices and behaviours that not only our wives but also our mothers, sisters and daughters suffer from. But what is the rational justification of women’s discrimination? Daadhitu answers, “I do not really know from where you men brought it. Men are our fathers, brothers, husbands and sons. And we are their mothers, sisters, wives and daughters. We are in one another. I do not really know where the male domination did come from.” This shows that the Oromo of the present day are not as moral as the Oromo of the Gada system.

To critically sum up the section; in morality there should not be discrimination of sex. But in many of the study areas the moral and legal rights that women do have are not equal to the rights of men. Consequently men do not fairly treat the rights of women as much as they do that of men. One serious omission is that women do not participate in assemblies. “The absence of women from assemblies hampers their development of eloquence, sophistry and the ability to deliberate on a single issue at length.”(Kidane, 2002: 44) No matter how fair they are treated in other areas of life if they do not have active participation and considerable
voice in public matters they are the victims of sexual discrimination. Even in Borana and Guji
where they are believed to be fairly treated women are not free and equal with men in so far
as there are areas of exclusions that hamper the development of their potentials.

5.1.8. Neighborhood in Oromo society

Neighbourhood is another important moral and social institution next to family. The
attitudes that neighbours do have for and consequently the way they treat one another has a
considerable moral weight. For Oromo the relations of olla, neighbours and the concern they
have for one another has a tremendous role to play in the social, economic, and cultural
development of the individual family and in that of the whole community. As one of their
proverbs goes, “Ollaaq ciinachaann lafayk ká’u, it is with the help of neighbours and ribs that
rising is possible.” This suggests that Oromo gives immense value to the care and concern
that neighbours offer and are offered. They believe that the moral order of a given society or
a nation itself is greatly influenced by the moral concern and treatment neighbours have for
one another.

Gada and safuu prescribe that neighbours should respect and love one another. Without having the attitudes of caring, sharing and loving one another it is impossible to acquire a well lived life. That is why Oromo always pray for the harmonious and peaceful relations of neighbours. No family is self-sufficient. Dewo reports his experience: “I have many things that I share and exchange with or borrow from neighbours, and my neighbours in their turn may have many others things that they need for themselves from me. We cannot live without such transaction.” For any Oromo family neighbourhood provides a sense of security. Those neighbours that have safuu for one another are good neighbours. Because they respect, take care of and help one another. One neighbour treats the other morally. One family is in some sense in the other families. When all neighbours fairly treat one another the community embracing these neighbours enjoys peace and harmony.

Borbor holds, “You must have peace at home. This is not enough. You must also have it with your neighbours. Still it does not stop there since you need it from everyone.” If everyone is in peace both at home and with neighbours, then everyone is in peace at the community level. This peace is attained only when the relations of neighbours and humans are free from vices. Borana always exert the utmost effort to keep the relations of neighbours as healthy as possible. Although not as good as the relations that they had in the past, it can be said that the present relations of Borana as neighbours are good. The other three Borana
informants (Melise, Dura and Jaatani) say that there is no goomi, jealousy among the neighbouring Borana. No Borana has any intention to see the other Borana being debased or impoverished in any case. Also a Borana does not want to be dependent on others. There is no temptation of living at the expense of others. Just as any other human beings Oromo pursue individual good, but “the good they seek are typically not obtained at the expense of their neighbours...” (Levine, 1974: 140) The pursuit of self-interest at the expense of any human being is morally undesirable – it is equivalent to committing cuubuu, sin.

Cooperation is the basic string that ties neighbours in Oromo society. They help one another mainly in solving the problems and easing the burdens of social as well as private life. According to the observation of Levine (1974:141), in Oromo society “most activities are carried out on a highly cooperative basis. Settlements are constructed and cattle are grazed and watered by members of olla groups working in concert.” Doyyo and Jaatani contend that Borana lived in good and healthy neighbourhood. But this good quality is now increasingly deteriorating. Along the cultures that infiltrated into their cultures and through the exposure of Borana people to urban life and schools neighbours have acquired different vices. Particularly Borbor stresses: We are getting into troubles. People go to the nearby towns, drink farsoo (local beer), and get intoxicated. Not only men, even women started doing this. This is a sign that Borana have started abandoning their ceera, morality. To me this is a serious threat to the healthy and harmonious relationships that we have so far been enjoying.

In the Oromo that have received the cultures of others, the relations between the neighbouring families are not as good as that of Borana. While describing how the Oromo neighbours in West Shawaa behave towards each other Dagaagaa asserts: We are not with the values that Oromo had prior to the conquest of their land by Abyssinian rulers. We have dropped those values that could make us love each other, and picked the values that threaten the good qualities of human relations. To some extent the relationships of the neighbouring Oromo families are poisoned with vices such as jealousy, contempt, backbiting, evil will, hypocrisy, and insensitiveness and uncaring. I do not know how and when this could be uprooted.

In describing the evils that disturb the good relationships of neighbours in the light of safuu, Mormor, Borbor and Dagaagaa have almost the same response. When these responses
are coherently organized they mean the following: Our experiences of life show us that there are diverse forms of evils that disturb the relations of neighbours. Some of these are jealousy, selfishness, blackmailing, backbiting, slander, stealing, malicious feeling with regard to the progress, interest, right and freedom of one’s neighbour. Is neighbourhood free of these vices in Oromo society? No, they are not. The assimilation of Oromo with the cultures of non-Oromo societies resulted in all these evils. Our safuu has become too weak to challenge these evils.

The basic unit of a community, society or even of a nation is a family – a family that stands in certain relation with the other family. The relation of one Oromo family with the next immediate neighbouring Oromo family is very important for the Oromo community or nation as a whole. It is the thread of relation that we have at the grass-root level that extends to the macro level. If the relations of neighbouring Oromo families are ravaged by evils their relations at higher level cannot get sound strength. This is what is being reflected in the present reality of Oromo society.

5.2. How Do Oromo Treat Non-Oromo?

In the preceding sections of this chapter we discussed how the Oromo internally treat one another. In this section we will discuss what moral concern they have in their external relation – or how they would like to treat non-Oromo either individually or collectively. Do they like to treat others the way they would like to be treated for themselves [by others]? Or, do they like to treat them like equals, superiors or inferiors? What does Gada teach an Oromo to behave towards other human beings in general? The norms and principles that Oromo use to treat non-Oromo are derived from the Gada system and safuu. A person who closely knows who the Oromo were and are can easily observe that these people first put one important question to themselves when they think of treating other people: ‘How would we like to be treated for ourselves? If whatever we like other people to do to us is what is morally desirable, then do we have the moral right to treat others wrongly?’ Certainly no one prefers to be treated as a slave or inferior. Almost all Oromo informants agree that Oromo like to treat others the way they would like to be treated for themselves. This makes us to look for the basis of this conviction.
5.2.1. Oromo Concept of Humanity

The value that human beings ascribe to life in general makes humans honourable. Borbor holds, “Gada teaches us to honour human life regardless of sex, age, skin colour, profession, position, power, wealth, etc.” Abdulkerim further explains this, “Certainly I want you to honour my life; you also want me to honour yours. Others want us to honour theirs; we also want them to honour that of ours. Honourable life should honourably be treated. Thus honour is the value that we all as humans need. This is the reason why Gada teaches to honour life.” For humans at least there are three ways of treating each other – fair treatment, unfair treatment and indifference. Any Oromo, according to Gada, should treat any person equally and fairly regardless of his or her particularities. Treating others as slaves or as inferiors makes the agent himself vulnerable to the same kind of treatment. Persons who have a contemptuous attitude towards others should not also expect from others a desirable attitude for themselves. As Dagaagaa says, Oromo treat others fairly more than they do themselves. This is the law of Gada. Confirming this Teib states, “We Oromo believe that the care and respect we receive from others is decisively determined not only by what or who we are, rather by the care and respect we do have for them.”

Indeed the views of these informants are in accord with one of the universally accepted golden rules of morality. But there is a controversial point in connection to this. If we say we ought to treat others the way we would like to be treated by them, then it means we make our selves the standard in terms of which we evaluate the moral quality of any action or behaviour. In case, if we are treated the way we do not want to be treated because of this or that matter, then it would mean that there is a possibility of restraining oneself from treating others in a desirable way. The statement that Amsalu gives below seems to address this problem. “Oromo people treat others with care and concern, without anticipating any good for themselves.”

Chaalaa has the same opinion with regard to the issue in point. “It would be good if each and every one gets the desirable care that he/she owes to others. But this has not been always the case. There were and are people who would prefer to treat you unfairly despite the concern and respect you owe them.” If this were not the case humanity would not face any undesirable act and behaviour. Whatever the case is the good character one should not be changed because of the bad character of the other. Thus I ought to respect you irrespective of
the attitude you have towards me. That is to say, I do this not because you reciprocate the respect but because you primarily deserve it as a human.

It is debatable whether the above contentions of the informants are consistent. Why a person ought to respect others irrespective of the attitude these “others” have towards him/her? The response to this question divides the informants into two groups – one group for example Duube says, “We fairly treat any human being unconditionally because Waaqa wills us to do that.” The other group contends that Gada taught us to fairly treat any human being unconditionally, because the respect of man is an end in itself (Jaatani). According to the contention of the latter, if men treat one another with respect not because they love or take care of one another, [or rewarded or punished by this or that] but because they believe that respecting human being is an end in itself, then this world will be the best place for humans to live in. If, indeed, there is a genuine need to make this world the best place for humans to live, all human beings should equally and fairly be respected or taken care of unconditionally by all humans.

This contention again entails one important question that should be brought to light. One may say, “Why does Gada teach me to do good to a person who behaves badly towards me?” This is one important subject of concern in morality upon which religious thinkers, sages, philosophers and others reflected. In Christianity, it is said ‘Do not return harm for harm.’ It even teaches that you must turn you left chick if you are slapped in the right chick. What about Oromo – how do they respond to the agent that inflicts harm on them? Informants have offered different opinions about this issue too. Some argued that Oromo ought to treat others fairly irrespective of the quality of treatment they receive from others, because this is the irrefutable Gada rule. Chaalaa points out: Even if you are not treated well by others do not stop doing right to them. We should not allow that the wrong actions and attitude of others dictate that of ours. It must not be the actions and attitudes of people but the norm or the rule of right and wrong that governs our personality. Human actions and attitudes are contingent and hence they cannot be considered as point of reference or standard.

According to the opinion of some others, it is a probably a mistake when Gada says that Oromo should treat others fairly regardless of the attitudes these “others” have towards Oromo. Particularly Jemal strongly argued: I do not understand why Oromo are duty-bound to fairly treat others who treat them unfairly? I think Gada has to rectify this mistake. As far
as my understanding goes this might be one of the components of our culture that has made Oromo a soft target for the attack of unfriendly people. It might have made us very weak in the face of the aggressive attitudes of the Abyssinian elites in particular. Still there are some other informants who doubted whether Gada taught such passivity in case of attack against oneself. Mormor says, “We know that Gada teaches tolerance, forbearance, endurance, patience and forgiveness. But I do not really know whether Gada said that one has to turn the other side of his chick when he is slapped in the one side.” Reciprocity is very important, but not between one people with friendly attitude and another people with unfriendly behaviour, since the former could be vulnerable to the unfriendly attitude of the latter. Chaalaa is stressing on the friendliness of Oromo: They have ever and never inflicted harm on others, nor attempted to impose any sort of domination on others - because such act is the anti-thesis of their Gada value. But they have been under brutal domination and exploitation ever since they fell under the autocratic rule of the Abyssinian rulers. To me what made them soft and vulnerable to the aggressive projects of Abyssinians is nothing but their tolerance, friendliness, and their principle of justice.

This is even witnessed by different scholars. According to Levine (1974: 150) the Oromo do not have any passion, “to establish domination over other peoples...” But why they lacked this passion? Was it because they lacked power to superimpose their own interest on others or because of the normative principle they pursued? The following statement again from Levine (Ibid: 155) attempts to answer the question, “In sum, it was their democratic collectivism and their historical project ...” which made them, “the unsuited for extending political dominion over others.” In conquest people of some other cultures do not hesitate in enslaving or treating their victims at least as inferiors. The motive of the conquest could largely be to politically subjugate the victims, undermine their identity and economically exploit their human and natural resources. This was the typical endeavour of the Amhara elites. “The Galla [Oromo]” as stated by Levine, however, “reveal little passion to acquire power. The pattern of egalitarian collectivism in their social relations helps to account for this lack of motivation.” (1974: 149)

Oromo lacked not only the motivation to acquire power but also the passion of superimposing their own interest and will on others. Historical records show that Oromo repeatedly engaged in wars with other people and won battles. But there is no recorded history that makes a mention of the time when Oromo looked at the victims of war as
strangers. “One of the Oromo expansionist strategies, used conspicuously during their period as conquerors in the seventeenth century, was to incorporate strangers through different forms of ‘adoption’.” (Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 23) This Oromo conquest made the conquered non- Oromo nothing but Oromo. Being quoted in Mekuria Bulcha Asmaram Legesse (1989: 17) writes. “Conquest, in the history of the Oromo has never given rise to sharp stratification between the conquerors and the conquered. The latter were given all the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. It violates Borana egalitarian ethic to describe the two halves as “conquerors” and “conquered”. (Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 54) In other words, Oromo believe in the equality of human beings. According to Dorsis, “Although we differ in terms of physical and mental features and also social positions none of these makes one superior or inferior. What power do we have to degrade the equality of humans that Waaqa has created?”

The attitude and concern that Oromo have for others, and how they practically treat them could be explained in terms of their activities of the following.

5.2.2. Inclusion and Exclusion

Depending on the attitude of a given society inclusion and exclusion, assimilation and dissimilation are involved. No serious difficulty is reported for Oromo society to assimilate a person or group from the other culture to itself, and also to assimilate itself to people of other culture. “The Oromo seemed to assimilate the conquered populations as frequently as they were absorbed by them. Consequently the area of the country where Oromo inhabited had become a veritable cultural corridor.” (Legesse, 1973: 9) This was the situation in which the Oromo became non-Oromo and non-Oromo became Oromo in different areas. The core rationale for the Oromo to assimilate others to itself and itself to others is the belief that all humans are equal. Neatly put by Levine (Ibid: 164) “A pronounced needs to affiliate with others made them [Oromo] particularly ready both to share their culture with others and to adopt the cultures of others.”

People of some other cultures would prefer to keep the purity of their ethnic group, and hence they do not assimilate others to themselves or themselves to others. They exclude others from themselves and themselves from others. The motive of keeping ones blood from getting fused with that of others may vary from one to the other ethnicity. The core point, however, is believed to lie in the value they ascribe to their own identity. Surely they ascribe high value to themselves or to their identity. It is this that forces them to insulate themselves
from others on one hand and to adopt a discriminatory policy against others on the other.

Oromo, however, do not have the orientation of making themselves higher or lower. Levine (1974: 161-162) again states, “To an unusual degree, the Galla [Oromo] appear to be oriented toward associating with others on a friendly basis. A recent survey of interethnic attitudes among the Ethiopian college students supports this general impression.” Oromo do not consider themselves as superiors and others as superiors or inferiors. They rather believe that they are equal to all other human race regardless of ethnicity, colour, sex, religion, profession, etc. and that others are also equal to them. This might have given rise to the belief that in essence there is nothing that non-Oromo lose when they get assimilated to Oromo, and the same thing is true to Oromo when they assimilate to others.

A certain society may be culturally more or less advanced, compassionate, humane and caring than the other. Therefore, for Oromo, there is assimilation not because there is basically a possibility of going from less human to more human, but because there is more suitability of culture, demographic and geographic factors. Since they equally recognize the cultures of others the Oromo people are not ethno centrists. They do not attempt to superimpose their own value on that of others. If there were no fences of value that people mentally built between one and the other there would be no problem. It is worth quoting Grayling’s (2005: 106-107) beautifully coined expression regarding this. He writes,

...physical fences only rise when mental fences have already been built. And it is of course the mental fences that are the real problem. Hatred and hostility, arising from fear or from insults and injuries real or perceived, and feeding under the disguises of racism, religious intolerance and territorial jealousy, inevitably result in the erection of barriers between people and peoples.

We agree with Grayling. All the negative values he mentioned are the products of human mind. Evils are first conceived in the unblessed minds, it is from there that they are hatched out in the form of hatred and hostility, racism and intolerance, jealousy and selfishness. The life and historical experiences of the Oromo of Gada show that these people did not in depth have this kind of mentality.
5.2.3. Assimilation: Oromization and De-Oromization

5.2.3.1. Oromization

Oromo have very ancient, strong and rich culture of assimilation. Oromisu, Oromizin3 is an act of assimilating non-Oromo either individually or in group into Oromo. “In a social system where interactions tend to follow a pattern of egalitarian collectivism, one would expect to find a socialization practice which produces a disposition to be friendly towards others.” (Levine, Ibid: 162) Oromo, in their native context, are friendly, compassionate and kind wherein caring and sharing is the prime principle in guiding their social interaction. Basing on his life experience and knowledge of Ethiopian history Chaalaa narrates: I think people of some other cultures are not as generous and friendly to others as much as Oromo are to anyone. Oromo accept or welcome any non-Oromo either individually or collectively and if the latter wants to get assimilated to them. That means, the Oromo do not only give them their identity but also equally share their resources with them. They take care of them as much as they do of those who are naturally born Oromo. In fact caring and sharing is not only for those who have become Oromo but also for those who have settled among Oromo even with their ‘otherness’s’. This is not a story but a reality of Oromo.

Indeed there is nothing that makes those people who have adopted Oromo identity different from those who have settled among Oromo since both get the same care and share from the native Oromo. Being an egalitarian society Oromo did not adopt different standards to treat different people. “The least stratified of societies are known as egalitarian because people tend to treat each other as equals.” (Michael, 1992: 501) The same standard that was used for the native Oromo people could be applied to all the new comers. Levine (Ibid: 162) curiously observed that Oromo are “open communities, easy for new comers to join, composed of people who are, in the first place cooperating neighbours... New settlers are accepted if they are willing to participate in community affairs...” This made Oromo suitable for non-Oromo to adopt Oromo identity.

Guaiffacha and Mogaasa: These two Oromo terminologies are used very often interchangeably. But sometimes they are used to mean two different methods of adoption. Both are different mechanisms that Oromo employed to assimilate non-Oromo to their own selves. Both Mogaasa and Gudaiffacha mean individual or group adoption. In its strict sense, Guddiffacha or Guddiffana is a method of adopting a child to a family that is mainly unable
to bear a child of its own. This is very common practice among the Oromo community. Any Oromo family has a strong desire to leave some one behind itself, so as to continue the genealogical chains. When the law of nature threatens this continuity by making a given family childless, guddiffacha is employed to overcome the threat. A childless family adopts either a boy or a girl very often from the family that has more children.

Mogaasa primarily means a collective adoption. It is used when people in group demand or request to assimilate to or identify themselves as Oromo [when they accept Orommumma as their own identity], or when the settlement of the conquered people among the Oromo community becomes inevitable. Although “Most Ethiopianists, following the Chroniclers and unconscious racist prejudices, have represented the Oromo conquests as relapses into barbarism (See Hultin’s essay),” recently “a number of historians have reinterpreted the conquest and incorporation of the indigenous populations as a successful ‘story of fusion and interaction’, through which the ‘Oromo genius for assimilation’ quickly transformed the conquered into Oromo.” (Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 24) The Oromo scheme of adoption and assimilation has probably one of the strongest factors for cementing the Ethiopian peoples together or for preventing them from falling apart.

Almost all scholars who conducted research in this area remarkably observed that the number of Oromo population grew very rapidly not only through the natural process of procreation but also through adoption. People would prefer to adopt the identity of Oromo at will because of the “universalistic nature of Oromo society and culture” (Lewis, 1965: 38), their egalitarian values, and their capacity to accept the assimilated fully.” (Bulcha in Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 54) Consequently, “The overall process of assimilation and Oromization of non-Oromos seems to have been smooth and rapid, the adoption of Oromo identity by new comers proved to be total. Thus, today it is impossible to differentiate between descendents of the once ‘proper’ and assimilated groups.”(Bulcha in Baxter, eds. et al, 1996: 54)

Dagaagaa reports the attitude that Oromo have towards human integration: In so far as I know, Oromo is a wonderful society. I say this not because I am from this society but because of the truth I know of them. No matter whether one is black or white, male or female, old or young a new comer is not treated as a stranger but as a member of an Oromo family or community. Oromo does not want to exclude others, and he/she does not want to be excluded for himself/herself too. Two Oromo do not very often prefer even to use their own language
in the presence of a third person that cannot hear the language, not because of any other reason but because they think that the other person could be excluded from their context. Thus inclusion is always their preference.

Jema gives long narratives on this: The friendliness and humanity of Oromo, seems to me, sometimes is too much. It goes to the extent of threatening their own rights, honour, opportunities, privileges and personalities. Indeed I appreciate the deep concern they have for others. These behaviours are good in a society or community that neatly understands and appreciates the goodness of such behaviours and responds with the same. In a society or situation that does not recognize the merits of these behaviours, however, it is somewhat self-denial. Even I am immensely affected by these behaviours. For example I do not feel free to use my own language with my friend who can also use the same language in the presence of a third person or a friend who cannot hear and speak our language. We think that our friend could be alienated if we use our language, while he wants to be with us. For us alienating a person who has come to us for friendship is somewhat unfair. I cited this example to say that this and other characters of Oromo have made them very suitable for others to adopt to, but less suitable for the Oromo to deserve respect from others.

5.2.3.2. De-Oromization

The assimilation of Oromo involves not only the process of Oromization but also de-Oromization. In the context of this study, De-Oromization is the process of Oromo assimilation to others either by forceful measures or through voluntary means. According to the reports of many scholars, when Oromo made their great migration to the north, east and west, some of them changed their own identity to that of the host instead of changing that of the host people to themselves, in some regions. The following statement of Legesse (1973: 8) provides a clue as to how the de-Oromization of the Oromo began. “The Oromo had penetrated far into Gojjam, Begemeder, and Tigre as early as 17th century. In all probability this population was absorbed by the Amharic and Tigrigna speaking populations.

Oromo had very resilient and accommodative culture. They believed that co-existence with others is possible in keeping or changing one’s identities and also in changing or recognizing the identities of others. Their democratic principles, notions of human equality, freedom and humanity did not force them to keep the ‘purity of their blood’. Some people think that they should keep the purity of their blood, identity or ethnicity [race] because of
this or that complexity, or because of the different value they ascribe to identities. But the fact that Oromo accept readily the identity of others and also give their own to others shows that they do not suffer from either superiority, inferiority or other forms of complex. This made some Oromo to lose their identity in favour of that of others.

5.3. Treating Oneself

How ought an Oromo individual to treat him or her-self? What is the safuu of treating oneself? According to the Oromo Gada and safuu inflicting harm not only to others but also to oneself is morally forbidden. One cannot handle his/her body or personality the way he/she pleases simply because it is his/her own. Rather he/she ought to treat it the way the Oromo safuu enjoins him/her to do. But precisely what is that which safuu prescribes for individuals to treat themselves?

Dorsis says, “Safuu commands us to refrain from inflicting harm on our personal well being.” We should not intentionally afflict an injury to ourselves not simply because it is painful but because it is immoral. Both Gada and safuu teach that we should not use our body or personality as means for some ends. Amsalu adds, “Safuu teaches us to treat our body and personality with care and concern, because it is a human body and life – the body and life to which the highest possible value is ascribed next to the Creator.” Chaalaa answers the above question by using a different version: “Do I need others to fairly treat me? Do I need others to take care of me? Definitely “Yes”, I do. If I am a person who needs others to do good to me, then I must be the first person who is morally responsible for the well being of my-self. If I do not take care of myself it is uncertain that I care for others. I think this is the basis of safuu.”

To explain the other reason why safuu prescribes that Oromo ought to treat her/ his self morally Tamiru holds, “Man is the creature of Waaqa. A person cannot badly or wrongly treat the life and the body Waaqa has given him.” Another informant brings the contention from religious explanation to the social being-ness of humans. “I live not only for myself but also for others. Just as I need others, these others also need me. If I inflict harm on myself I also cause harm to those who need me. The care I take for myself is at the same time the concern I have for those who need me.” (Abdulkerim) That means an Oromo has a moral duty to fairly treat not only others but also her/himself.

Tripathi (2003: 125) writes, “...causing harm and violence to one’s own self is also unethical. For example, smokers, gamblers, etc. often argue, it is my body or my money and I
am not harming anyone else through my pursuits.” It is not true. In a person there are others. Each and every person has certain social position or relation. The society needs one as a son, husband, teacher, father, advisor, brother, friend, brother-in-law, uncle, professional, investor, etc. If this person causes physical and mental injury to himself he simultaneously hurts all those who need him for one or other reason. He violates not only his own right but also the moral right that others have on him. It is also by taking this into account that safuu teaches that we should have concern for ourselves as much as we do for others.

The core and decisive reason why safuu teaches that everyone should take care of him/her-self, however, seems to come from the recognition of the intrinsic nature of life. If human life is respected as an end in itself it is automatic that every human being takes care of himself as an end, not as a means. If safuu says that humans should not use their body or human person as a means, then they should treat themselves as ends. It is their moral duty to be the guardian of their own selves. Mistreating oneself is equivalent to mistreating others, because it violates the moral right of the self just as it does that of the others. Thus the Oromo treat morally not only others but also themselves.

5.4. How Oromo Were Treated

The traditional moral values of Oromo can be explained not only in terms of the way they treated others but also in the light of how they responded to those who treated them in certain ways. To expound this it is important to establish a framework in terms which the whole intricacies of this section is conceptualized. Human history is full of actions and reactions, migrations and separations, assimilations and dissimilation, constructions and deconstructions, wars and peace, friendship and hostility. Although history describes factual happenings, it is possible to evaluate the moral content of these happenings – from what good they created for or what harm they inflicted upon humanity. History is primarily a human project and experience in which people helped or harmed one another for different reasons. Considered from this angle, the history of a given society is loaded with immense moral values, since it involves how good or bad people treated one another in the process of making it.

It is not only in the actions, reactions and interactions that morality or immorality lies but also in how the history of a certain people is interpreted. Historians write and describe the factual events of history either as it actually is or the way they want it to be. That means the way historical facts are described or interpreted may carry some kind of moral value. It is
possible for any unjust, biased or uninformed mind to distort the history of people by either exaggerating or underestimating, by misinterpreting or mistranslating the merits and demerits of the roles and activities that people have in the process of making history. Denying people what they really deserve and attributing to them what they do not deserve is morally wrong. Being dictated by unreasonable command of emotion, a writer may deny or hide the real facts of history, assert or report the unreal ones. From this one can draw a conclusion that human history can critically be evaluated from moral and ethical viewpoints. This section is concerned with the issues of how Oromo politically, economically and culturally have been treated from practical, conceptual and intellectual perspective in the Ethiopian historiography. The section is limited to only some of those subjects that are relevant to their moral values.

5.4.1. The Oromo History: Myth and Reality

How the Oromo history is recorded, interpreted and presented or how it is explained and understood is directly or indirectly the reflection of how they were treated. Our purpose is not to narrate the recorded and unrecorded history of Oromo. Rather to show how Oromo were treated in the course of the Ethiopian history, how their personality, position and roles were viewed, and consequently how the battles between morality and immorality were fought on the issue of their life, dignity, right and freedom. Have Oromo been treated the way they would like to be treated? Were they taken care of by others just as they took care of others? Were they comfortable with the way they have been treated in the history of Ethiopia?

Undoubtedly, like any human community, Oromo would prefer to be treated equally, friendly, brotherly, humanely or in general fairly. We have already discussed that Oromo more or less treated any non-Oromo individual and community with the utmost care and concern. They treated any one the way they would like to be treated for themselves. Unfortunately, however, Oromo have been treated quite the opposite way by others particularly ever since the dawn of the last twenty century. Although they were believed to be basically peace-loving, friendly, generous and humane throughout their history, they have been portrayed by some as violent warriors, barbaric aggressors and unfriendly human community. Oromo was portrayed either as people with no history and story, or as people of bad history. Mekuria Bulcha reports,"... while their land was claimed as part of the empire, Ethiopian history disowned the Oromo." (Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 62) It is really absurd to think of society without some kind of history. If such society is said to exist, it must be either a mythical society [non-existent] or one that is disowned its own history.

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According to the observation of Baxter (Baxter, eds.et. al. 1996: 14) “The history of the peoples of Ethiopia is extremely controversial. It has almost written from a centrist and imperial point of view which for Oromo is that of their colonizers. They have been marginalized historically as politically.” The Abyssinian ruling elites did not want anything remarkable about Oromo history be written or recorded or known. It is to satiate this evil intention of the ruling elites that some local and expatriate writers distorted or misrepresented the historical realities of the Oromo people. The whole effort of the Abyssinians was to discolour the role of Oromo in the history and making of Ethiopia. Mekuria Bulcha (Baxter eds. et al. 1996: 62) reports what he observed as an eye witness probably when he was a student at Addis Ababa University.

At the history department [of Addis Ababa University] dozens of lectures were given by both Ethiopian and expatriate instructors on the genealogical mythology of Abyssinian kings... but, nothing was said about the Oromo and their history during a long-term introductory course given on the history of Ethiopia; they were denied any recognition both in the lecture rooms and in the obligatory set text-books.

Oromo had their own history. It is the history of actions and reactions, war and peace, conquest and resistance, exploitation and domination, migration and settlement, Oromization and de-Oromization, etc. Whether we like it or not the sons and daughters of Oromo people,[that of other ethnic groups too for that matter] have served Ethiopia with competence and distinction, great patriotic sentiment and commitment as military commanders, officers, soldiers, scholars, writers, civil servants, artists, sportsmen, farmers, merchants and professionals. It is difficult to think that the Abyssinians who have declared themselves as “true Ethiopians” have done as much as Oromo have to make the flag of this country get hoisted with pride and honour at national and international level. But the Abyssinian elites were/are ‘smart’ enough in veiling these historic and heroic deeds of Oromo children and people as a whole.

Most of the Abyssinian writers denied, misrepresented this reality, or said little or nothing about it. “History text-books bestowed heroism and greatness on past Abyssinian leaders and praised” writes Bulcha, “their contribution towards the creation of the Ethiopian empire. Thus ‘state’ was closely linked with the Abyssinian people, their culture and identity, while the non- Abyssinian peoples of the empire were completely denied.” (Baxter, eds. et al.
The way the Abyssinian writers, clergies, chroniclers recorded and interpreted the Oromo history is the reflection of the unfair or malicious attitude they had towards Oromo.

To make this point more concrete and clear let us consider some core historical events that are very relevant to the moral values of Oromo.

5.4.2. Oromo and the Ethiopian Identity

Identity is a complex philosophical or metaphysical concept. In order to understand the notion of this concept in the Ethiopian societies of today, it is necessary to analyze the term itself. Identity as an abstract concept has a metaphysical import. Its referent cannot be pointed at and said to be this or that. Who am I? Am I a desire, belief, thought, knowledge, physical entity, a fixed or a continually changing entity? We humans always want to go from where we are to where we are not; we want to move from who or what we are to who or what we are not. We want to negate our present identity to acquire a new identity. Always we are in search of the negation of our present reality in favour of our ideal. Therefore, who are we - those who aspire to be someone other than themselves or those who are actually in themselves? As we always strive to become someone who we are not there is conflict in our identity.

On the other hand identity is a relational concept. One may be able to describe the term identity and thus may be understood as a state of being the same in nature, quality etc; and in contradistinction to others which are different. To identify is to delineate or isolate the features which mark out from others and hence of a conflict. Thus to talk of identity is to talk of a conflictual relation, which forms the basis of the underlying philosophical problem of identity. When we apply the notion of identity to the society, then its problem is expressed in two ways: one, how do we express the identity of a person vis-à-vis other persons and two, how do we express our social identities in the context of other societies. The former is called individual identity and the latter is known as multiple identities.

It is difficult to define the identity of man as an individual. Traditionally and generically, persons are seen from two standpoints: that of the body that provides the basis for one’s determination and material interests and that of the spirit which is regarded as the basis for one’s infinity and rationality. In terms of the body, one could be described as physical, biological and psychological. As a physical object, one is either tall or heavy, has a
heart, head, etc. - these provide him with a specific shape excluding him from other objects and beings. From spiritual perspective, one does conceive of oneself in terms of the other.

The term social identity reflects a group of people who are homogenous and permanent in spite of change and multiplicity. That is to say, the people in question have certain features invariable in time and space. This in short means despite the changes, the people in question remain the same. If we argue that identity has meaning only when it is linked to other things, then social identity has meaning when a group of people is seen against other groups. The Oromo identity as an individual man and as a group of people is considered from this perspective.

After being incorporated to the Abyssinian Empire, whether they liked or not Oromo were identified as Ethiopians. But they were implicitly and systematically excluded from being Ethiopians in their own right as Oromo. Some of the dominant Abyssinian elites used to make an explicit claim of being the “True Ethiopians” for themselves, which implicitly suggests that there are “untrue Ethiopians”. In the minds of these “Ethiopianists” all those who claim to be Ethiopians are classified into two – the ‘True Ethiopians’ and the ‘untrue Ethiopians’. The moment one says that there are ‘true Ethiopians’ by implication he/she means that there are ‘false’ or ‘fake Ethiopians’. Legesse remarks, “In the mind of many Ethiopianists..., there is no doubt as to who among the peoples of Ethiopia is a “true Ethiopian” and who is not”. (Ibid, 2000: 3)

Those who claim the privilege of being ‘true’ Ethiopians are Semitic speakers, in contrast to the Cushitic, Omitic, and Nilotic speakers. The size of the non-Semitic speakers is roughly as twice as the Semitic speakers. What is Ethiopia and who are Ethiopians when the two-third of its population is considered to be ‘false’ Ethiopians? But what is the reason for the “Ethiopianists” to say that they are the true Ethiopians while the others are not? And who has given them the authority to classify the Ethiopian people as ‘genuine’ and ‘fake’? Let us leave these questions to those who seek to delve further into the matter in detail.

5.4.5. Denial of Oromo Existence as a Nation

It could be a strange thing for a person or scholar who very well knows the existence of the Oromo if he/she finds another person who denies the existence of these people as a nation. To any one’s surprise there are such local and expatriate scholars or historians. In his attempt to bring the assertions of such scholars to light Mohammed Hassen writes, “For instance, Harold Marcus recently argued that ‘passionately engaged in the Oromo quest for
political sovereignty, various authors seek to create a historical nation called Oromia and
fabricate a glorious history for the non-existent country.’’ (Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 70) What
do a certain people require to be a nation, and what is that which Oromo lacks to be a nation?
Is it really true to say that Oromo does not have a home land? Hassen partly answers this by
saying, “Marcus neither explains why in his view the Oromo are not a nation nor why
Oromia is a non-existent country.” (Hassen in Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 70) In reality,
however, both Oromo as a nation and Oromia as an Oromo home land exist. This is self
evident.

The enigma is - why the writer wanted to turn his eyes blind to this obvious reality
which is undoubtedly out there? The denial is due to either a sheer ignorance or arrogance or
hidden motive. It is difficult to say Harold Marcus denies the existence of Oromo out of
ignorance, because anyone who has at least no knowledge of Oromo should not be tempted to
write about them. Certainly Marcus knows Oromo and their land. That is why he shares us
his opinion. But he did not want to write about the truth he knows. We may not commit a
fallacy of false dichotomy if I say the denial is then due to arrogance or some hidden motive.

Still one can ask, why arrogance and what is the hidden motive? One can doubt until
he gets the evidence that could dispel that doubt out of his mind. But denying the reality that
cannot even be doubted is unethical. No deep thought process is required to prove the
existence of Oromo as a nation and Oromia as the Oromo home land, because this is a self-
evident reality. “Today the Oromo” Mohammed Hassen quotes Gellner, “are emerging ... as
the most important nation in the Horn of Africa with a recognized territorial identification
with Oromia.” (Hassen in Baxter, eds.et al. 1996: 70) It is, therefore, morally unjustifiable to
deny the existence of people as a nation without providing valid evidence that proves their
non-existence.

5.4.6. Intellectual and Cultural Alienation

Alienation is one of the important philosophical terminologies of the 20th century. It
“is a prominent term in twentieth – century social theory and social criticism, referring to
any of various social or psychological evils which are characterized by a harmful separation,
disruption or fragmentation which sunders things that properly belong together.” (Craig, E.
ed.1998: 178) This term acquired considerable attention in the philosophical works of Hegel
and Karl Marx. Hegel used it to explain the evolutionary development of absolute idea.
Owing to its internal dynamism Absolute Idea or Spirit posits itself as material object or
nature which is its opposite. It negates its original abstract state of existence and becomes a concretely material object. This is alienation.

But in Karl Marx the term alienation is used in quite different context. He used the same term to explain the reality of human relations to labor products, one another, state and even to their ideals. He particularly is used it to portray the situations of the modern wage laborers who are ceprived of owning and controlling their own labor products. In general the term alienation refers to the act or the result of an act through which something or somebody becomes alien to something or somebody to which he/it appropriately belongs. For various reasons people could be materially, ideologically, spiritually or intellectually alienated or separated from that which belong to them or from that which they belong to. Oromo, in many ways, alienated from what belonged to them and also from to which they themselves belonged.

At this juncture it is imperative to mention at least some of the intellectual trickery undertaken to alienate Oromo from the intellectual, historical and cultural scenes of the country. Some expatriate and Amhara intellectuals have extensively and intensively written about many events took place in Ethiopia. Most of them have written about the history of the Abyssinian kings, regimes, languages, literature, politics, culture and the Empire. Only few of them paid attention to the historical role and cultural place of Oromo and other ethnic groups of the country. Even among these elites those who distorted the role and place, history and culture, values and systems of Oromo are many. It is beyond the capacity of this Thesis to disclose how many of them have written what about Oromo. Only three of them are cited as examples- two local and one expatriate scholar.

According to Leggesse (2000: 4) one of the many traditional Abyssinian historians, Aleqa Tayye Gebre – Mariam, wrote a book, Ye Ityopia Hzib Tarik, [History of the people of Ethiopia] during the era of Menelik. In this book he devoted one chapter to the Oromo History. He described the Oromo population who abandoned their language and adopted Amharic with satisfaction, while he saw “nothing but waste, rot and devastation” in all other Oromo communities that relatively retained their demographic, cultural and linguistic dominance. Legesse (2000: 2) further goes to quote the statement that Edward Ullendorf (1960: 76), made in support of Aleqa Tayye, “The Galla [Oromo] had nothing to contribute to the civilization of Ethiopia; they possessed no material or intellectual culture, and their
social organization was at a far lower stage of development than that of the population among whom they settled.” Ullendorf was one of the expatriate scholars who categorically denied the contribution of Oromo to the development of Ethiopia. While introducing Edward Ullendorf to us Legesse (2000: 2) says, “... a leading British linguist and Ethiopianist, a man who held the only chair in Ethiopian studies in the British university system and one of the founders of the Ethiopian Studies Association in Ethiopia and Europe...”

A critical reader may doubt more about the reliability of this data than about the truth of Oromo contribution to the Ethiopian culture. How a scholar with such advanced mind and sound academic profile misses this vivid reality? Once more, why one dares to deny the human, material and intellectual contributions of the Oromo people when at least it is possible to understand that the largest resource that goes for the survival and development of the country is drawn from this population and its land? More importantly, does such denial of people’s reality add value to the nation?

The attempt to critically evaluate the contributions of people to the country is basically good. But the failure to recognize the obvious fact is bad. Ullendorf further says, “[The Oromo] were not only the cause of the depressed state into which the country now sank but they helped to perpetuate a situation from which even a physically and spiritually exhausted Ethiopia might otherwise have been able to recover far more quickly.” (Legesse, 2000: 2) It is again good that Ullendorf observed the formidable challenge that Ethiopia sank into, but it is sad that he made the Oromo people to be the sole cause of this challenge. He did not have the least doubt that Oromo was the cause for the stagnation of Ethiopia. But what does he think that the Oromo did to depress Ethiopia? When he (1960: 75-76) further writes, “Abyssinians ...were swallowed up in this vast immigration” he seems to refer to the great migration of the Oromo as the cause of the Ethiopian depression. The Oromo migration had taken place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when Ethiopia did not have the shape and the size it has now. But the depression that Ullendorf is talking about is the event of the 20th century that is being carried into the 21st century; it is the living reality of the present day – that has been under the Abyssinian autocratic rule for more than one century. Then what good ground does Ullendorf have to make the Oromo people responsible for the draw backs that Ethiopia encountered?

Some Ethiopianists have highly acclaimed as Legesse says, “the now infamous statement of Ullendorf.” They “adopt the same perspective...” and saw Ethiopia as consisting
of “true Ethiopians” contrasted with the whole group of residual peoples who are on the periphery of the Ethiopian core and whose main contribution to Ethiopia is thought to have been a destructive one."(Legesse, 2000: 5) The Ethiopianists fabricated some fictitious stories to provide a justification for their assertions and dominations. One was particularly about Oromo migration which was considered not as a human phenomenon but as a natural disaster. As reported again by Leggese the Oromo migration was seen as a kind of “natural disaster” inflicted upon Abyssinia. (Ibid, 2000: 5) We are not, at this point, interested in proving whether there was such a huge social movement known as ‘the great Oromo migration’ but concerned with the issue why this social phenomenon is viewed as a natural disaster.

Natural disaster is governed by the blind law of nature. It is devoid of any conscious, creative and reflective character. Can we say that the Oromo migration was a phenomenon of this nature? To some Ethiopianists the answer is definitely ‘yes’. Legesse who bitterly fought to expose this delusion writes, “Favourably quoting Aleqa Atsme [another traditional historian] Mesfin Wolde Mariam, an Ethiopian geographer says, ‘If the Amharas in Gojjam and Dembia and the Tigreans did not confront them with sufficient strength and stop them, the Gallas [Oromo], like a flooding river would have spilled over Egypt.” (Legesse, 2000: 5) Prof. Mesfin likened the migration of Oromo with somewhat irresistible flooding. He stated this intentionally. The reason could be guessed in two ways. One is to say that the Oromo migration lacked human qualities and values. The second is to discredit the place that the Oromo people have in the making of the modern Ethiopian nation by disfiguring their profile.

Let us raise a question to a critical reader – can we say Prof. Mesfin Wolde Mariam, as a prominent and renowned Ethiopian geographer does not distinguish the distinction between the unconscious flooding river and the conscious social movement? No person with sane mind can answer this question affirmatively. He compared the conscious and creative human migration with the unconscious natural phenomenon not because he does not know the distinction of the two but because he might have had strong intention to dehumanize the Oromo. But the point is, what benefit could be gained out of such misrepresentation? Who is the beneficiary? Is it not the cumulative effect of such myths and groundless assertions that has brought Ethiopia to the shameful situation it is now groping in? The attitude that Prof. Mesfin might have had towards Oromo could further be disclosed from his statement. As
Legesse (2000: 5) clearly puts it, “He [Mesfin] says that the end of the Galla menace came about when Menelik “assimilated them by making them share power and through intermarriage.”

It is possible to raise many questions about the power sharing and intermarriage that Menelik ‘generously granted’ to Oromo. At this point we do not dwell on this issue. We would rather like to explore the moral dimension of it. His statement suggests that we can draw some sort of comparison between the conquest of Menelik and the migration of Oromo. The Menelik’s conquest of the Oromo land was implicitly considered to be a heroic deed and a blessing mission, whereas the Oromo migration was implied as a curse and destructive holocaust. Whatever was done by the Amhara rulers was believed to be moral, just and right whereas whatever was done by Oromo was judged as immoral, wrong and unjust. The same mind that considered the Oromo migration as natural disaster conveniently decorated Emperor Menelik with prize, who mercilessly slaughtered thousands of Oromo, amputated, maimed for life by cutting off breast and limbs of the thousands. It is an ordinary knowledge for a person with the academic profile of Prof. Mesfin to know that one should not do whatever he/she does not like others to do it to him/her. If he/she does something wrong to others while he/she knows that it is what he/she ought not to do to others, then the moral standing of this moral agent is certainly questionable.

The statement given by Prof. Mesfin involves moral judgment. It is not a descriptive statement that can be evaluated as true or false rather it is an evaluative judgment that can be understood in terms of the rightness or wrongness, goodness or badness of the action in question. It implies the undesirability of the Oromo migration. For a time being let us assume that the migration of the Oromo was undesirable. But what makes the Menelik’s atrocious act a blessing one? Put on a balance what Emperor Menelik did to the Oromo people (through conquest) and what harm (if at all there is such) the Oromo as a people did (through their migration) to the Amhara. Anyone who has studied the modern Ethiopian history definitely knows how brutal and inhuman the conquest of Menelik to Oromo was. This is mentioned elsewhere in this work. Although some Amhara writers wrote the Oromo migration as undesirable historical phenomenon no other scholar from a different background witnessed about the harms that Oromo migration inflicted on Amhara or any other ethnic group of the country. No brutal acts or behaviours were recorded to have been committed when Oromo
penetrated into the north, south and west. Thus compare the consequences of the actions of the two - whose action was more violent or immoral than that of the other? Is it not disgraceful for intellectuals to deny such an obvious reality?

We do not really know the motives of some Ethiopian intellectuals who had strong concern for underestimating the Oromo people. This is not only the harm to Oromo but also a threat to the scholarly calibre of these intellectuals. The missions of intellectuals are to discover the undiscovered reality, to unveil the veiled truth; to straighten the distorted facts, to make the unknown known, to find answers to unanswered questions and explore solutions to unsolved problems. These tasks comply with moral and ethical rules and principles. But if intellectuals are engaged in distorting realities, misrepresenting truth, in hiding and denigrating the facts of people, then they take the track which is diametrically opposite to their missions. In this sense they become parts of problems and not parts of solutions.

Intellectuals commit such wrong things not because they do not know what is right to do and what is wrong not to do, but because they could be overwhelmed by bias and prejudice, covetousness and hatred. These behaviours are of emotional or irrational nature. Emotion does not deliver knowledge. Thus rising above this emotion is the basic traits of intellectuals. *Ethiopia has been suffering from endemic problems not only because illiteracy was rampant but also literacy was not appropriately responding to the problems of the country and its people.* Some of the histories and anthropological facts written on Oromo have been brought to the notice of the world primarily through these biased minds. A person who morally does wrong out of ignorance could be pardoned, but that who does it out of intention however is blameworthy.

It may not be surprising if a blander was committed by the traditional historians and clergies. But when this is done by intellectuals who have high modern academic profiles it is saddening. What Aleqa Tayye, as a traditional historian, says for instance, is not as much painful as some of the works of the modern Abyssinian intellectuals are. However, there is one thing to be appreciated even about these scholars (Tayye, Ullendorf and Mesfin in particular). They did not beat around the bush, rather they indirectly brought out to light all the evils committed against Oromo by the successive Abyssinian regimes. They must be appreciated for two things. One, calling “A spade spade” is not denigrating. This is an open expression that clearly shows the hatred that the regimes had for Oromo. Second, they
brought it from behind the curtain to the intellectual realm where through time reason gives its own verdict.

In contrast to the scholars who intentionally described the reality of Oromo by putting it upside down there are others who tirelessly worked to put this reality of Oromo right side up. Asmarom Leggesse is one of such scholars. In an attempt to correct the Abyssinian misinterpretation of Oromo migration he writes, “From a historic perspective, the Oromo migration was not a formless “flood”, it was not a ‘tidal wave’ nor was it a “purposeless” movement, rather it was a disciplined movement of people with an effective military organization.” (Ibid, 2000: 5) This migration is one of the major components of the Oromo history as well as that of Ethiopia. It might have inflicted some harm, but generally it is believed to have opened a new venue for the interaction and integration of peoples in the country. With the exception of some works of the Abyssinian clergies and traditional historians, in many of the literature we read, we found no statement that discloses the damage that the Oromo migration inflicted to Ethiopia and even to the Abyssinians.

The whole story of the menace of the Abyssinian elites is to marginalize Oromo and make themselves [politically, culturally, linguistically, militarily, historically, economically, etc.] the centre of the country. The following contention of Legesse, however, unambiguously and beautifully describes the reality of Oromo. He writes, “From a geographic perspective, the Oromo are not marginal to the Ethiopian nation. They are at its very core. The capital city, Addis Ababa, is in the heart of Oromo country and the Oromo nation occupies a roughly cross-shaped territory whose intersection is at the centre of Ethiopia.” (Ibid, 2000: 6) Although mythically possible in reality it is impossible to deny this truth.

The Abyssinian ruling elites hierarchically structure the Ethiopian peoples in which they place themselves both individually and collectively at the top and all others [being the subordinates] remain at the bottom. The intention of their written accounts is the reflection of this. Their whole effort was not to bring facts to light but to downgrade Oromo and upgrade Amhara. It is not to tell the truth of the past and present, and predict that of the future to humanity but to crush the role and the place that the Oromo had and have in this country. They had to intensively downgrade others in order to vividly upgrade themselves. They measured their greatness not by the degree of the problems they solved but by what extent they downgraded the Oromo and other ethnic groups. This is a grave moral break down.
No matter how terrible and immoral they were, all the distortions and myths made about all the non-Semitic peoples of the country were not successful in destroying the truth and the reality of these peoples. Although all the evil intentions of these elites held back the development of the country they did not, however, make the Oromo [all other peoples of the country for that matter] to be what they could not be. Oromo remained, remain and will remain Oromo. If there is anything that is capable of diluting the identity of Oromo, it is not force and suppression but may be good will and free association of people.

Oromo is the nation through whose accommodative and tolerant culture the different ethnic groups of the country are cemented together. Commenting on this Levine (Ibid: 175) writes, “..., the Galla [Oromo] presence provided an interaction chain between the Amhara and numerous other Ethiopian peoples.” Metaphorically, Oromo is the blood and the flesh of the unity of the Ethiopian societies. The moral value of Oromo might have done much more in bringing the Ethiopian peoples together than the forceful action of the Abyssinians. The conquest of Menelik and all the atrocities inflicted on peoples by the subsequent regimes tried to hierarchically lump the Ethiopian peoples together by force, but Oromo decisively united these peoples peacefully through their tolerant, kind, patient and humane gestures. This is one of the remarkable contributions of Oromo that some of the expatriate and local scholars blindly and wickedly denied.

The largest resource that goes for the building of the nation comes from Oromo and Oromia - human, material, natural and financial resource. This is best articulated by Mekuria Bulcha, who wrote, “The conquered peoples, particularly the Oromo, were not only made to assume the cost of the conquest itself, but also carried the economic burden of state-building.” Bulatovich’s estimates in 1898 indicated that the Oromo provided over 70 percent of the annual income of the imperial treasury. Even today the Ethiopian state is almost entirely dependent on Oromia’s economic resources.” (2002: 78 – 79) On top of these, it is important to note that Oromo possessed, the Gada system which is to a greater extent has values, organizational structure and features comparable to the modern democratic system of the west, before it was suppressed by the Abyssinian rulers. Although it had been the main target of attack the values of the Gada system has even served the best interest of the ruling elites of the country. It is because of this value that Oromo had been an accommodative and tolerant even to them. This has immensely contributed for the cohesion and integration of the present day Ethiopian peoples.
5.4.7. Institutionalized Alienation

Not only individuals but even institutions seem to have the intention to keep any Oromo profile out of sight. The best example for this is the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES), which should rather be called ‘Institute of Abyssinian Studies.’ Until very recently it had been exclusively concerned with the studies of the Abyssinian kings, queens, language, history, politics, religion, archaeology, culture and way of life. The profound anthropological study that Legesse made about Oromo discloses how Oromo are unfairly treated by this Institute too. According to his observation, “It is the Association that excluded not only Oromo but also all other Cushitic, Nilotic and Omotic speakers, because it viewed them “as alien and inferior.” (Ibid, 2000, xii)

The Institute or the Association of the Ethiopian Studies represented one-third of the country’s population from geographic and demographic perspective. By implication the Institute has the belief that others are not Ethiopians. As mentioned earlier, in the eyes of some “Ethiopianists” some people are not real Ethiopians. That is why they classified the Ethiopian people as “True and False Ethiopians”. There are two tasks before those who are said to be “false Ethiopians” - to deconstruct this myth in order to ensure their true Ethiopia-ness or to virtually deny their being Ethiopia-ness. Just as it is immoral and unethical to unfairly treat others, it is so to continue languishing under unfair treatment.

Ethiopian studies without the studies of all of the peoples of the country, are pseudo studies. Probably the scholar who for the first time critically and academically challenged in depth this Abyssinian approach is Asmarom Legesse. He writes, “On the whole, Ethiopian studies treated Oromo studies as superfluous, and barely tolerated, appendage of the Ethiopian establishment whose primary focus was the Semitic –speaking populations of Northern Ethiopia and their cultures, languages, literature, history and archaeology.” (2000: 2) Ethiopian institute of studies that does not recognize the Oromo and other peoples, which are the largest constituents of the country does not deserve the name it bears. One may understand from this, how intellectual institutions that were established for the pursuit of truth discriminate the non-Abyssinian Ethiopians, of which one is the Oromo. The reality of Ethiopia is largely in the hands, minds, cultures and activities of all peoples that constitute it. Undermining this reality is not only denying the right of people, but also depriving the
country of its citizens and opportunities. If an intellectual institution that is set up for the pursuit of truth fails to deliberately serve the purpose of truth then it certainly serves the purpose of falsity which is the contrary of its mission. It hurts not only others but also itself. It is this kind of unfair treatments that undermined the reality of the country. One can imagine how painful it is to be implied as a “false or fake Ethiopian” in one’s own land of birth.

Not only has the Institute of Ethiopian Studies that marginalized Oromo, but also the other institutions of the regimes shared the mission. The regimes and their systems did not only make any effort to study, know and publish the truth of Oromo but also they did not want others to write and know about the reality of Oromo. Even they did not want the Oromo get the opportunity of knowing themselves. Systematic ways of ridiculing such efforts were installed in the state machinery of the regimes. For example, one can learn from the bibliographies listed in different books that extensive and intensive studies have been done on various aspects of Oromo society largely by expatriate and to the lesser extent by native scholars. Much of this work was even done by missionaries as sideline curiosity, not by officially granted scholarly efforts. But it is unfortunate that almost none of these publications were available in the libraries of academic institutes, book stores and shops of the country.

Even those which were luckily available in the libraries were under arrest. No reader could find them easily. They were either misplaced or hidden. All these were done when at the same time everything written about the Abyssinians was not only made available in the university, college and school libraries; but also recommended [at least some) as a text or reference. Such systematic violence against Oromo has been operating over the last one century in all aspects of life and relations. A conclusion can be drawn from this that there were designed complex networks in the systems of the Ethiopian regimes to veil the reality and truth of Oromo. Is this not professionally and intellectually unethical?

In this intellectual and cultural alienation we see that there are bias and prejudice, foolishness and stupidity, arrogance and ignorance, conspiracy and shrewdness. All these are vicious behaviours and acts. Indeed these evils severely hurt the Oromo but they did not also benefit the moral agents – i.e., Amhara ruling elites. Neither the country nor the generation was a beneficiary of these. Even some times the moral agents themselves could be consumed by the repercussion of their evil deeds. It is really mysterious why people engage in these kinds of evil projects that benefit no one. Definitely moves and behaviours destroy the
harmonious relationships of people and may block the course of history for sometimes. Anyone who commits evil moves against the course of history, and at the end of the day even the agent himself is the loser.

5.4.8. Political Marginalization and Assimilation

In politics generally there are two parties standing on diametrically opposite sides – the rulers who rule the subjects and the subjects that are ruled by the rulers. The important moral point is – how would the rulers like to rule, and how would the ruled like to be ruled? Do the rulers rule the way they are pleased or the way the subjects want to be ruled? Which way of ruling is moral? Before they fell under the repressive rule of the Abyssinians Oromo had and were ruled by their own democratic system i.e., Gada. The autocratic rule of the Abyssinians and the democratic system of the Oromo society are antagonistic – one negates the other. They were based on opposite moral values. Because of this, Gada is the first important Oromo institution that received the severe blow when the Oromo land was invaded by Emperor Menelik. “The Emperor and his Amharic speaking followers were represented as having been given the historic mission to conquer, domesticate and Christianize the ‘Galla’ [Oromo].” (Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 15) According to the conquerors this mission could be achieved only when the Gada institution, which is the anti-thesis of their rule, was destroyed entirely and substituted by their brutal rule.

To effectively disentangle the Oromo society from the Gada democratic system and assimilate it to their own culture and identity the Abyssinians recruited some of the Oromo local chiefs. They gave minor political power to some who accepted their rule. In order to win the broader mass base they further introduced a system of “honorific’s to reward the leaders of the colonized populations…” (Legesse, 2000: 13) Different civil and quasi-military feudal titles were given. Some of the civil titles were baalabaat [local chief who had an intermediary role between the conquered population and the conquering rulers] and balaambaraas. The quasi-military feudal titles that were given to “many of the Oromo leaders who submitted to [the] imperial rule…” (Ibid) were Grazmatch, commander of the left guard, Kagnazmatch, commander of the right guard, Fitawrari, commander of the front guard and Ras, head of the army (Ibid).

This had made the Oromo elites to think that they were sharing power [while very few of them were given only the power of peripheral nature], and the people believe that they
were not plundered and excluded. More important to the regimes was that those who shared power attempted for themselves to adapt to the culture of Amhara and to make people of their domain accept the same. In terms of politics, economy and culture Oromo were pushed away to the periphery. If there was a sphere of influence where Oromo were required in large number was the army, because they were honest and competent soldiers. Although they outnumbeled all others as soldiers even in the army those who had a commanding post were few in number when compared to the total number of Oromo soldiers. On top of that their contributions and biography are not balanced. It is only few whose heroic deeds are known in the history of the country when who selflessly and gallantly fought for the country were many in number.

The Amhara ruling elites were able to put Oromo under their autocratic rule not only because of the conducive factors they were able to get, as mentioned earlier, but also they were able to get collaborators from the Oromo people. Some people know only what they get, but not how much they lose to get that. They do not calculate the cost they incur for whatever they secure. Even they do not take the tiniest pain to think about the harm their action inflicts upon others as long as they find it good for themselves. Menelik conquered Oromo because he was also able to get and use Oromo who had deserted their own people for the sake of their own benefit. Regarding this Legesse writes:

Not only foreign observers but also some of the leaders of the colonized populations in southern Ethiopia were won over by the mystique of the Abyssinian monarchy. The Abyssinian colonists used that mystique as a powerful tool for advancing the colonial project. High ranking Oromo chiefs such as Ras Gobana Dhaach’i who served the Ethiopian emperors were completely sucked into the feudal hierarchy and enslaved by their craving for higher and higher rank. (2000: 16)

Not only Gobana but also there were other more Oromo war chiefs and dignitaries who were used as a Trojan horse for the Imperial conquest. Gobana and others, according to Legesse, “were instrumental in serving the submission of the top political leaders of the independent Oromo.” (2000: 16) That means it must not be the Abyssinians alone who should take the whole blame for the brutal and immoral treatment inflicted to the Oromo people, but also the Oromo collaborators who had a decisive share in it. The collaborators are morally responsible as much as the aggressors.
5.4.9. De-Oromization and Resistance

During and after the incorporation of the Oromo land and people to the Abyssinian Empire the Amhara elites attempted to deconstruct the Oromo identity and at the same time reconstruct that of the Amhara i.e., Amaharization through de-Oromization of Oromo. Taking the identity of the ethnic group from which the ruling elites had emerged was systematically made an obligation. To accomplish this mission the rulers employed various methods such as Christianization, and language transfer and intermarriage arrangements. The ultimate goal of these methods is the Amharization of Oromo through de-Oromization. In the present context Amarization roughly means the process of using any means to Amharize Oromo. But as Bulcha beautifully coins extensionally it can be used to denote more than this. He writes, “Amharization is the learning of the Amharic language and assimilation of non-Amharic ethnic groups into the Abyssinian culture and Orthodox Christian religion.” (1996: 55) Or it is a process of deconstructing the Oromo identity in order to reconstruct that of Amhara. Thus de-Oromization and Amharization are the two sides of the same coin, in which the former is a means and the latter is an end.

De-Oromization involves the process of destroying the core institutions, values, language, religion, social and political systems and features that made Oromo who or what they were and at the same time inculcating all the values, systems and cultures of the Amhara identity. In short turning the Oromo from what or who they were to what or who they were not is its essence. The problem that this process created was not only abandoning one’s identity and taking the identity of others, but also deserted one’s humane and egalitarian value system in favour of the repressive and hierarchical system of others. Legesse (2000: 14) remarks that in contrast to the egalitarian culture of Oromo the “Abyssinian society had the authoritarian and sharply ranked” hierarchy. The following sections attempt to explain how de-Oromization and Amharization were processed through Christianization, language transfer and intermarriage, all of which are the means for Amharization as an end.

5.4.9.1. Christinization

The Oromo religion over the last one century suffered a severe blow. Orthodox Christianity was introduced to and penetrated into the lands of Oromo in the nineteenth century mainly through the repressive actions of the Abyssinian leaders and clergies. The aim of the Abyssinian rulers in general, that of Emperor Yohannes IV, Emperor Menelik II and
Haile Selassie in particular was to conquer and rule the Oromo not only by military force but also by religious conversion. This reality is unambiguously described by Levine, “Amhara armies were preceded, accompanied and followed by monks and priests who facilitated the imperial expansion by planting the roots of Amhara Christian culture.” (Ibid: 150)

Emperor Menelik and his leadership used both guns and religion to make the Oromo people surrender to their will. The latter was used as strong ideological weapon to exhort Oromo to conversion, and the former were used to crash their resistance. Before the forceful introduction of Christianity into their country, Oromo had their own indigenous religion, i.e., Waaqeffana. But the Christian Amhara labelled Oromo as “pagans”. “Borrowing their faith from the Judaico-Christian tradition, Abyssinians came to revere a white God and reduced the Oromo belief in Waaqa Guraacha [Black God] to a form of devil worship.” (Gemetchu in Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 97) Under the cover of Christianizing the “pagan Oromo” the Orthodox Christian priests, monks and other clergymen invaded the Oromo people and their land with the “tabbots” on their heads. The imperial armies and all the personnel of the Orthodox Christian churches worked in different fronts for the same goal – i.e., to de-Oromize Oromo in order to make them Amhara. In this work, Christianization refers to the process of converting Oromo into Orthodox Christians.

“Emperor Menelik of Abyssinia conquered not only the Oromo land but also attempted to destroy the Oromo religion, Waaqeffanna. After the large part of Oromo land fell into the hands of his warriors, Menelik forged ahead in order to convert the Oromo people into Christians.” (Chaalaa) In some parts of the Oromo land apparently the conversion was successful but in some other parts it encountered stiff resistance. For example the Borana Oromo bravely protested the conversion and defended their religion. “Menelik’s conquering army came to Borana” Jaatanii reports, “with two things in their hands and minds- guns and the Cross in their hands, and immense evils in their minds. Both were to destroy the Oromo identity. The Cross was to convert Oromo into Christians and pacify their resistance; and the guns were to break any Oromo resistance against their conquest.” Doyyo on his part narrates, “Menelik’s army exerted the utmost effort to convert the Borana people into Christians. But the Abba Gadas of Borana did not welcome their efforts. They did not give up their religions and cultural values. They strongly resisted the intrusion and menace of Menelik’s warriors.”

In explaining the consequence of this resistance Jaantani states, When the Menelik’s army and his henchmen were not able to break the resistance of the Abba Gadas they resorted
to the Qaallus, the leaders of the Oromo religious institutions. Sidelining the Abba Gadas they started empowering the Qaallus as *Baalabbaats*² (local chiefs) in order to rally them around the Imperial ambition and interest. In deed some of the Qaallus gave in and became Christians. Particularly “… Fitawrari¹⁰ Hapte Georgis appointed two major Kallu’s of the Borana as baalabbaat to represent to the Ethiopian state to the Borana population as spokesmen for the Borana.” (Helland in Baxter, eds. et al, 1996: 144) Although the Abyssinians tried to use the Qaallus as important tool for converting the Oromo into Christians, the Qaallus did not adequately serve this purpose as they were expected” (Jaatani). To explain how the Qaallus responded to the tricky approach of the Abyssinians, Jaatani reported, “The Qaallus said to the conquerors, ‘For ourselves we are converted. But we cannot convert the Borana, because they are not under our control. Borana are governed by Gada, and hence this is the domain of the Abba Gadas. We have no power to interfere’.”

What Menelik and his officials forgot was that the Qaallus themselves were still Oromo deeply from inside. There was tacit understanding between the Qaallus who had become Christians and Baalabbaats, and the Abba Gadas who strongly resisted the conversion. Even the Qaallus who had become Christians did not abandon their indigenous belief. The following narration of Chaalaa attempts to answer the question as to what sound reason did the Abba Gadas have to strongly resist the conversion. The argument of the Borana Abba Gadas goes like this: We found nothing wrong in our religion. We see no problem in our Gada and Waaqeffanna. We have our own way to Waaqa, just as people of other cultures do have their own. We want to keep our religion just as others do their own. Nothing makes it inferior to that of others, and nothing makes that of others superior. Thus we Borana Abba Gadas do not want to be converted, and we do not allow the Borana people to desert their religion too. As a result of their resistance to the menace of the Abyssinians warriors, according to the narration of the informants, many of the Abba Gadas were thrown to jail.

At this point in time it is very important to raise one question- why did the Abyssinian warriors want to convert Oromo? Whose good was intended to be served; the good of Oromo or the good of the Abyssinians? The following contention of Jaatani answers the questions. Orthodox Christianity was the ideological weapon for the Abyssinian ruling elites. The conversion was launched not to serve the good of Oromo rather it was intended to pacify their reaction and to denigrate the resistance of these people, and ultimately to make Oromo abandon their *Oromumma*. The Church and the forces of Menelik II were working hand in
hand - the Church to Christianize Oromo, and the forces to conquer the land, the people and
the mind of Oromo nation. Their goal however, was one and only one - to put Oromo under
the subjugation of the Amhara elites. Thus the Oromo land was conquered both by the rulers
with guns in their hands and priests with ‘taboots’ on their heads.

The contention of Chaalaa reinforces the above position stated by Jaatani. He argues
that the Orthodox Church was the strong wing of the Abyssinians regimes particularly
starting from the era of Emperor Menelik up until the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie’s
regime. It was preaching as if Oromo had no religion of their own. Its personnel scorned that
Oromo were pagans. For them, no other belief was a religion except Orthodox Christianity.
Indeed they did this not because they did not know that the Oromo people had their own
religion, but because they were motivated by their hidden concern. The purpose behind the
scene is to destroy the identity of Oromo and instilling that of Amhara in the Oromo mind -
Amhara toolchuudhaaf Oromo ballessuu, destroying the Oromo identity in order to
hegemonize the identity of Amhara (Chaalaa). This is what the core of Christianization was.
This clearly shows how some Amhara elites were immoral and cynic not only in treating
other people but also in using the spiritual institutions for their own personal ends.

Not only the Borana Oromo who understood the hidden motive of the Abyssinian
Orthodox conversion and resisted it. With the exception of some, the majority of the Oromo
population used different means to resist the menace. The most widely used tool was the
adoption of other religions than Orthodox Christianity. In order to maintain their identity the
Oromo had to stage active and passive resistance. “As an instrument of passive resistance,
religion was used by the majority to maintain boundaries between themselves and the
conquering Abyssinians who were Orthodox Christians.” (Bulcha in Baxter, eds. et al. 1996:
55 – 56) The islamization of Oromo was largely induced through trade and the aversion to the
Orthodox Christianity of the Abyssinians. Bartels explains that Islam and trade have gone
together in Africa again and again, and the islamization of Oromo in particular was
encouraged by Oromo aversion to the Christian Amharas. (1983: 14) The coercive pressure
put on Oromo from Orthodox Christianity induced the further penetration of Islam into the
Oromo land which started earlier through trade. In many Oromo areas such as Wallo, Arsi
and Haraghe Orthodox Christianity faced an outright rejection, and the en massie adoption of
Islam took place (Bulcha, 2002: 210). To specifically locate the areas where islamization
predominantly took place Bulcha again writes, “In Wallo in the North, in Arsi, Bale and
Haraghe in the south and south east, and in Jimma in the South-west, Islam was adopted to avoid the often mass conversion by the clergy of the Abyssinian Orthodox Church.” (Bulcha in Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 55-56)

The evasion from Orthodox Christianity also opened a way for Protestant to take deep root in other parts of the Oromo country. In an attempt to explain this Bulcha states, “In the Western Oromo land Oromo chose Evangelical Christianity over Abyssinian creed.” (2002: 210) In contrast to the Orthodox creed the Evangelical Church played important role in encouraging the participation of Oromo as personnel, in using Afaan Oromo in preaching, teaching and even sometimes in writing. Services were given in Oromo language and many of the personnel in the church were Oromo. By contrast, although it involved some cultural changes the evangelical church posed no serious threat to the identity of Oromo. It rather encouraged the expansion of modern education, health services and raised the consciousness of Oromo people. Thus the Oromo of the region found less evil in the pursuit of the evangelical church than in that of the Orthodox Church of the Abyssinians.

5.4.9.2. Benefit of Conversion

What was the benefit that the Oromo who abandoned their indigenous religion and adopted Orthodox Christianity gained? Could it be the benefit that Waaqeffanna was unable to offer? Doyyo argues, “The conversion did not give us anything that we did not have, rather it made us lose the decent religion that Oromo had over thousands of years. You are beneficiary if you are given something good that you do not have. Oromo did not lack religion.” Adding to this Jemal says, “The ruling elite forcefully introduced Christianity to the Oromo people not because they wanted to give us something good that we lacked, but to cart off the good that we had in our hand, mind and life.” In the major religious traditions people believe in God although they use different names for calling and diverse ways of worshipping him. “Thus the conversion” Jaatani draws a conclusion, “was not because our religion was inferior to the mentioned religion, but because of the political motives and menace of the regimes in the country.”

The Oromo who were converted were simple passive followers. But why at least some of them were unable to become church personnel? Three reasons could be sorted out for this. One, it might have been thought that the Oromo did not have the spiritual and moral standing for serving such an institution. The second, there was a strong tendency from the
Amhara clergies and elites to make the church remain being their exclusive sphere of dominance. The third, a person with Oromo identity was not qualified for becoming a priest of Orthodox Church. Put differently, it was impossible for an Oromo to be a priest unless he became Amhara. The basic reason, however, is the belief that an Oromo should not be a priest unless he takes the Amhara identity. For that matter, even those of Oromo who took the identity of Amhara were not given the chance of becoming priests.

The Oromo themselves did not want to become clergymen and to actively participate in the ritual performance of the Orthodox Church. Because such a commitment, in that particular situation, would mean abandoning one’s Oromumma. It was impossible for almost all the Oromo to abandon their Oromumma for becoming priests. As Dorsis says, “Oromo did not have any good reason in adopting Orthodox Christianity by giving up their own indigenous religion. This was one reason why Oromo were not priests. The second reason was there was no plausibility for the Oromo to abandon their identity for becoming priests.”

Even today the number of Oromo who actively serve in the Orthodox Church as personnel is insignificant as compared to the total population of Oromo pursuing Orthodox Christianity. In the Oromo belief repression in the name of religion is not only reprehensible but also a sin.

5.4.9.3. Was Waaqeffanna a Threat to Orthodox Christianity?

Can it be said that the Abyssinian elites attempted to destroy Waaqeffanna, because it posed a threat to their religion? How did it value other religions and their believers? Borbor responds: We the Borana Oromo believe that Waaqa has kindly given us a peaceful religion for making us have peace and harmony with everything. We do not use our religion as a means of threat or violence against anyone or anything. This religion is not a religion of violence; i.e., is a religion of peace and tranquillity. We believe that everyone is free to pursue whatever religion he/she chooses. We do not even pressurize people to adopt and follow our religion. Basically religion is a divine institution, because it is given to humans from a divine power, i.e., the Creator. How man can use such a sacred institution for evil purpose?

Indeed today there are some Borana Oromo who have adopted either Christianity or Islam – abandoning their indigenous religion. Given this, it is possible for one to think of some tension between those individuals who remained being adherents of the traditional religion and those who have abandoned it. What kind of attitude is there between these two groups of people? Do the adherents of the indigenous religion consider the converted as
traitors? Is there any discomfort between the two groups? Borbor answers: Not at all. The converted are treated just as they were Waaqeffatota, believers of Waaga. Nothing could happen to them for being followers of a different religion. It is their right to choose any religion they think to be good for them to follow. We do not interfere with their choices. We are tolerant and have peaceful approach to any other religions. What we as Borana dislike is the superimposition of other religions on that of ours and not the choice of individuals. I do not force you to eat what you do not want to eat. This is also just like that. It is up to the person to choose which religion he likes. Anyone is absolutely free to choose his or her own faith.

The following report given by Dagaagaa substantiates the comment of the above informant. Borana people in particular and the Oromo people as a whole do not have any problem with any religion and their adherents. If Oromo have any problem regarding this, it must be caused by people of non-Oromo culture. Oromo do not want others to superimpose their own religion on them, just as they do not intend to superimpose their own on others. While informally conversing with Chaalaa the researcher put this question to him: where does the problem that people have in and with religion really lie - in the religions themselves, or in the minds of their adherents? He answered: To my understanding there is nothing wrong with religions. They are all faiths believed to have been given by Waaga, and we do not believe that Waaga gives us religions of discriminatory nature. We believe that he has given us genuine religion, and any genuine religion claims no superiority over other religions. The prejudice of superiority or inferiority lies not in religions but in the minds of their adherents. Problems arise because we abuse religious doctrines.

Chaalaa’s response provoked another question: what do you mean by genuine religion? Is there a religion that is not genuine? The respondent unhesitatingly answered, Yes there is. Man-made religions are not genuine. I mean there are religions that some people create in the name of spiritual powers or religions that could be distorted because of the intervention of human interest. The genuine one is that which is created by Waaga. He has given us religion in order to make us believe in him and live in peace with one another. Religion is nothing but the belief that we have in Waaga and our relation to him. I do not think that Waaga has commanded us to shed the bloods of one another for the superiority of this or that religion provided that religions are divine prescriptions. It is only Waaga, not man who judges which religion is better, if at all there is such a religion. Comparing the religious
ambitions of Oromo with that of Amhara Levine (1974: 151) writes, “The Oromo religious culture could therefore not to be exported to other peoples” whereas the “Amhara armies were preceded, accompanied and followed by monks and priests who facilitated the imperial expansion by planting the roots of Amhara Christian culture.” Oromo never and ever used their religion as a tool of domination and exploitation, because they believed that religion which is divine must not be used for wrong actions and ends.

Despite the atrocities inflicted on the Borana Oromo were able to retain at least the major components of their indigenous religion. “In the South, in Borana, traditional Oromo religion persisted.” (Bulcha in Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 56) Even those who became Orthodox Christians themselves remained deep down pursuers of Waaqeffanna. Neither the pursuit of Orthodox Christianity nor Islam was able to make them entirely abandon the elements of their traditional religion. Witnessing this Gudrun Dahl writes, “Borana themselves follow their traditional monotheistic religion, or are Christians or Muslims … Muslims and Christians retain many traditional beliefs.” (Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 164) This is the common trait of all the converted Oromo, no matter whether they have become Christians or Muslims.

As the observation of Mekuria Bulcha goes, “… whether they became Muslims or Christians, the underpinnings of Oromo religious belief remained their traditional religion. Most of its rituals continued to be observed by converts of the new religions.” (Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 56) Very often Oromo are heard saying, “Waaqa abba kenyaa, akakayu fi abahayu kenyaa hir.ganu, we do not abandon the God of our fathers, grand and great grand fathers.” Side by side with the God of Christianity or the Allah of Islam Oromo pray to their indigenous Waaqa too. Basically the Oromo believe that the ultimate Creator is one and only one, although people use different terms to name him.

The Borana retained not only their traditional religion, but also their indigenous political culture, i.e. Gada. Commenting on this Bulcha (1996: 56) says, “Although it was purged of its political functions by the conquest, much of the ritual and social values of the Gada system continued to operate, and still today Gada constitutes a shared political idiom.” Thus the effort of the Abyssinian massive conversion of Oromo to Orthodox Christianity is the story of a failure, not of a success - because, “The different religions that different Oromo groups adopted seem not to have strongly affected the values, language and world view
which characterize them as a people.” (Ibid) The political and cultural activities that have
been undertaken since May 1991, clearly reveals that this is unquestionably true. It took the
Oromo people no time to use the democratic values of their Gada system, to reveal their deep
knowledge of how the system functioned and how its rituals were conducted. All these “still
exist among all religious groups and in all the Oromo regions.” (Ibid)

5.4.9.4. Suppression of Language

Language is one of the core features of peoples’ identity. One important mechanism
for the destruction of the Oromo identity was banning the use of Oromo language and at the
same time enforcing the use of Amharic, the Amhara language. “Since linguistic assimilation
was equated with “de-ethnicization” of the populations of the conquered territories, the use of
the Oromo language in school education, church service and public administration was
banned.” (Bulcha in Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 56) Amharic was certified as a language of
civilization, education and media of communication whereas Afaan Oromo, Oromo language
was rejected as language of the backward. Oromo children who were sent to schools were
made to desert their mother tongue and learn the Amharic language at any cost. Amharic
was, therefore, used not only as means of instruction but also as means of de-Oromization
and Amharization.

Amharization, which involves for Oromo the learning of Amharic language,
assimilation into the Abyssinian culture and conversion into the Orthodox Christianity, “was
initially limited to the descendents of a few traditional elites.” (Bulcha in Baxter, eds. et al.
1996: 55) But later it became one of the important components not only in the curriculum for
the first and second standards but also for the higher learning institutions. Some decades
back, “At the departments of Ethiopian languages students spent two terms taking courses in
the ‘dead’ and living Semitic language of Ethiopia, while the Oromo and other Cushitic
languages, spoken by more than two-thirds of the population of the Empire were totally
excluded.” (Bulcha in Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 63) These had twofold mission. One is,
discouraging students using their own mother tongue, and the other is, forcing them learn
Amharic through which they also adopt the Amhara culture. The Oromo students were made
to think that their own mother tongue was the language of the uncivilized and of an inferior
quality that should be abandoned. Ultimately it was to make them give up their own identity
and adopt that of the Amhara.
5.4.9.5. Quasi - Peaceful Alliance

The Abyssinian Imperial regimes did not only use explicit force and violence to dominate Oromo, but also forged a quasi-peaceful alliance with Oromo. Some alliances were forged particularly through marriage and others were without marriage. Intermarriage arrangement, the heart of which is political marriage, between the elites of Oromo and Amhara has a long history. “The pattern of Galla [Oromo]-Amhara alliance at the level of the royal court was continued by Tewodros who married Tewabech, daughter of the Galla [Oromo] chief he would defeat in 1853.” (Levine, 1974: 85) This statement of Levine implies that this pattern of marital arrangement between the two existed even before the marriage of Tewodros and Tewabech.

Intermarriage was used as one ‘decisive’ strategy for assimilating Oromo into the Amhara identity. Arranged between the two ethnic groups marriage is believed to fuse the blood of the two. The Abyssinian elites particularly the royal families offer their daughters, sisters or other female relatives to the Oromo elites for marriage; they also get married to the Oromo women of an elite family. Witnessing this Levine says, “Intermarriage has long been a means of solidifying a national elite in Ethiopia … Amhara and Galla frequently intermarried… and Emperor Haile Selassie I married the daughter of an originally Muslim Galla king from Wello.” (Levine, 1974: 45) According to the observation of Legesse, “the ultimate tool employed by Abyssinian rulers was the use or promise of elite political marriages between their women and the leaders of the new colonies. The most powerful traditional or emergent rulers of these territories were permitted or, more likely, ordered to intermarry with the Abyssinian royal houses…” (2000: 17)

Indeed intermarriage between the Oromo and Amhara elites was not a simple personal arrangement; it rather was a multi-faced one. It is personal, ethnic, political and cultural marriage in which the Oromo loses and the Amhara gains from the game. A son or a daughter born out of such marriage is tailored to favouring the identity that either transcends the identity of the two original ethnic groups or takes the identity of the dominant one. Both ways serve the interest of the Abyssinian ruling elites against that of the Oromo. But to the Oromo it was a mystic and ironic tool for making them compromise their identity of birth in favour of the identity of the ruling elites. This was presumed to weaken “the ethnic
boundaries at the top echelons of the colonial hierarchy and permanently attaching the local leaders to the central feudal hierarchy.” (Legesse, Ibid)

How effective was this intermarriage to achieve the intended goal? In some sense it was successful. It uprooted some Oromo elites. It took them out of the society to which they belonged and placed them in a society to which they did not belong - alienation. By so doing it did not only weaken “the ethnic boundaries at the top echelons of the colonial hierarchy…” (Ibid) but also effectively made the Oromo chiefs to abandon their identity in favour of that of Amhara to which they were married. They adopted Amhara culture, used Amharic as their own mother tongue, accepted Orthodox Christianity, acted and behaved, or in short identified themselves as Amhara. In that sense they were alienated from their own selves, and wedged into the evil trap of the Amhara ruling circle. Even these did not have equal status as those who were born Amhara. In contrast there were Oromo elites who did not want to desert their Oromo origin despite the strong ties created through marriage. “In particular, one should note the prominence of Oromo in the royal court at Gonder in the eighteenth century, when Emperor Bakkafa employed Oromo soldiers as palace officers, Iyasu II married an Oromo woman from Wallo, and his son Iyoas I insisted on speaking Oromiffa at court.” (Levine, 1974: xviii)

To sum up, written materials and live experiences show that the persistent campaigns of the Abyssinian elites against Oromo was not only to deny or disown the Oromo history but also to destroy their identity and incapacitate their resistance. All the bias and prejudices, dirt and dust that contemptuously and irresponsibly are heaped on the reality of some other human community poison the environment of human relations. Oromo have been the victims of such bitter, fouled and stifled environment. Although they may not kill the spirit of one’s identity immoral and unethical acts and behaviours gravely hurt the well being of human society.

5.5. Oromo National Consciousness

National identity is defined usually in terms of common language, origin, history, cultural ties and territorial location. Being and becoming aware of one’s identity in relation to that of others gives rise to the orientation of one’s place and position in the web of relationships in which one is a part- as an individual or as a group. It is out of this that nationalism emerges. Although the term ‘nationalism’ is vague in one sense and ambiguous
in another sense, generally it refers to a form of consciousness, attitude or concern those members of a certain nation or ethnic group develop about their national and cultural identity. It also designates a movement or struggle of a certain organized force aiming at either to dominate others or to liberate one’s nation or ethnic group from the domination of others. In this sense nationalism is a moral concept although it is popularly considered as a political. It is loaded with the value of domination and liberation. If it aims at the domination of others it is immoral for its unfair treatment. If it is undertaken in the intention of liberating people from domination it is moral since it aims at good human cause.

The concept of identity and nationalism are intimately connected. As discussed earlier identity stands for the personality, what-ness or who-ness of an individual or a group of individuals. Whereas nationalism is a conscious attitude, concern and movement that people develop for their identity- the conscious concern they have for their political, cultural, economic and social interest, place and role, opportunities and recognitions, privileges and rights. The relations of nations or ethnic groups are largely influenced by how they value and what interest they have on each other. Particularly, the value that people attach to their own national identity motivates them to behave either aggressively or friendly toward people of other identities.

In history there were people who imposed their own identity on others on one hand, and those who bitterly fought against oppressions to regain the identity they lost to these oppressions on the other. Depending on the history and experience so far gained one can get two ambivalent moral impressions about nationalism – in one sense it is more moral than immoral; and in other sense it is more immoral than moral. The nationalist movement that wages struggle against domination so as to regain all the economic, cultural and political rights is morally justified, at least in principle. That which is undertaken in the intention of violating the rights, honour, freedom and independence of other nations or minorities is morally unjustifiable. In some cases the morally justifiable nationalism itself has two faces – human and inhuman. Its aim could perfectly be noble whereas the means it employs can be questionable. Because of its vulnerability to abuse sometimes it involves mass murder, ethnic cleansing and other various forms of atrocities. It is in terms of this conceptual framework that we consider the Oromo nationalism.

Oromo nationalism developed as a reaction against the economic, political, cultural and social subjugation imposed on the Oromo people. It is both a national consciousness and
national movement undertaken either for securing political, economic, social and cultural independence or ensuring justice in all spheres of life and activities of the Oromo society. Being conscious of Oromo identity, Oromo nationalism expresses the self-assertiveness of Oromo. As it is true of any human communities, Oromo nationalism is a historical phenomenon. It emerged and is unfolding as a reaction to the brutal exploitation and domination of the Abyssinian ruling regimes. Although its identity was there ever since Oromo emerged as people, the development of Oromo nationalism (the struggle for the identity of the nation) is relatively a very recent phenomenon although its development is probably very fast in the history of nationalism.

It began taking root when Emperor Menelik, conquered the Oromo people and their land. Mohammed Hassen clearly puts, “Oromo nationalism, like other African nationalism emerged and developed in response to colonial rule. It is developing and changing. It took its shape against political and cultural dominance.” (Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 68) Political and cultural dominations, economic and social exploitations are not only painful to life but also preclude all the diversities, potentials and talents of the victims from being actualized. The oppression of the Imperial elites denied the Oromo the right to pursue their own course of development. The uncomfortable feelings for having been denied the right to flourish, in all aspects of life was strongly felt. The conquest of the Oromo land, the brutal exploitations and merciless subjugation of the Oromo people prompted the minds of the elites – to raise questions such as, who are we? Why should we be dominated? Is it because we are weak to protect our interest or because we do not really feel the pain of the evils inflicted on us? Who are those who dominate us? How did they come to dominate us and why? What should be done to shake off the yolk of domination that denies almost every right to us?

Oromo nationalism did not and still does not have a smooth route of development. Starting from its birth in the 1960s it faced intense opposition from the Ethiopian ruling regimes and others. (Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 68) All the regimes that ruled Ethiopia over the last one century looked at Oromo nationalism as a dangerous move, and consequently they attempted to suppress and eventually eliminate it. They used any explicit and implicit strategy to dismantle Oromo into pieces so that each piece remains without any knowledge about its identity with the other. Witnessing this Mohammed Hassen writes, “The Amhara ruling elites undermined Oromo national identity and unity on the grounds that the development of
Oromo nationalism would lead to the disintegration of the Ethiopian empire.” (Hassen in Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 67)

As observed by Mekuria Bulcha being an Oromo and being an Ethiopian were seen as incompatible. For the Abyssinian rulers and elites it is not possible for an Oromo to be an Ethiopian unless he/she abandons his/her Oromumma, Oromo-ness. Both are dichotomized – one has to be either an Oromo or an Ethiopian since it is impossible to be both an Oromo and at the same time an Ethiopian. Of the two one is undesirable because it is the menace to the other, i.e., Oromumma. And the other alternative is desirable because it consolidates the integration [unity] of Ethiopia, i.e., being an Ethiopian. For the desirable alternative, i.e., Ethiopiawati, Ethiopian to flourish the “undesirable”, i.e., Oromumma should be vanished. Thus the elites and rulers thought that Oromo had only one option to survive - that is to abandon their identity and take the identity of Amhara since becoming an Ethiopian is possible only through the passport of Amhara.

Surprisingly what oppressors and dictators never learn is the fact that their cruelty and brutality yields what is diametrically opposite to their whims. “The oppressive policy of the Amhara ruling elite made the Oromo to strongly embrace their ethnicity which the oppressors sought to destroy.” (Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 13) In general the regime of the Amhara ruling elite “used the cruellest and crudest form of violence against any signs of distinctive Oromo identity.” (Ibid) The fact that Oromo people were “systematically denied their economic, political and cultural rights…” (Ibid: 47) eventually made the Oromo to develop “conscious interest in Oromo language, culture and history.” (Ibid)

The Amhara rulers used the religious and regional differences existing between Oromo as an opportunity of blinding them to their real identity. But all the mythical barriers they put between the different Oromo communities [so as to make them ignorant of their oneness] were not successful in achieving its goal. For Oromo in the face of their identity all other differences are of secondary importance. As Herbert Lewis says, “…religion and region carries much less importance for the Oromo whom I know than does ethnicity, being Oromo. Their primary identification and loyalty is attached to their Oromo-ness.” (Ibid: 44) That means, all the mischievous and mythical, the immoral and vicious constructions were not able to kill the spirit of Oromumma [Oromo-ness] in Oromo personality rather made them to enthusiastically embrace it.
Oromo nationalism developed through different stages. “In the 1950s and 1960s the Oromo of Jimma and Ambo, at least had an awareness of their ethnic distinctiveness but lacked an arena or appropriate activities to act on this basis.” (Ibid: 47) Consequently, the first stage was confined to the individual awareness of Oromo identity and their conscious protest against the brutality of the regimes. This stage involved primarily the circles of Oromo elites engaged in military and bureaucratic hierarchy of the system. Some Oromo military officers and soldiers bravely started to challenge the Imperial autocratic rule. The individual reactions eventually precipitated to the formation of the Maccaal0-Tulamaa Association. The association raised questions and presented many petitions to the top officials of the regime to lift the unbearable burdens that the Oromo were groaning under. When the regime turned its deaf ear to their demands, as Bulcha reported, “the abortive plot against Haile Selassie and his regime.... was attempted by Match-Tulama members. (Ibid: 59)

This first stage of Oromo nationalism was a phase at which the Oromo nationalists themselves were not well understood by their own people – the people that they were fighting for. In the face of the well organized forces of the regime the resistance of the nationalists relatively achieved no significance effect. Many of the elites who sought the recognition of the Oromo identity were gunned down, died in prison or fled to exile and bush. Although the Oromo struggle of this phase was sporadic, localized and was led by the “traditional elites who lacked an overall perspective of the Oromo nation and were unable to articulate its aspirations” (Ibid: 49) it laid a remarkable track that the Oromo people cannot abandon unless the cause that these forerunners died or suffered for was achieved.

The second phase of Oromo nationalism involves a large number of the educated Oromos. Education and religion were used by the Amhara ruling elites as strong tools to de-Oromize and at the same time Amharize the Oromo. “In the late 1960s and 1970s young Oromo were drawn increasingly into the modern sectors through education, moving to towns and the capital, participation in urban occupations and the military. They became much more aware of modern politics.” (Ibid: 47) This opened the Oromo eyes and minds not only to the world of modernity but also to the challenges that were threatening their own identity. The first challenges that the Oromo children, who were sent to schools, encountered were the use of Amharic language instead of their own mother tongue, and learning the history of the
Abyssinians in which they found no significant portion of Oromo history. In the curriculum of the schools at different levels almost there was nothing about Oromo. The sole mission of the schools was to Amharize [the other version of which was to de-Oromize] the Oromo young people.

Civilization and Oromumma were dichotomized and Amharization and modernization were synonymised. Oromumma was considered as the identity of the uncivilized, and Amharumma [being Amhara] was taken as the identity of the civilized person, or people. For Oromo children to get civilized they ought to abandon their Oromumma and adopt the Amhara identity. The Amharized Oromo was viewed as the civilized person that could join the club of the Amhara elites but still with ‘inferior’ citizenry status. Not only the Oromo school children who faced the challenge of being Amharized but also all the Oromo who joined the urban life, different training centres, business activities and employment in civil and military institutions. The regimes used all means to make the Oromo language and culture appear as ‘inferior’- which ultimately meant that the Oromo identity was ‘inferior’ to that of Amhara. Those of Oromo who particularly went to schools and higher learning institutions were able to learn the distinctions.

In view of the identity of Oromo the policy of education produced two groups – the groups for and against the systems. Some young Oromo who learnt Amharic became reluctant to use their own mother tongue. Particularly some of the first generation of graduates from the secondary school and university quickly identified themselves as Amhara by abandoning their Oromumma – believing that the Oromo language and identity were ‘inferior’. But very many other Oromos, however, were determined to challenge the denigrating views which were being taught, and began to translate their convictions into deeds and concrete actions by using for example the Oromo language in public. Around the beginning of the 1970s Oromo students began to speak the Oromo language on campus. (Bulcha in Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 63)

The fact that the young Oromo population drew more and more to schools, colleges and various training institutions did not only result in de-Oromization but also developed a tendency of seeking and making a difference to the existing status quo. On the basis of the tendency they developed the Oromo students and educated people could be categorized into two – the group that sought social justice to end the backwardness of the country and the
suffering of people as a whole, and the group that was moved by the sense of being discriminated and alienated on the basis of ethnicity. Initially, as historical records show, the tendency of the first group was very popular and explicit—this was in line with the tendency of the whole student body in the country. That of the second group developed out of the conviction that “Oromo people were being systematically denied their economic, political and cultural rights, and appropriate respect and ‘status-honour’.” (Lewis in Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 47) At first this was in its latent form.

In the 1960s and early 1970s Ethiopian students made a land shaking protests against the regime. Under the banner of “Land to the Tiller” they made peaceful demonstrations repeatedly, which critically shook the foundation of the system. The Oromo students actively took part in the fight against the system. Besides their participation in the whole body of the students they published some clandestine pamphlets. Bulcha writes, “In order to challenge the system that devalued and stigmatized their culture, some clandestine publications in the Oromo language, and later in English started to appear...” (Bulcha in Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 63) That means as Bulcha remarks, “…the Ethiopian school system and the official culture did not create an Ethiopian identity. Instead it produced “insiders” and “outsiders” and perpetuated existing ethnic prejudices and mistrust” (Ibid: 63) which heightened the struggle against the regime. Not only are the protests of the educated elites and students but also the uprisings of Oromo peasants in many places are worth mentioning. Particularly the Bale peasants’ uprising was the outstanding. The regime faced the same challenges in almost all ethnic groups and regions of the country. The cumulative effect of the various forms of struggle against the regime finally led to the eruption of the Ethiopian Revolution in 1974, which brought down the Haile Selassie’s Imperial Regime.

Did the Revolution give solutions to the problems and answers to the questions, for which Oromo nationalism was called forth and sought? The revolutionary air of the first two or three years was filled with the sense of promising solutions and hopeful answers. The problem of land and ‘National question’ were the fundamental problems of the country that called forth the revolution. The Provisional Military Administrative Council [PMAC] otherwise Dergue, that toppled the Imperial regime could consolidate itself and stay in power only if it positively responded to these chronic questions. Consequently, the problem of land was addressed by undertaking a radical land reform program.
The military regime also showed initially a gesture of good will to address ethnic problems. The existence of nations, nationalities and various communities with different languages, religions and cultures was recognized for the first time in the history of the country. The word ‘Oromo’ as a collective name substituted the denigrating names of “Ye-Shawa Gella”, “Kottu”, “Ye-Wallagaa Galla”, “Arsi”, “Borana”, etc. The recovery of their collective name [i.e., collective identity] brought about a new dynamism in Oromo self-perception, peasants and workers included.” (Bulcha in Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 64) They gained the recognition of rights to their language which they fought for – “...the legal use of Afaan Oromo for mass media became possible for the first time.” (Ibid) But recognizing the rights of people is one thing, and granting them the opportunities and privileges that they deserve by virtue of their right is another.

Unfortunately the revolution did not continue with all the hopes and promises to address the rights of ethnic groups although it initially sympathized with them. The Amhara elites were able to manage shifting the gear of the revolution in favour of their own interest. The military regime built confidence because of two main reasons. The country’s military force which was under its control was ready for mobilization against any resistance. The land reform program gained a huge support of the peasantry. These were enough for the new regime to consolidate its own power. The proclamation of land answered to the question of “Land to the tillers” by snatching it from the hands of the landlords, naftenyas and churches.

After consolidating its power the Military Government started adhering to some policies of the previous regimes particularly with regard to the issues of ethnicities. The story of forcefully keeping all the ethnic groups of the country together by using the Amhara culture as a medium of unification continued. “Instead of encountering voluntary integration of the nationalities in the country’s socio-political structure, unity and homogeneity were sought by military means.” (Bulcha in Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 64) Before and immediately after the eruption of the revolution there were fierce debates among the educated people and students whether priority should be given to class struggle or ethnicity.

Most fair minded Ethiopians including some of the Oromo elites pursued after the fashion of Marxism, believing that it was the only guiding ideology for the creation of a just and prosperous Ethiopian society. The Marxist oriented individuals believed that all the problems of the nation could be addressed and solved through class struggle that transcended
ethnicity. They explained the economic, political, social and cultural relations and problems of the society in the country in terms of class divisions, and hoped that they could bring about fundamental solution to questions of ethnicity by taking the class struggle to its ultimate end.

Bulcha (in Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 61) writes that the primacy of class over ‘tribal’ sentiments and cultivation of class consciousness was emphasized. It was argued that class, as collective identity, transcends ethnic identity and therefore, Ethiopia’s problem ought to be primarily seen as a class problem not an issue of ethnic or colonial oppression. Those who looked into Marxism for the solution of the country themselves were divided into two groups largely on the question of the support to be given to the Military Government and its replacement by a people’s government. One intended to give a provisional critical support and the other denied any support to it. They also differed on the issue of how to create the government of people. The immaturity of political consciousness, lack of advanced knowledge of setting workable tactics and strategy, poor experience of handling contradictions and differences created a wide crack among the ‘Marxist-revolutionary forces’ of the country.

This condition became an opportunity for the self-styled Military Government to play off one against the other. First it made those Marxist groups that gave it a provisional critical support its ally and the other group its enemy. This finally led the nation to the most brutal massacre called, Red Terror – which took the lives of thousands, most whom were young, educated, people with sincere love and respect for the nation and the country. But finally even those who voted a critical support for the regime on temporary basis themselves were crushed by the brutal forces of the regime.

The revolution for which the young, educated and well-wishers of the country fought ended up in devouring those who were the vanguard for its eruption. Despite the hope and conviction of people that the revolution had something good in its store for solving the chronic ethnic problems of the country, it turned out to be practically more callous than the previous regime. The Oromo language and culture were absolutely suppressed; even the remaining ritual and ceremonies of Gada system were banned – being considered as ‘reactionary’ and ‘superstitious’ exercises. “Amhara elites continued to dominate Ethiopia’s politics, media, academia and other public institutions” (Bulcha in Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 65) thereby the history and the story of ill-treatments of ethnicities continued.
The shift that the Military Government made regarding the problems of ethnicity brought a change in the content and scope of Oromo nationalism. Those who had strong concern about the issue in question themselves could be categorized into two groups – the group of those who believed that still a genuine solution could be found within the bounds of the country’s territorial integrity and the group of those who believed that national independence was the only possible solution. The former eventually died out whereas the latter was finally precipitated to the formation of the ‘Oromo Liberation Front, OLF’.

As shown above, both the Imperial and the Military regimes left no stone unturned to destroy the identity of Oromo. But, whatever ways and means were used to dissolve the Oromo identity into that of Amhara was left in vain. “The identities that the Haile Selassie and Military regimes wasted so much resources and human life to suppress were blossoming and asserting themselves with a ferocity that was not suppressible any more by military means.”(Bulcha in Baxter, eds. et al. 1996: 66) Despite the brutal atrocity inflicted on them Oromo were able to retain some of their distinctive culture. The more the ruling elites enforced their shrewdness against the identity and well being of Oromo, the more Oromo became aware of the evil motive of this enforcement. The deeper the oppressors exerted their efforts to denigrate the identity of Oromo the stronger Oromo got concerned about their Orommumma. The Oromo nationalism is still unfolding. It keeps on developing till the Oromo ge: a political, economic, social and cultural space that they morally, humanly and legally deserve. No repression of any kind disrupts its continuity as long as it aims for justice and peace. The only thing that halts it is the attainment of justice – fair, moral or ethical treatment in all aspects of life and relations.

5.6. Critical Analysis

Better to say something about treatment. In view of morality no one has the right to enslave any human being, and no one has the moral duty to accept any treatment that dehumanizes him/her. People are not naturally born with more or less dignity. Consequently one cannot treat the other as inferior or superior. Every human individual gets value not from nature but from the society he/she is born and belongs to. Thus unfair treatment is the result of human choice. The merciless exploitation and domination to which Oromo were subjected for more than one century was not a matter of accident but rather the outcome of a deliberate choice of Abyssinian elites.
Human history shows us that there were acts and behaviours for or against identity. On one hand there were some human forces that forcefully made others individuals or communities to lose their identity in favour of their own and on the other there were other forces that fought for the retention of identity. Consequently in the attempt to dissolve identity and retain it there is struggle – the struggle between the moral and immoral attitudes and orientation. The Amhara elites used all available means to destroy the identity of Oromo and the Oromo people paid the necessary price they were asked to retain their identity.

The wrong premises that the Amhara elites used are: One, Ethiopia is the result of their own making; and second, Ethiopia survives as long as the Amhara, their language and culture are the centre of the nation. Humanity has at least two major means of keeping people together – one is by consent and the other by force or violence. The first one is moral and the second is immoral. The choice of the Abyssinian ruling elites has always been the second option. Why they failed to see that people could stay in unity by consent more comfortably than by force? By immoral means [force/violence] it may be possible to keep people together only for sometime but impossible to assimilate or integrate them perpetually. It is the peaceful means or consent that makes people to have positive interest in one another – intrinsic interest. The ruling elites of the country, however, had never made this their own choice.

Why either ‘this’ or ‘that’ when it is possible to be both ‘this’ and at the same time ‘that’? Why is it not possible to be an Oromo and at the same time an Ethiopian, if there is need for it? Why the acquisition of an Ethiopian identity should be through the cultures, language or identity of Amhara or Semitic group? The Amhara elites ascribe the history of Ethiopia to themselves when they well know that Ethiopia is the nation that is built by the life and blood, sweat and labour of all the Ethiopian peoples. But they do not want to recognize the merits of others for they might have believed this could threaten the claims that they are the only creators [makers] of this nation. They identify Ethiopia and Amhara when the three-fourth of the Ethiopian population is non-Amhara. They make Ethiopia and its nation tiny in the intent to make their own selves great.

Ethnicity existed, exists and it continues to exist as long as there are linguistic and cultural diversities. This is its natural feature. Human history may or may not avoid this feature. It also exists as artificial and historical phenomenon. As long as there is bias and
prejudices, or unfair treatment ethnicity exists. All Ethiopians may favourably accept their Ethiopian identity only if Ethiopia recognizes and fairly treats the diversities of its ethnic groups. In other words, in principle they comfortably accept the Ethiopian identity only if they are fairly treated. And the Ethiopian identity also flourishes only if all the ethnic groups comfortably accept it as their national identity. It is only then that all identify themselves as Ethiopians not as a matter of formality [license] but as a fact of reality. There are different ethnic communities in African societies in general and Ethiopian societies in particular. Ethnicity is understood as a way of classification, referring to a group of people who share a common language, customs etc. Positively, it is a mark of identity and belonging; hence an essential part of being human too. All of us belong to certain groups, be it family, ethnic community, nation and the like. Thus, we identify ourselves in this manner also.

In principle the integrity of the country is desirable and its dissolution is undesirable. To avoid the undesirable and to be left with the desirable the use of force was seen as the only option for them to be considered, when there were many other non-violent ways of doing it. Ways other than force would compromise their power, the power that they would never give up unless disgracefully pushed off. Thus we may think that the use of force helped not the country and its people, but the elites. Even the elites are eventually the losers. This is what the history of the country vividly witnesses.

From moral perspective anyone who denies the reality of any other ethnic group is doing injustice. Whether we like it or not Ethiopia is the making and the home of all of its ethnic groups in the country. A genuine Ethiopian is not one who calls him/herself a ‘True’ and the others ‘False’ Ethiopians, rather one who accepts the diversity and recognizes the identity of each ethnic group composing Ethiopia. A ‘True Ethiopian’ who excludes the others on the basis of ethnicity, religion or sex is a false Ethiopian. Thus, in reality the Abyssinians who call themselves the ‘True Ethiopians” and consider the non-Abyssinians as “pseudo-Ethiopians” are false Ethiopians. They use the label “True Ethiopian” to get an open door and password for the perpetual assumption of power.

The Abyssinian elites ascribe immense value to themselves as the sole unifiers of the country. Although they portrayed their conquest as a gesture of unification, in actual fact it was a project of melting all the ethnic groups into one ethnic group. The story of their domination is not to create a unity in diversity rather to crush out diversity into one identity.
It was an attempt to make all others to lose their identity in favour of one ethnic group. But how these large bodies of human communities could be dissolved into one ethnic group which is by far less than the rest of the population of the country? Ignoring the possible alternative they have been trying the impossible one, the effect of which is a failure of many dimensions to the nation.

Ethiopia has been the fortunate land and nation for being endowed with immensely rich and colourful diversity. But it unfortunately lacked the system and wisdom that could recognize the merits of this diversity particularly over the last one century. The regimes that came one after the other seemed to have recognized Ethiopia as a land, not the peoples on the land. They told us that they had wonderful love for Ethiopia and enormous respect for its people. But the reality on the ground depicts that they loved the land, not the people; they loved themselves not the country. They did not only deprive the Oromo people of all what they deserved but also they distorted, disfigured and stigmatized them for nothing but themselves. The talents, potentials, energy and creative power of the Oromo people were suffocated. This injured not only the Oromo, but also the country, generations and human values.

Imagine the picture of Ethiopia, for example, without all non-Abyssinians. Could it have the power and the grace that it has when all the non-Abyssinians are the constituents of it? When the values and norms, the traditions and history of these people get distorted or undermined it is the image of Ethiopia that gets damaged, it is the power of this nation that is enervated and it is the development of these people that is hampered. Thus the moral quality of the Abyssinian politics has played more in downgrading than upgrading the nation and the country. It is not the Oromo who depressed the development of Ethiopia as some scholars said; on the contrary it is the Abyssinian ruling elites who have been ravaging it for more than a century. The resistance the Oromo made to reverse the repressive rule of the Abyssinian regimes in different forms and capacities has rescued at least the important features of their identity. “The resisters of tyranny are mankind’s greatest heroes.” (Grayling: 2005: 143) A legitimate battle against immoral is moral, because it aims at the advancement of good.

Conclusion
In this chapter we have tried to explain as to how Oromo translated their traditional moral values into deeds. An attempt was made to demonstrate how Oromo practically treated others and how they themselves have been practically treated by others. We understand that moral beliefs, which are the ideological foundation of virtuous conduct, develop through the recognition of the vital importance of the directive force of moral values. These are internalized and merged organically into emotions and feelings and thereby linking feelings, knowledge and practical action. Such beliefs represent moral knowledge that is deeply rooted in human consciousness as well as in the culture of region that a person resides. At the more conscious level, they directly influence the choice of motive, decision-making and its execution.

Except in the treatment of women, Oromo were morally well and modest in treating others. The concern they had for others is still valid and desirable in the contemporary world. But they were not treated the way they had been treating others. This has placed the Oromo in a precarious situation for about a century. They were crushed between two diametrically opposite value systems- the friendly and humane system of their own and aggressive system of the Abyssinian elites. In reaction to the situation they developed two ambivalent attitudes – the attitude of protesting the oppression and the attitude of keeping their own non-violent behaviour. In course of time, Oromo nationalism emerged out of the necessity of fighting national oppression, although this ambivalence is still being reflected in its performance. The point is that moral knowledge can function only if and when it develops into the corresponding beliefs of the person: when transformed into moral beliefs, ideas about good and evil become a great moral power. In other words, moral beliefs are the subjective grounds of sanity and responsibility, of control and self-control of the person.

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**Notes**

1. The author does not seem to mean great number of children. Rather he seems to say that the family keeps on bearing children up until nature forbids them to do so.

2. Mogaasa is the Oromo word which primarily means collective adoption. It also refers to the act of adoption that is undertaken at individual level. In certain locality of West Shawaa people use this term to express the act of emancipating oneself from slavery or servitude by paying compensation.

3. Naftegna literally means in Amharic a holder of rifle. Metaphorically it denotes the Amhara who joined the Menelik’s war of conquest and settled amongst the conquered Oromo with guns in their hands and powers bestowed on them to keep the subjects in check, and in the motive of looting and expropriating the land and the livestock of the conquered people.

4. The word “Boran” names the Borana people. Please note the word is spelt differently by different scholars. Some of these are Boran, Borana, Boorana, Booranaa and Borena. This is true of many other local terminologies used in this study.

5. Taboot, in the Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, is believed to be a blessed entity symbolizing different Angels that are worshipped. It is taken care of only by priests.

6. Baalabbaat is the title of a local chief who is appointed by the Imperial regime to basically mediate the regime and the local people. In actual fact a person of this title is the agent of the government who executes the top-down direction.
7. Tewodros II was the Emperor of Ethiopia from 1855-1868, who forcefully tried to lump different small states of Abyssinia together.

8. This refers to Mohammed Ali of Wallo, who was later baptized by Emperor Yohannes IV as Nigus literally means king, Michael of Wallo. He married the daughter of Emperor Menelik II and fathered Lij Iyasu.

9. Matcha is one of the Oromo clans or tribes. Although the appropriate spelling in Oromo language is Macca different writers spelt it as Mecha, Meca, Macca, Matcha.