4. The research setting

4.1. Introduction

This chapter will give background information about Gedeo and Guji communities and their localities. The chapter will provide information on the location, language, religion, origin, agro ecology and production practices, social and political organizations and how they are incorporated into Ethiopian empire. Much emphasis is given to the customary systems of administration and political history of the subject peoples as this has paramount importance in the comprehensive understanding of the current relationship between the peoples.

4.2. The Gedeo

4.2.1. Land and people

The Gedeo are one of the 56 ethnic groups who were lumped together to form the SNNPR\(^\text{19}\) of the new federal structure of Ethiopia. ‘Formerly, the Gedeo were referred to as Darassa and their country Darassa Awraja, one of the districts of the former Sidamo Tekilay Gizat (imperial province)’ (Tadesse K, 2002:22).

\(^{19}\)The SNNPR is located in the Southern and South-Western part of Ethiopia. Astronomically, it roughly lies between 4°43’-- 8°58’ North latitude and 34°88’-- 39°14’ East longitude. The region is bordered with Kenya in South, the Sudan in South West, Gambella region in North West, Oromia region in North West, North and East directions. The total area of the region is 110,931.9 km\(^2\) which is 10% of the total area of the country. According to the 2007 national population census, the total population of the region was 15,042,531; this figure makes the region’s population to be 20.4% of the total population of the country. 13.9 million (89%) of the region’s people are living in the countryside mainly working on agricultural activities. According to the same source of information, the region has an average population density of 138 persons per a km\(^2\) of land. It is also reported that the maximum density is 627 persons per a km\(^2\) in Gedeo; whereas 21 persons are living on a km\(^2\) land in South Omo zone. According to the publication of the regional council of nationalities, SNNPR is comprised of 56 ethnic groups with their own distinct geographical location, language, cultures, and social identities living together. These varied ethnic groups are classified into the Omotic, Cushitic, Nilo-Saharan and Semitic language families. Based on ethnic and linguistic identities, the region is recently divided into 14 zones, 4 special woredas, and 131 woredas, which further divided into 3999 kebeles (Council of Nationalities, SNNPR 2011:12).
During the *Derg* regime, the district was re-named as Gedeo *Awraja*. As of EPRDF’s coming to power, some parts of Bule and Wonago *woredas* were dissociated from the previous Gedeo *Awraja* and incorporated into Oromia region and Sidama zone respectively. In addition to this, Amaro *woreda* (the country of Kore ethnic group), was separated from the *Awraja* and given the status of special *woreda*. Despite this, Gedeo *Awraja* has been raised to the level of a zone. This was said that an indication of the geopolitical and economic significance of the Gedeo to the national development in general and to the endeavour of south region's development in particular (Dagne, 2011).

The Gedeo are located between 5 and 7 degrees North latitude and 38 and 40 degrees East longitude in the escarpment of the southeastern Ethiopian highlands overlooking the rift valley, in the narrow strip of land running from north (Sidama zone) to south (Oromia region) (Tadesse K., 2002:22). The Gedeo share boundary with the Guji-Oromo people in all directions except to the north at which they are bordered with the Sidama ethnic group. According to the 2007 national population census, the Gedeo had a total population of 986, 977 people (CSA, 2008), “of which over 23.3 % are believed to live in Oromia region, notably in Guji and Borana zones” (interview with ex-Gedeo zone chief administrator, Hawassa, 23Nov, 2011).
Map 3: SNNPR by zone and special *woreda*

Source: CSA, 2008
4.2.2. Language and religion

According to McClellan (1988:28), being one of the members of the highland Eastern Cushitic linguistic complex, the Gedeo speak *Gedeuffa / Gedeinke affö* (Gedeo language), a language most closely related to those of Burji, Hadiya, Sidama and Kambata with whom they share numerous cultural and social similarities. Over several centuries of contact with the Guji-Oromo, the Gedeo have incorporated many Oromo words into their vocabulary. Many Gedeo know this language quite well, which facilitates contact. *Mageno*, literally the sky God, who is said to have created everything, is the center of Gedeo's religion. Since time immemorial, the Gedeo believe in *Mageno*. The Gedeo believe that *Mageno* is the creator of everything on the earth and is the Supreme Being. He is the origin and sustenance of all things. *Mageno* created the earth, all things on the earth, the sun, the moon and stars. When *Mageno* created man, he also created animals, fishes and plants. He has also created such ‘bad things’ as illness and death. The Gedeo have firm belief in *Mageno*'s powerfulness and capability of doing everything without limitation. Although *Mageno* is considered to be 'good' because he guides and protects people, he can also punish people if they do not obey his instructions. The traditional Gedeo pray, give offerings and sacrifice to *Mageno* almost every time. They do this to beg *Mageno*'s benevolence for ‘good things’ like rain, good harvest, children, health, and peace, and in order that he protects them against evil things such as war, disease and natural disaster. The Gedeo face *Mageno* before they face the day. In other words, the Gedeo begin the day with prayer. For instance, in the morning when they wash their face, the Gedeo pray to *Mageno* so that he may protect them from enemies and bad fortunes. Before going out for a long journey, they pray to *Mageno* so that he guides and protects
them against evil things. Even after someone has died, the person's relatives pray in order that Mageno may protect the soul of the deceased.

‘The Gedeo believe in life after death. Ancestral spirits are regarded as the legitimate intermediaries between Mageno and the people’ (Tadesse K., 2002:27). As the case among Guji-Oromo (Tadesse B., 1988:21), the Gedeo also worship natural phenomena such as rivers, hillsides and big trees. It is not these objects themselves that are worshipped, but the spirit of the Mageno which is believed to reside in them. The objects only act as churches of the Christians or mosques of the Muslim under which prayers and offerings are made for God or Allah. Apart from these, among the Gedeo witchcrafts and sooth Sayers are also thought to be the seats of divine powers and hence a sizeable people attend their houses.

However, after the incorporation of the Gedeo into the Ethiopian state and particularly after the expansion of missionaries, most people in the area have been Christianized. Christian Missionaries came to the Gedeo country in the early 1950s. They established two churches, the Ethiopian Kale Hiwot Church and Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekaneyesus. Of these, the Ethiopian Kale Hiwot Church (EKC) attracted the bulk of the Gedeo population and exerted a far-reaching influence (Tadesse K., 2002:27). Though the Ethiopian Orthodox Church entered the Gedeo land in the last decade of 19thC (McClellan, 1988:23), there are more converts to Protestantism than to Coptic creed. Several factors facilitated the popularity of the Protestant mission among the Gedeo. Of these, offering medical services by opening rural clinics, charity for the needy and elementary or village schools for the children of the rural people are the major ones. Furthermore, Protestant religion has been positively perceived by considerable number of
the Gedeo people in that several social problems like diseases, drunkenness and family disorganization have minimized through continues missionary preaching.

4.2.3. Origin of the Gedeo people

The origin of Gedeo is not well known. Researchers (Demissie, 1988; Tadesse k., 2002; Asebe, 2007; Tadesse k. et al, 2008, Dagne, 2011) agree that this is due to absence of any reliable written source that could show the origin of the people. Over half a century before, Aleka Taye (1955:35) in his Amharic version book entitled Ethiopian History without mentioning their origin simply states that there are people around Harro-Wolabu (a small pond located at about 8-10 km south west of Bule town) who speak a different language from the surrounding Oromo people and who call themselves Darassa, though they have cultural similarity with the Oromo people.

One of my Gedeo informants, contend that the Gedeo came from the north direction. They came to their present areas in search of fertile soil for their crop cultivation and grazing land for their livestock. The Gedeo crossing the sea [presumably the red sea], through Eritrea, moved southwestward to Bahr Dar (Gojam) then to Sidamo land; the Gedeo keep on going ahead through Negele, Wadera, Adola, Me’e Boko, Harso, Gedeb, Likitu, Repe, Haro-Wolabo, Bericha, Kolisha, Kara, and finally they reached Agemsa. After elapsing some time there, they came dawn to Wochema from which the various clan members of Gedeo dispersed to different Gedeo localities [subbo (highland); dhibata (midland); and riqata (lowland)] where they are living now (Interview with a key informant, Dilla zuria woreda, Wochema kebele, 27 Feb., 2011).

Agemsa is one of the rural kebeles of Bule woreda where the Oda ya’a (literally, traditional public meeting place) of the Gedeo is found.
According to a book\textsuperscript{21} recently published by the group of Gedeo intellectuals, historically there were three brothers by the name Deresso, Boru and Ugago (Gujo) who were as a matter of chance dispersed to different ecological niches in search of grazing and fertile land. It was after this dispersal that Deresso get married two wives and got seven sons, whom the present day Gedeo are believed to descend from. According to the same information source, the Gedeo were historically lived in such areas like Genale, Harsu, Hawata, Boku (Solamo) and Hara-Dida. Then, they gradually left these places, came and settled in the areas of Haro-Wolabo, Kube, Wochema, and Kara. In that way eventually they dispersed to their present localities (Tadese K., et al, 2008:6-13). Most of my Gedeo informants in Bule, Dilla zuria, and Gedeb agree on the above assertions and further state that these are the original settlement places before they scattered all over their present territory.

Another publication by the South Nations Nationalities and Peoples’ Regional Council, institute of culture and language, history and heritage (2009:375) traces the origin of Gedeo to Harsu, found in Oromia rigion. According to this writing the Gedeo originally came from the area called Harsu, crossed Hawata River and came to Haro-Wolabo. Then they moved NorthWest ward to Agemsa where they spent long. There they devised their cultural and spiritual laws by which they are goverened. That is why \textit{Oda ya’a} of Gedo located in Agemsa (at a particular location called Onocho).This publication also asserts that the apical father of Gedeo is named Deresso and he had two wives from whom he got seven children by whom the Gedeo clans are named today.

\textsuperscript{21}This book is an Amharic version, entitled ‘\textit{Yegedeo Biher Tarik} (The History of Gedeo Nation). It is published in 2000EC (2008) by the Gedeo zone information and culture main department, Dilla.
Dr. Tadesse Kippie in his turn traces the origin of Gedeo to the aboriginal tribe called Murgga-Gossalo, perhaps the earliest people to have lived in the area. However, according to oral tradition, he adds, Gedeo trace their origin to a polygamous ancestor named Deresso. Deresso was believed to be the elder brother of Gujo, the ancestor of Guji-Oromo, and Boro anceser of Borana Oromo. This implies Gedeo and Guji are descended from the same ancestor (Tadesse K., 2002).

As we observe from the above discussions, both the oral tradition and the statements by the literate groups of the society, historically the Gedeo lived in such areas like Genale, Hawata, Hara Dida and Kube. The tradition also strongly maintains the view that the original home land of the Gedeo was found to the east of their present location, and also Gedeo and Guji share a father. On top of this, Gedeo’s place of residence before their expansion seems to fit with the first residential places of the Guji Oromo (see section 4.1.2.3).

4.2.4. Clan organization

Deresso, the apical ancestor of the present day Gedeo, was said to have seven children, three from the senior wife and four from the junior one. The sons were named as Darasha, Gorgorsha, Doba'a, Hanuma, Hemb'a, Logoda, and Bakaro. Descendents of these sons are organized into two ‘houses’, Shole bate (the senior) to which the first four belonged; and Sasse bate (the junior) to which the last three were members of. It is from these seven sons of Deresso that the present day seven Gedeo gosa (clan) claim to have descended from. My informants at Wochema state that among the shole bate clans Darasha is senior. Whereas among the sasse bate Hemb’a is the senior. Of all the seven
clans Darasha is said to be senior clan, which the Gedeo tell this for practical matters among themselves. ‘Gedeo thus appear to have an asymmetrical moiety organization with the senior clans dominating the society’s more important leadership posts’ (McClellan, 1978:69).

The Gedeo social structure consists of gosa (clan) at the highest level and extends down to lineage, extended family, and nuclear family. The latter consists of the husband, his wife (wives), and their children. The extended family includes the brothers of the husband, his father and mother, and his brothers’ children in addition to the nuclear family members. Informants at Wochema (Dilla zuria woreda) and Agemsa (Bule woreda) listed twenty five lineages under the three clans of sase-bate, and 15 lineages under the four clans of shole-bate. All of these lineages are exogamous, as to the same information source.

Up on his death, Deresso divided the land among the seven sons. Each clan thus was awarded specified territory. Before their incorporation into the Ethiopian empire in the last decade of the 19thC, the Gedeo lived in a federation of sasse roga (three zones). These are the Subbo, Dhibata and Riqata and were ruled by a council of elected elders, according to the gada tradition (Tadesse K., 2002:25). The division of Gedeo land into the sasse roga was for administrative purpose. With the exception of slight variation in dialect and climatic condition, people living in the Sasse roga have similar culture. However, in each of the Sasse roga some clans are more dominant than others (Demissie, 1988: 3). The Subbo roga encompasses the northeast or the highland part of Gedeo which covers Bule woreda; Dhibata is the southern part which includes Yirga-Chaffé, Kochere (formerly Fiseha Genet) and Gedeb woredas; and Riqata is the northern part of Gedeo,
which includes particularly Wonago *woreda*, and the town of Dilla (Tadesse K., 2002:25). However, one of my informants at Wochama states that, seen in the context of territorial settlement pattern, the territorial division (*Sesse-Roga*) among Gedeo clans is hypothetical. Whilst certain clans may be dominant in some areas, we do also observe other clans along with the major ones. For example, Hemb’a is dominant in Wonago *woreda*, but does also inhabit Yirga Chaffee *woreda*, along with Bakarro. Bakarro are found both in YirgaChaffe and Kochere *woredas*. The Logoda are dominant in Kochere *woreda* but they do reside in Bule *woreda* as well. This shows that these seven Gedeo clans do not exclusively occupy a given territory, contrary to the general assumption. Therefore, we can infer from this that, though the seven Gedeo clans are territorially defined, individuals are free to move and settle wherever they like.

When society is organized by clans the members of a clan are considered between themselves as brothers and sisters. Their duty to one another becomes one of the mutual support and defense. An offence of one member is an offence against all. The strength of the clan is reduced if a member of the clan is killed. Therefore, compensation must be obtained either by reduction of the strength of the offending clan or by payment of goods, money, or anything considered convenient by the custom. For the matter of revenge the inconvenience of the person is not regarded, it is enough that he belongs to the offending clan. Among the Gedeo, informants state that the unit is not the individual but the kin. The individual is but part of the kin. If he be injured, it is the kin which is injured. If he be murdered, it is the blood of the kin that has been shed, and the kin is entitled to compensation or to revenge. If he commits a wrong, the whole kin is involved; and every member is accountable, not as an individual, but as part of the kin that committed the
wrong. These days, however, as ‘civilization’ advances the right of vengeance was gradually limited, and thus only the offender and/or sometimes his immediate kin remain responsible.

4.2.5. Agro-ecology and Production practices

The Gedeo have three agro-ecological zones. These are subbo (highland), dhibata (midland), and riqata (lowland). Agricultural activities are carried out in accordance with the agro-ecology. According to the information from Gedeo zone agricultural development main department (2012), the subbo is a cool region, which accounts for 26% of the Gedeo land. It has an altitude of over 2500 masl with annual rainfall ranging between 1000–1200 mm, and temperature below 16°C. This zone is said to be suitable for the cultivation of such highland crops as barley, wheat, beans, peas, and vegetables (mainly cabbage and onion). Enset (Ensete Ventricosum), the staple food of the Gedeo, is not abundant here; as opposed to dhibata zone where it is widespread. At this elevation, there is sufficient pasture since rainfall is abundant but the population is relatively less dense. Lower population means, there are fewer gardens and more open grazing land. Hence, there is livestock herding activity, which include mainly cattle, sheep, horses and mules.

The dhibata accounts for the largest share (73%) of agro-ecology of the Gedeo and considered to be the best agro-ecological zone. It has an average altitude ranging between 1750-2500 masl, annual rainfall 800-1000 mm, and temperature roughly 18-26°C. Most of the Gedeo people live in this zone which has a moderate climate and is also considered to be the best ecology for the production of enset the basic subsistence crop, and coffee
(the predominant cash crop). The *rigata*, the hot region, accounts for about 1% of the Gedeo land, has an average altitude below 1750 masl, annual average rainfall below 800mm and temperature above 25°C. In this region, such crops as *enset*, coffee, maize, *teff* (*Eragrostis Abyssinica*), banana, mango, avocado, sugarcane and sweet potato are grown. This region is also reported to be the second important cattle and goat herding area following *subbo* agro-ecology.

According to my key informants in Dilla *zuria woreda*, based on moisture and temperature, the Gedeo recognizes four seasons on which their farming calendar is based. These seasons are *Bono* (mid-August----mid-January), *Ba’lessa* (mid-January----mid-March), *Harsso* (mid-March----mid-May), and *Adolessa* (mid-May----mid-August). *Bono* is a warm and moist season, about 5 months long and is the main harvesting season. *Ba’lessa* is the dry season, with burning heat (*qamo*) and about two months long. Field preparations are made in this season. *Harsso* is rainy season, about two months long. It is in this season that the major crops of the Gedeo (*coffee* and *enset*) are planted. *Adolessa* consists of intermittent rainy and dry days. With duration of about three months, it is the long rainy season during which weeding of major crops is carried out.

The Gedeo practice an ancient African agricultural system with the African hoe, in which as in most of African countries, women (rather than men) play greater role in food production. The agricultural system of Gedeo is estimated to be more than five millennia old (Tadesse K., 2002). *Enset* and coffee play a central role in the the agriculture of the Gedeo.
The roles these crops play in the Gedeo production practices is beyond an economic sphere. They play important roles in the social and cultural spheres as well. Apart from \textit{enset} and coffee, livestock are also important component of the economy of Gedeo. Nevertheless, due to the rapidly growing population and the consequent farmland shortage, the lion's share of Gedeo's land has been devoted to \textit{enset} and coffee.
cultivation. As a result of pasture land scarcity, the Gedeo couldn’t raise enough livestock on their land which in part contributed to the establishment of reciprocal relations of the agricultural Gedeo with the neighboring agro-pastoral Guji-Oromo. In the period of the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s and the resulting famine in the country, *ensen* has been acknowledged by many as reliable food source. Hence, different products of the crop are sold in the local markets and have been transported to big cities like Addis Ababa (see figure 1) where the food is now getting popularity and is served with *kitiffo* (minced meat mixed with butter).

Figure 2: One of the *ensen* and coffee forests in Gedeb *woreda*

Source: Field photo, May 2012 (Halo-Beriti *kebele*)
Coffee is the most important cash commodity for almost all people in the coffee producing areas of the country. It also covers the lion's share of foreign exchange earnings of the nation as a whole. In Gedeo, coffee has the greatest economic importance for the community (see figure 2). In the first place, it is used as the major source of cash income, and also for home consumption. The importance of coffee is not limited only to economic spheres. Coffee has social and cultural significance as well. Coffee is important in promoting one’s social position among the producer. As wealth is valued by the possessions of herds of cattle among the neighboring agro-pastoral Guji-Oromos, the size of coffee plantation determines the social hierarchy of wealth among the Gedeo. Most cultural practices and rituals performed in Gedeo are accompanied by coffee ceremonies. People who gather to construct a hut for weeding or harvesting in coffee fields through work party or individuals hired for labor are served coffee either at the beginning or the end of the job. When the Gedeo face joyful or sad events coffee is served to guests who come to attend and share the joy or sorrow.

4.2.6. Customary system of administration

In every society there are acceptable mechanisms of maintaining societal rules either through formal or informal method of enforcing these rules; otherwise, the survival of society is inconceivable. Thus, ‘the Gedeo like their neighboring Guji-Oromo and the Sidama, have the gada system, which they call it balle system’ (Demissie, 1988:10; Tadesse K., 2002; Tadesse K., et al, 2008). The Gedeo balle system has slight variation from the Guji gada system. But it is often referred as gada system both by the community itself as well as by outsiders. Some used the terms interchangeably and
hence, in this thesis, I also did the same. The *balle* system provides secular and religious leadership for the Gedeo. In the Gedeo *balle* structure, a man passes through nine *balle* grades in his life period (beginning from early childhood to old age) all through *Qadado, Siida, Lumaasa, Raabba, Luba, Yuuba, Guduro, Qulullo* and *Cewwajje* which represents childhood to old age (Tadesse K., et al., 2008:24-25). Each grade, as most informants indicated, lasts for eight years. Within each grade, activities and social roles were strictly defined both in terms of what is permitted and what is prohibited.

My informants at Agemsa (Bule woreda) stated that the recruitment of individuals to a certain *balle* grade is not related to the actual age of the age-set members but people of different age can belong to the same *balle* grade. Similarly, John Hinnant in his study of the *gada* system of the Guji-Oromo states that the *gada* has superficial resemblance to the age-grade organizations that are found in certain African societies. The resemblance to age-grade is that *gada* organization segments the ideal or normative male life into a number of stages or grades and specifies the appropriate behavior for each grade just as the age grade organization does (Hinnant, 1977).

There is no written evidence about the origin of the Gedeo *balle* system. Nevertheless, there are common insights about the myth of origin of the Gedeo *balle* structure. In the main, according to the various oral traditions, the Gedeo people developed their *balle* system from the *gada* system of the Guji-Oromo with whom they had a long history of cultural, economic and political relations, and geographical proximity.
McClellan (1988:28; and 1978:72) by narrating from his informants presents the origin of Gedeo gada [Balle] system as follows:

The Guji Qallu named Woma first started gada. Gedeo admired it, believing it to be a proper way for people to elect their leaders, but the Guji were unwilling to teach the rituals to the Gedeo. Finally, two Gedeo men, disguised as women, slipped secretly into the Qallu’s compound and were granted asylum from the angry Guji. He then taught these men the secrets of gada. After a time, these men returned home, only to dispute between themselves who should be the first Abba gada. A contest between the two, Fifu and Dacho, was held to resolve the conflict. First each was asked to carry water from Ghedicco in a sieve. Only Dacho was able to accomplish this feat. Next they slaughtered oxen, and Dacho’s was found to be without a heart, a true miracle. Since that time miracles have been associated with Abba gadas.

This myth helps explain three general features of the Gedeo balle system; the great similarity between the Guji and Gedeo models, the respect which the Gedeo traditionally had for the Guji Qallu, and the ‘shared’ nature of the Gedeo Abba gadaship (McClelan, ibid). Several scholars also seem to agree to this story. They described that the century old relation of the Gedeo with the Guji and the Borana paved the way for the former to incorporate the gada system into their socio-political structure. Since then, elders used this system of administration to maintain ethnic cohesion among the Gedeo as well as interethnic cooperation between the group and the neighboring Guji-Oromo (Hudson, 1976:232-237; Wedekind, 1980:131-176; McClellan, 1988:28). These institutions in some way share some functional and structural similarities with each other (Hinnant, 1977, Solomon, 2009:5; McClellan, 1988).

Although the Gedeo shares the customary system of administration with their neighboring Guji-Oromo, there are also some variations between the two groups in that the Gedeo have only one central leadership—Abba gada while there is separate Abba gada for each Guji-Oromo group. We understand from this that there is some sort of centralization in the Gedeo gada system with respects to the Abba gada leadership; but
decentralized traditional administrative structure for the Guji-Oromo (Asebe, 2007). Below presented is the Gedeo balle structure that depicts the chain of command and accountability in the Gedeo balle structure.

Diagram 1: Structure of the Gedeo Balle (gada) System

- Ya’a council
  - Abba gada
    - Ja’llaba
      - Riqata Roga
        - Ja’lgabba
      - Subbo Roga
      - Dhibata Roga
        - Ja’lgabba
    - Hullati Haitcha
      - Batetti Haitcha
        - Murra
          - Residents of Kebele
As it is shown on diagram 1 above, at the top of the hierarchy is the *Ya’a* council which is the supreme authority in the Gedeo *balle* structure. The *Ya’a* council has the power to elect all *balle* officials who are accountable to it. It is the last decision-making body to which, even the *Abba gada* is accountable. This council was responsible for holding communal assemblies in every village, and the sites where these assemblies were held in each village were called *Songo*. This council mediates disputes, declares wars on enemy incursions, and initiates, when necessary, wider intergroup cooperation as well.

Figure 3: Gedeo *gada* elders in front of *onna ya’a*, Onocho, Agemsa (Bule)

Source: Field photo, Dec., 2011 (at the left edge *Atto* Tamrat Mariam, language interpreter)
Below the Ya’a council in the hierarchy is the Abba gada who is seen as the figurehead of the whole Gedeo, and is often described as the president of the traditional Gedeo community. Cases are referred to him and his council when a decision can not be reached at lower level. For instance, when conflicts break out between clans or if there is conflict with any of the neighboring ethnic groups, then he will be called in to help make peace. During his terms of eight years in the ‘office’, the Abba gada gives political, social and spiritual leadership to the community.

As the case among the Guji-Oromo (Tadesse B., 1988:21), among the Gedeo also Abba gada was considered to be holy. Supernatural power was believed to be bestowed upon him. His curse was feared like a poisonous snake's bite while his blessing was believed to be important for the success and well being of an individual and his family or to the community at large. It was this belief that made the traditional Gedeo to conform to the instructions of the Abba gada and remain faithful to the balle in power.

The well-being of Gedeo society was tied up in the health and character of the Abba gada and each holder of the position was believed to reflect the goodness of his illustrious ancestors. As Gedeo’s chief official, the Aba gada was busy making scarifies for the good of the whole society, hearing final legal appeals and dealing with inter-clan conflict (McClellan, 1978:72). Many people go to the Abba gada with gifts of honey, barley and livestock. Abba gada on his part prays to Mageno in order that hunger, drought, starvation and other natural calamities do not strike his people. He also blesses his subjects to be prosperous, have good harvests and good fortunes in all respects.
According to the information from the recent Gedeo Abba gada, among the Gedeo, historically the Abba gada in power resided on sacred ground at Agansa and during his terms of office doesn’t involve in such activities as going to market, attending wedding and burial ceremonies, going to hotels, and not allowed even crossing river unless in extra ordinary circumstances. The house of Abba gada is considered as sacred and hence a person with homicide case is not allowed to come to his house before he clears or purifies the ‘blood’ through the traditional gondoro ritual. Next in the hierarchy is Ja’llabba (deputy). He is an assistant to the Abba gada. He receives instructions from
Abba gada and conveys to the officials under him. Ja’llabba like the Abba gada is considered to be free from sin. The Abba gada and the Ja’llabba, the two chief positions within the system, were shared between two of the junior and senior clans with the latter always holding the Abba gadaship. The positions of Abba gada and Ja’llabba tended to be hereditary, although not in a strict sense, and candidates were expected to be of exemplary character with no physical or mental disabilities.

Roga, another status on the structure of the balle, is an administrative rank below Ja’llaba. It is composed of heads of the three territorially based administrative branches called Subbo Roga, Dhibata Roga and Riqata Roga of the Gedeo land. For most Gedeo, according to my informants in Bule, the Roga songo was the final level of appeal for different social and economic as well as political matters. Only if matters concerned the whole Gedeo community and mabala (unusual event) reach the Abba gada.

Ja’lqabba being on the fifth stratum of Gedeo balle serves as an assistant to the Roga. He receives leadership from Roga and transmits to the concerned authorities under him. Hullati- Haitcha is a traditional leader of each Godeo clan. Being accountable to Hullati-Haitcha, Batetti-Haitcha is in charge of daily activities of leading a local community. Basically, he is a chief local administrator at the lower level (kebele) of a customary administrative system. Dabbale is an assistant to a Batetti Haitcha at a Kebele level. He administers the community as per the directives given to him by his superior, i.e. Batetti Haitcha. There are a number of Daballes at a Kebele level. The Daballe are assistants of Batetti-Haitcha.

Next in the hierarchy to the Daballe is the Murra who receives orders and decisions made by Kebele Batetti Haitcha and Daballe, and passes them onto the Kebele residents.
He has social and administrative responsibilities. The Murra had different duties which include announcing the death of a resident of the Kebele and mobilizing the community for funeral ceremony. He is in charge of the maintenance of law and order, and marking plots of land when land is distributed to individuals. He also gives military service as soldier during times of war. He reports to the local chief administrator (Batetti Haitcha) and his assistant (Daballe) on the occurrence of crimes so that they would seek measures to be taken to deal with the problem.

Other than providing the people with the sense of identity, the balle system manages customary land tenure system of the Gedeo. In traditional Gedeo community, land was communally owned or it was the property of the seven Gedeo clans, and decisions as to the allocation of new lands to new claimants were made by the ya’a councils (councils of elders) (McClellan, 1988:25). The council chiefly distributed land among the seven Gedeo clans. The clan possession was further distributed among sub-clans, families and individuals. According to the customary rule of the system, a person could get plot of land inherited from his parents. (Tadesse k., et al., 2008:175). The balle institution plays pivotal role in initiating meetings and public gatherings of the elders for various purposes which include activities like constructing houses and bridges

The balle system of the Gedeo had also a great role in conflict resolution. Conflict of any kind within a family was resolved in the family itself. Sometimes family cases come out and reach to the nearby relatives. Certainly, dealing with family cases by relatives was widely accepted by the society. Nevertheless, resolving conflict among the clans as well as the neighbors was the duty of the Ya’u council. In all cases, the ruling of the Ya’u council was final and would be respected by all parties to the conflict. When the conflict
involved homicide, it would be managed through a ritual carried out by customary leaders, i.e. *Gondoro* tradition. *Gondoro* is a traditional ritual to purify blood enmity, and bring about durable peace. *Gondoro* is a means of resolving conflict by declining an event must not happen again between conflicting individuals/groups. This tradition works both in resolution of inter-personal as well as inter-group conflicts. The decisions of the *balle* officials are usually accepted heartily because of the people’s fear of the religious leaders (*Woyyo*) who back the *balle* decisions by cursing in the name of *Mageno* (the God).

Following the incorporation of the territory into Ethiopian state, nevertheless, it was hardly possible for peoples of southern Ethiopia to freely exercise their socio-political and cultural traditions since they had neither freedom nor the economic capacity to undertake such practices. The conquest seriously affected the socio-economic, political and cultural autonomy of the people. Accordingly, the rituals of the *balle* system, the respect given to *Abba gada* and the *gondoro* tradition significantly declined (McClellan, 1988:59; Tadesse K., 2002:25).

However, elders disclosed that there were *balle* practices clandestinely among the Gedeo during the imperial regime. For instance, during the time of Emperor Haile Silassie one indication of such *balle* function is the case of an appeal made to the emperor about the disputes over land between the local people and the feudal land lords in Michile, northern Gedeo. One of my informants states that he was made a representative of the then Gedeo peasants and took the appeal to the King in 1960. Except for a few such attempts to use the institution in its real sense, the Gedeo were not able to utilize the *balle*. At the time, the land as well as the people of Gedeo was ruled by the *balabats* who
were the lower ties of the central government which used the westernized form of state structure (Interview with a key informant, Dilla zuria woreda, Wochema kebele, 27Feb, 2011).

During the 17 years long Derg regime let alone indigenous institutions of governance like balle, even ethnic identities were suppressed under the pretext of Ethiopian unity. As a result of more centralized state power exercises even at kebele level, backed by Marxist ideology, the role of balle institutions was greatly minimized to an unprecedented level. This however does not mean that the balle was totally paralyzed. Some of its practices like the religious services by the woyyos were employed in such activities as house, road, and bridge constructions. Even though the tradition was considered as backward and anti-revolutionary by the Derg government officials at all levels of government structures, informants at Bule town unveil that they used to attend some of the balle rituals in secret. The coming of protestant missionaries in Gedeo land since 1950s also undermined the spiritual world of the Gedeo that was closely related to the balle system. The internal challenge was the force of ‘modernity’ among the youth who began to question about the advantage and usefulness of the balle system also other factor that influenced Gedeo balle tradition.

Nowadays the situation looks changing. According to my informants in Bule and Dilla zuria woredas, since the down fall of the Derg, the balle system seems reviving in some places. The current liberal policies on the part of the EPRDF government opened a rout to the revitalization of the functions of indigenous culture. The gada, which was suppressed or at least survived under strong pressures from the previous states, is now allowed to exercise more freedom. “The official ritual of revitalizing of the balle among the Gedeo
was held at a place called ‘Hoticha-Kube’ on 9 March 2002” (interview with Gedeo balle leaders, Bulle Woreda, Agamsa kebele, 28Feb. 2012). The renaissance of the balle system and the value attached to the gondoro tradition, has now got recognition, at least in theory. The majority of the Gedeo and the local governments recognized its importance in preserving intra-ethnic cohesion among the Gedeo and interethnic cooperation with their neighboring people like Guji-Oromo. Despite this, there is no any observable activity by this institution in all Gedeo woredas other than in Bule, may be due to the existence of Oda ya’a and its influence in that woreda.

4.2.7. Gedeo’s incorporation to the Ethiopian Empire

The Gedeo were one of the autonomous southern states before its incorporation into the Ethiopian empire in late 1890s (McClellan, 1988: 13; Dagne, 2011:24; Ayalew et al, 1996:3; Demissie,1988:4; Tadesse k., 2002; Tadesse k. et al, 2008). The two societies (Abyssinian and Gedeo) were vastly different at the time of confrontation in the late 19thC. While the former represented an expanding aggressive feudal monarchy politically and militarily strong, the latter was relatively small, segmented society dominated by the domestic community (McClellan, 1988:30; Tadesse k. et al, 2008:225). Hence, the outcome of the clash was never questionable. A Gedeo society that did not fight as one or even in alliance with its neighbors stood no chance of winning against a rejuvenated and unified Abyssinian state (McClellan, 1988:31). In fact the Gedeo didn’t submit simply. They attempted to resist Menelik’s forces with their spears and shields. However, these weapons couldn’t match to the modern fire arms of Menelikan conquerors. Indeed, this was one factor that facilitated submission of the Gedeo people. In addition, the Gedeo people heard the calamity that the Wolayta and Kaffa faced in the hands of the
Menelikian forces. Furthermore, the eastern Guji had also submitted before them. Thus, it seems that, the only chance they had amidst these situations was to surrender and they did so. McClellan discusses the details of the situation as follows:

In the Gedeo case, incorporation came without calamity. Having heard of the Wolayta calamity, and knowing that the eastern Guji had already surrendered; the Gedeo encountered the northerners with considerable trepidation. After a couple of skirmishes which resolved little military, the Gedeo called a follé (assembly) to discuss the situation. Most were ready to accept the demand for submission... [Then the assembly chose] a Gedeo delegation of eight led by Shunde Karro and offering token tribute of a sheep and some honey. The commission represented each of the seven Gedeo clans plus an eighth member. It is not clear whether [the Abyssinians] insisted on this number for political reasons or the Gedeo determined it. Some informants claimed that the members were chosen by a kayo (a ritual and omens expert), while others suggested they were volunteers. After blessing the commission, the Abba gada, gave Shunde a protective amulet to wear, and the group set off for Shisha. Many Gedeo were convinced they would never return. Instead, the delegation reappeared a few days later, each member an invested official. Shunde had been appointed balabat for all Gedeo, the others subordinate korros (McClellan, 1988:22-23).

Before incorporation, the Gedeo lived in a federation of sasse roga (three zones). These are the Subbo, Dhibata and Riqata and were ruled by a council of elected elders, according to the balle or gada tradition (Ayalew et al, 1996:2; Tadesse K, 2002:25). The division of Gedeo land into the sasse roga was for administrative purpose. With the exception of slight variation in dialect and climatic condition, people living in the Sasse roga have similar culture (Demissie, 1988: 3).

However, with the incorporation of the Gedeo into the Ethiopian state, fundamental transformations had occurred upon the overall economic, social and political life of the society. After incorporation, the neftegna-gabbar (patron-client) arrangement, the economic, social and political pressure imposed on Gedeo through the establishment of an administrative hierarchy of the central feudal system, and the appointment of balabat and koro, distorted the indigenous Gedeo social structure. The traditional leaders along
with their associated institutions were withered away. The land of the native people was expropriated and distributed among the neftegna to the Amhara settlers, members of government judges and the church (Demissie, 1988:31). In other words, with the introduction of the neftegna-gabbar relations, the Gedeo were denied their land and produces. Their land being confiscated, they were reduced to the level of gabbar for the northern settlers. That is, the native people were put at the disposal of the neftegna, and the latter were entitled usufruct rights over land and benefited from labor services from the gabbars. Besides, the language, religion and culture of the native people were neglected, and they were forced to adopt the northerner’s religion and culture.

The reduction of the status of Abba gada to serfdom and decline of the institution by the northern administration left enduring social crises in many aspects. Customary conflict resolution, which clearly enhanced the cohesion and harmony within the Gedeo and with their neighboring Guji, was discredited by the Ethiopian administration. The arrival of the Amhara (Ethiopian) administrators on the Gedeo land, the ritual ceremonies of the gada (balle) system, the respect given to Abba gada and his councilors, and the gondoro tradition significantly declined. Moreover, the values given to such practices and their role in day-to-day life of the society kept on declining because people were forced to take their matters to courts rather than to the gada officials. ‘In the economic sphere too, the conquest significantly reduced the subsistence level of the Gedeo people by imposing backbreaking tribute on the peasants. As it was common in all the militarily subdued regions of the south the feudal lords were extracting three-fourth of the produce from the tenants’ (McClellan 1988:59), who because of poor agricultural technology and uncertainty of climate suffered from low production even for family consumption.
In sum, as the Gedeo society entered the twentieth century, with the neftegna and gabbar arrangement, three features of changes within Gedeo can be identified. Firstly, the territory of Gedeo is expanded in size, and most of the incorporation of new lands enlarged the subsistence basis of Gedeo population and encouraged the growing of coffee in downslope areas. Secondly, the influx of northern settlers following Dejazmach Balcha's occupation of Gedeo in 1895 increased pressure on the traditionally-based enset economy which had to be mitigated through mixed coffee/enset cultivation in lowland areas. And finally, the establishment of a military garrison around Agere-Selam and other local military centers necessitated improvements in road facilities, and this in turn created connections between local and regional centers of coffee marketing (Ayalew et al, 1996). As the economic value of coffee increased through rising prices at national and international levels, Gedeo became more central to the Ethiopian economy, leading to changes in the lives of ordinary Gedeo; though most of the incomes accruing from the sale of coffee were appropriated by the neftegna, rather than by the Gedeo themselves. Nevertheless, the greatest administrative pressure that brought about changes in the lives of the Gedeo was experienced during the 1920s when measurement of land through qallad (a rope or leather thong about 66-67 meters in length) was introduced by Balcha. The process of measuring land brought many hitherto unoccupied lands into the hands of the neftegna, and formerly forested areas which were under the control of the traditional authorities now came under the disposal of the neftegna. Thus, the ordinary Gedeo were forced to abandon their traditionally-inhabited areas of enset as the new settlers claimed rist and maderia rights over measured lands, and eventually migrated toward the periphery in search of unoccupied and forested lands. This process of migration brought
about assimilation of different clans, eliminated traditional no-man's zones and encouraged clearing of forested areas for the purposes of growing mixed coffee and enset.

By the 1940s and 1950s the Gedeo intensified cultivation of coffee for cash production, and Gedeo's transition from enset cultivation to coffee increased the economic value of land. There arose the Gedeo's acute interest in the cultivation of more land for coffee, and this generated conflicts between the Gedeo peasants and new settlers (Amhara feudal lords), as the latter struggled to bring new lands under their control. Therefore, from the early 1950s onwards, the challenge to the gabbar-neftegna relations was set, and intensified. And at the end, in 1960 the Michile\textsuperscript{22} war broke out. The neftegna won the war, evicted native Gedeo. The native people appealed to the Emperor through their delegates; and the emperor decided to resettle some of the Gedeo into such Guji localities as Uraga, Shakiso and Hagere Mariam (now Bule-Hora).

4.2.8. Down-slop expansion of the Gedeo

Before the Gedeo expanded towards the surrounding lowlands, they lived in the highlands; and their territorial limit did not extend beyond the highland chains facing the rift valley to the east of Lake Abaya (MacClellan, 1978:61). It is said that the Gedeo and the Guji had their own traditional territorial limits. Accordingly, the Gedeo lived in the

\textsuperscript{22}The northern Gedeo peasants did not accept the harish exploitation imposed on them by the Amhara feudal lords. In an attempt to resist the Amhara (northern) domination and regain their land, they appealed to the government for reforms and changes. The central government made some promises that never materialized. This did nothing to improve the life of the peasantry rather it stifled armed rising by making the peasantry hesitates in expectation of possible changes. After exhaustively trying such meances as appearing before the court individually and sending a delegate to the central government and achieving no practical changes except good words, the Gedeo decided to forcibly reject the feudal lords. However, the feudal lords with their economic, political and military power would also reject. This contradiction finally led to the 1960 rising, also known as the ‘Michille War’. Michille is one of the several rural kebeles of Dilla zuria woreda. It is located at about 10KM east of Dilla town.
highlands while the Guji lived below that highland in the lowlands. It was later that the Gedeo expanded towards the lowlands. ‘The introduction of the qalad (measured land) system in the Guji-Gedeo area [in the 1920s] facilitated the massive expansion of the Gedeo towards the Guji territories in the low lands’ (Berhanu, 1993:75). This was because the increasing of coffee production changed the aims and the priorities of the government. In the qalad system, it was not the gabbars that were allocated to the neftegna like in the former periods. Instead, land itself was allocated to the settlers through systematic measuring. Two factors have caused the introduction of the qalad system. Firstly, Balcha, the then governor of Sidamo province brought many northern settlers with him in 1917. Thus, he introduced this system in order to give land to these settlers. The second and the most important reason was the increasing of coffee as an export replacing the traditional Ethiopian export like Ivory, wild animal skins and Rhino horn. However, the source of these export items (i.e., the wild life) was eliminated because of hunting at the time. Therefore, to build/strengthen his economic and political bases as well as to provide enough tribute to the central government, Balcha had to find an alternative export item. Accordingly, he resorted to coffee production which requires broad and intensive use of land and labor (McClellan, 1988).

Besides the above mentioned reasons, the completion of Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway in the same period increased the value of coffee. For this reason, they sponsored the Gedeo to intensify coffee production as the Gedeos used to produce coffee before this period in limited amount (McClellan, ibid). That was why the Ethiopian administrators of the region encouraged Gedeo’s expansion towards the lowlands in the nearby forest. The Ethiopians recognized the right to the Gedeo to develop the new lands. Thus, the northern
administrators distributed land first to the agricultural *gabbar* before the semi-agricultural *gabbar*. That means, the fact that the Gedeo were agricultural peoples helped them to get land first because they were considered to have the knowledge of cultivation.

It was also reported that the Gedeo attempted to expand up slop towards the localities of other Guji group’s. But they didn’t seem to be successful like the down slop expansion. This was because there were minor skirmishes between the Gedeo and the Guji over land in this part of the Guji-Gedeo area before the advent of the Ethiopian administration. This limited the Gedeo expansion there. However, the incorporation of the area by Menelike forces and the subsequent establishment of the garrison town like Bule and Elalcha near the traditional boundary of the Guji and Gedeo changed the situation. For one thing, the establishment of the garrison town in the inter-ethnic zone between the Guji and Gedeo pacified the area. For another, more Gedeo agriculturalists were allocated to the *neftegnas* (northern settlers) as *gabbar* to work for them on the Guji land. At the introduction of the *qalad* system too, the Gedeo worked for the norther settlers as tenants. In this process, more and more Gedeo highly interacted with highland Guji as well.

However it was towards the lowland Guji that the Gedeo penetrated most. The *qalad* system helped the expansion of the Gedeo towards the Guji land. It was said that the Gedeo are limited to the highlands in the former times, but they came and cultivated in the Guji areas later. When this happened the Guji could not put claim to their land. This was because land was in the hands of the *neftegna* after the incorporation. As the Gedeo
had the ability to cultivate land, the *neftegna* provided them with land. On the other hand, the *neftegna* did not give much land to the Guji for the Guji were herders. This was because the transhumance nature of the Guji hindered the *neftegna* to frequently get them for services and it was also difficult to supervise such mobile peoples. As a result, they preferred the Gedeo who led sedentary way of life. Using this opportunity, the Gedeo came dawn and settled in the Guji land.

In addition to this, the coming of ‘Amhara’ new settlers (soldiers and civil servants) into the Gedeo land (after 1890s) also intensified the problem of pressure on land, and the demand for incorporating forested and hitherto unoccupied lands increased. This was further reinforced by the growing interest of the settlers in coffee production as a cash crop. As coffee production expanded into down slope areas (which were formerly owned by Guji as grazing lands), the traditional importance of *enset* was declined, due to the allocation of more cultivable lands for coffee production. In fact, the expansion of coffee markets at local and regional levels, made the Gedeo people to further expand into down slop localities (Ayalew et al, 1996). Actually, the expansion of Gedeo towards the Guji land has started some time before the incorporation of the Guji-Gedo area into the Ethiopian Empire. It was since the 19thC that such gradual expansion of the Gedeo down slope started. It is said that there was population growth and thus over population in Gedeo at that time. For this reason, the Gedeo expanded down slop towards the inter-ethnic zones gradually (Tadesse B., 2009; Ayalew et al, 1996, McClellan, 1988). The fact that Gedeo and the Guiji consider each other as ethnically related and the fact that these people had interdependent economy that fostered harmonious and symbiotic relations even seems to have facilitated the Gedeo expansion to the Guji land (Tadesse B., 2009;
Girum, 2011; Asseb, 2007; Abiyo t, 2005:27). The Abyssinian conquest had also a profound effect on the expansion of the Gedeo. By requiring tribute in both goods and services, the conquerors intensified the economic burden on the Gedeo household; at the same time, by enforcing peace within the region, the Ethiopians facilitated the expansion of Gedeo into the forested buffer zone relatively more secure. They even preserved the area South of Lagadara River to the Gedeo by blocking Sidama expansion there (McClellan, 1988:27).

From the viewpoint of (most of past and present) Ethiopian government authorities, pastoral lands were seen as idle or ineffectively used. That is why they take away pasture lands from pastoralists (give it to crop cultivators, use it as state farm, sell or lease it to investors, etc) considering such land were ineffectively used and wasted. Consequently, some of the Guji went into Abaya lowlands while others ended as tenants ((Berhanu, 1993:97). During this time, many Gedeos who had benefited from the coffee based economy bought land in Guji. For instance, about 100 Gedeos bought land in Guji localities in 1972 (Tsehay, 1980: 201). In addition, Haile Silassie’s government resettled about 5000 Gedeos on mount Anfarara near Kibre-Mengist. This, together with the northern new settlers and the population increase among the Guji population caused an increase in the overall population in the Guji land (Tadesse B., 1995:52).

One of my Gedeo informants in Gedeb discloses that after the 1960 Michile war between the Amhara feudal lords and the Gedeo peasants in the area, Emperor Haile-Silasie-I, as compensation for the victimized Gedeos in the war and to relive the problem of population pressure in their localities provided land to numerous Gedeos in Guji
localities. Accordingly, first 500 gasha (20,000 hectares), later 1000 gasha (40,000 hectares) and finally 900 gasha (36,000 hectares) was given to the Gedeo farmers in the Guji localities. As to the same informant, the lands given to the Gedeo at that time were idle / bare where only wild animals live. It is the Gedeo who developed these localities as agricultural land. These areas are found, among others, in the present day Shakiso, Solamo, Kercha, Dimitu-Hambelela, Melka-Soda, and Bule-Hora woredas (Interview with a key informant, Gedeb town, 5 June 2012).

Asebe depicts that Gedeo’s expansion to the Guji land was not limited to the downhill expansion in the first half of the 20th C. As to him, the massive Gedeo resettlement scheme, which probably has deep implication for the recent conflicts, took place both under the imperial and the military regimes. In Ethiopia it has been a long used government strategy to use population redistribution and resettlement as a means of deactivating ethnic/nationalities movements. Whenever certain ethnic groups uprising against the state, the successive governments were using ‘drought’, ‘famine’, ‘population pressure’, and ‘land shortage’ as excuse in dismantling the population and paralyzing the movements. The same strategy has been also employed to counterbalance ethnic questions by mixing groups with different political interests and historical backgrounds. For instance, the resettlement of Amhara people from Wollo and Gondar in western Wellega by the Derg regime was to cut the rebellion in the north from its source of supply—the people--- and to counterbalance Oromo movements in the resettlement areas (Asebe, 2007). Similar was the case of Gedeo peasants’ resettlement in the Guji hinter lands in 1960 by the Haile Silassie government as strategy to disunite and weakened Gedeo peasants’ following the uprising in the same year. The resettlement was made in
different Guji areas like Adola, Hagere-Mariam (now Bule Hora) and other Guji territories located far away from Gedeo-Guji border. Shortage of land among Gedeo on the one hand and the existence of fertile ‘idle land’ in Guji area on the other hand were taken as a pretext for the resettlement (Hussien, 2002:65-66).

One of my key informants presents population pressure as one of the most important problems in Gedeo land. For example, nowadays in several kebeles of Wonago woreda over a thousand persons are living on a square kilometer of land. According to this official, about 700 persons per a square kilometer of land is the average population density in Gedeo zone. This makes Gedeo to be the most densely populated zone in the country. That is why the Gedeo expand to Guji localities in different ways possible. The Gedeo do not like to re-settle in Bench-Maji zone, where the regional government resettled the Gedeo a decade ago. The Gedeo want to be resettled in Guji land due to the proximity of the area, existence of similarities of weather, historical background, economic interdependence, and social and cultural similarities. My informant further explains that as a result of government resettlement policy in the early 2000s over 880 farmers were made to resettle in Bench-Maji zone. But nowadays the Gedeo living in that resettlement area do not exceed ten farmers. Even those returnees from Bench-Maji resettlement areas went to Guji localities where their relatives went earlier, (i.e., they did not return to their home village in Gedeo) (Interview with ex- higher official of Gedeo zone administration, Hawassa, 23Nov. 2011).

On his study of Gedeo production practices, Dagne also portrayed the same fact. He stated that […] the EPRDF government was busy resettling people from highly populated
and food deficit areas to resourceful regions. As part and parcel of this program, up to Feb. 2004, about 800 Gedeo households were made to resettle in Bench Maji Zone of SNNPR. Of these, five were from Wogida PA (Yirgachaffee woreda). But all (the five) returned back to their abode after short stay in the resettlement area. The returnees mentioned several factors as problems they faced within the resettlement area. They said that we were made to resettle near the Sudanese border where the climate is very hot. Let alone to farm and make our living there, we couldn't manage even to walk short distances. We were not familiar with the food item distributed to us. Besides, the area is infested with malaria and the disease affected many re-settlers. The informants further pointed out that due to the problems noted above, so many resettles were leaving the area and returning to their respective natal villages (Dagne, 2011)

Apart from government induced formal resettlement during the Haile-Silassie-I regime in the early 1960s, the Gedeo by themselves used different tactics to resettle on Guji land. These include: taking land through contractual agreements for certain period and holding it permanently when the Guji go distant areas with their cattle particularly during dry seasons; through clandestine land purchase from the Guji as a result of profit from coffee sells in the area; through approaching the Guji as adopted child and eventually inheriting or sharing Guji’s land with other natural children of the Guji; through transfer of Guji’s land (by the balabats) to the Gedeo when the Guji migrate far distances with their cattle in search of grazing and water (FGD with Guji informant, Torre, 15 June 2012).
One of my Guji informants tells the following story. As to this informant the Gedeo settled on Guji land using different strategies other than in-law relationships and friendship. The informant forwarded a myth commonly held among the Guji that Gedeo systematically displaced their Guji friends. This story goes like this:

Whenever the Gedeo visited their Guji friends whom they intended to displace, they carried seeds of cabbage on their curly hairs. Upon entering the Guji kraal they scratch their heads so as to dispose of the seeds, which soon germinated. The Guji look this as a bad omen to the welfare of their cattle. Thus they (the Guji) evacuate the kraal to which they would never return. The Gedeo used this mechanism to displace the Guji and then occupied the fertile territories of the Guji (key informant interview a Guji informant, Torre, 15 June, 2012).

In Guji tradition there are some crops and animal foods that are strictly prohibited. This includes cabbage. As to the above informant, though this cabbage is taboo among the Guji, it is one of the favorite vegetables among the Gedeo. But the Gedeo reject the above assertion and claim that their expansion was part of the ‘brotherhood’ and friendship between the two. Some Gedeo also disclosed that the mobility of Guji pastoralists paved the way for Gedeos to settle and control more territories. There are also some other Gedeos who argue that as land is the government property, every citizen has the right to move and live anywhere he likes (Interview with key informants, Dilla, 11 April, 2012). In any case, these down-slop expansions of the Gedeo did not disturb their peaceful relations till early 1990s.

In sum, to understand the issue of down slope Gedeo expansion into the Guji localities we are not to restrict ourselves to the horizontal interethnic relations of the groups alone. Apart from the systematic holding, inheriting, clandestine purchases of Gujis’ land by the Gedeo, we need to give due concern also to the vertical relation---the roles played by governments (the conquest, the economic interest, resettlement schemes, the
developments of garrison towns as inter ethnic buffer zones, etc) of different regimes. Particularly, the imperial era’s economic interests in the areas (coffee’s need as sole export item) significantly contributed to the down slope expansion of the Gedeo.

4.3. The Guji people

4.3.1. Land and people

The Guji are one of the many branches of the Oromo people, living predominantly in today’s Guji and Borana zones of Oromia Region, in southern Ethiopia. They are also referred to as ‘JamJamtu’ or ‘JamJam’ by some of their neighbors and in some travelers’ accounts (Taddesse B., 2009:191; Tadesse B., 2004:13; Dejene, 2009:15). The Guji live in the territory that extends from Lake Abaya in the west to Genale River in the east, and from the southern Agere-Selam in the North to Southwest of Negelle in the South (JemJem, 2011:56; Dhadacha, 2006:12). As such ‘the Guji have direct contact with the neighboring peoples like Arsi in the east; Borana in the south; Burji, Kore and Gamo in the south west; and Gedeo, Sidama and Wolayta in the north’ (Dhadacha, 2006:12; Tadesse B., 2004:13). ‘Other than in Oromia regional state, small pockets of the Guji

23 In Borana zone, the Guji live mainly in five of the thirteen woredas comprised to form the zone. These are Abaya, Gelana, Bule-Hora, Melka-Soda, and Dugda-Dawa woredas.

24 Oromia is one of the nine ethnically based regional states of the new FDRE. Its current capital is Addis Ababa (the Oromo call it Finfine). According to the 2007 national population census, Oromia region covers a total area of 353,006.81Km² and has human population of 27,158, 471(13,676,159 males, 13,482, 312 females). This makes the average population density of the region to be 76.93 people per square kilometer. The region consists of 17 administrative zones, 304 woredas, and 375 urban centers. Over 90% of the people of Oromia live in the rural area, and agriculture is the major source of livelihood for the overwhelming majority of the people.

Oromia has both international and internal border lines. Internationally, it shares borders with Kenya in the south and the Sudan in the west. Internally, it borders with all regional states with the exception of Tigray regional state, which is located at the northern tip of the country. Accordingly, the region is bordered with Amhara national regional state in the north, afar regional state in the northeast, Somali regional state in the east and southeast, SNNPR in the south west, Gambela regional state in west and Benishangul-Gumuz regional state in the north west(see Map 4).
population currently live in the Sidama zone (Wondo Genet area), and in Gamo-Gofa zone (in Nechsr National Park). The Guji in Wondo Genet area are fairly assimilated to the Sidama culture, as they have lived there among the Sidama for centuries’ (Tadesse B., 2009:192). Besides, considerable size of Guji people live mixed with the Gedeo in different rural kebeles of Gedeo zone.

No exact population size of the Guji branch is known from the census report, which lumps their number together with other Oromo groups (Dejene, 2009:16). However, Dr. Tadesse Berisso, based on the 1994 and 2007 national population census, estimated their number to be more than a million (Tadesse B., 2009:191; and 2004:1). These days the Guji territory witnessed both reduction and expansion. According to some sources (Hinnant, 1977:15; Taddesse B., 1995:34; Van de Loo, 1991:15), the Guji were being pushed by their neighboring Sidama in the north and northeast and Gedeo in the northwest and thus this community lost portion of its land. Meanwhile, they moved southwards by pushing their fellow Borena-Oromo. This practice was the outcome of population pressure and the associated push factors.
Map 4: Oromia region by zone

Source: CSA, 2008
4.3.3. Language and Religion

The Guji speak *Afan* Oromo (the language of Oromo), one of the most widely spoken languages in Ethiopia, belonging to the eastern Cushitic language sub-family---comprised in Afro-Asiatic language family (Tadesse B., 2009:191; and 2004:1). The Guji have developed a very complex set of belief and practices. They basically believe in the supernatural power *Waqa* (the God). They also believe in abstract concepts and physical objects as well as in power vested in certain individual and families. The Guji also believe in the existence of *durrissa* (devil) whose main deed is said to mislead people to do something wrong (Tadesse B., 2004:2). They assume that *Waqa* lives far above the earth and sent *Qallu* for the people with *gada* laws of peace and ways of life. Therefore, it is believed that disobeying any *gada* laws and principles of *nagaa* (peace) would create misfortunes upon the person(s) or group(s) (Hinnant, 1977, 37-38). *Waqa* who is said to have created everything is the center of the Guji religion. He is believed to have lived among the men until he was annoyed by the evil deeds of human beings and finally moved to the sky where he is living now in seclusion (Tadesse B., 1988:20).

Natural phenomena such as rivers, trees, land and the like, are objects under which prayers and sacrifices are made for *Waqa*. They act as Christian churches and Muslim mosques. Indeed, not all trees, rivers or land are the objects of religious devotion. But, only those that are associated with some important Guji rituals such as the *gada* system or the objects which are related to myth of origin. Thus the *Ma’a Boko* tree where important *gada* ritual takes place and *woyyu* Adola (holy land of Adola) which is associated to the myth of origin are popular among many natural phenomena. The *Qallu* (supreme religious leader) and *Abba gada*, who are respectively considered to be *Woyyu*
(holy) and *Warra kallacha* (Virile family), are among the individuals who are believed to possess inherent or acquired power through which they could do good or harm others (Tadesse B., 1988:21). Their curse is feared like a poisonous snake bite, while their blessing is very important for individuals success in wars, hunting, good life, and for the well-being of the society. The *shabola* families, who are believed to have power to control lighting, and the *dalacha*, who are believed to create internal problems for individuals are also considered to be *woyyu*. Guji are very careful not to offend these families, because of fear of the consequences----lightning and stomach travail----that are believed to follow.

However, this traditional belief system in Guji appears to have been changing. The latest but the strongest socio-cultural influence was attributed to the introduction of new religious faiths (Christian and Islam) into the Guji land. With gradual decline of the Guji customary system through super imposition by the northern (Amhara) administrative structure, these new religious faiths also played significant role in interrupting and putting serious adversities on the socio-cultural and political system of the Guji. 'Recently, particularly after the 1974 socialist revolution, many Guji have been converted to Christianity (mainly Protestantism in particular) and Islam’ (Tadesse B., 1995; and 2004:3). Nowadays, Protestantism is expanding within the Guji and the indigenous religion is becoming marginalized. The new trend of what can be called ‘revival of indigenous culture’ seems to be nominal and could not challenge the expansions of the new religions into the Guji land (key informant interview with informants, Bule-Hora, 19May, 2012; and FGD, Torre, 16 June 2012).
4.3.3. Origin of the Guji People

There is no agreed upon place of origin of the Guji-Oromo. The myth of origin of the Guji people is controversial among the scholars and the society itself. The Guji consider their homeland to be the very ancestral cradle of Oromo culture. Scholars (Dhadacha, 1988:11 and 2006:14; Van de Loo, 1991:15; Tadesse B., 1995:36; Jemjem and Dhadacha, 2011:59; and Hinnant, 1997:19-20) trace the origin of Guji people to the Guji land itself. Asmarom even goes on to say that the area recognized as the cradle land of the Oromo culture is in the general area of the present day Guji and northern Borana land (Asmarom, 1973:9). Indeed, from analysis of historical linguistics, oral traditions and cultural data it is concluded that the Oromo originated in and around the areas currently inhabited by the Guji, Borana and Arsi Oromo (Haberland, 1963, Lewis, 1966; Asmarom, 1973; Tadesse B., 2009; Tadesse B., 2004:3). It is from these areas that the Oromo launched their vast expansion in the 16th and 17th centuries. It is not clear, however, when or why the Guji separated from other Oromo groups and formed an independence territorial unit (Tadesse B., 2009:193).

However, Jemjem and Dhadacha (2011:59) associate Guji’s center of origin with the area called JamJam high lands, a vast land between south of the Sidama and north of the Borana. Oral legends of the Guji put that the Guji originated from the place called Girja—an area located at about 30Km northeast of Adola town of Guji zone. It is also said that ‘Guji’s center of origin is known to be Adola, the area around today’s Kibre Mengist, the land in which this society dwells at present’ (Dhadacha, 1988:11). Girja is established in the mind of every Guji and also believed by the entire society as the original homeland and place of origin for all Guji in particular and human kinds in general. They say ‘waaqi
"duri biyee Girjaarraa nama loobe’, meaning: ‘God originally molded human kind from the soil of Girja’. That is why the collective name the community is usually suffixed by the name Girja (saying Guji-Girja) to indicate that the person is typical (original) Guji (Jemjem and Dhadacha, ibid). Dr. Tadesse Berisso (1995:36-7) shares the above assertions by stating the following:

According to Guji tradition, Adolla and its environs were the points of origin of the Guji and other groups with whom they lived. In mythic time, they say, a man named Gujo with his three sons (Urago, Mati, and Hoku) and other members of the family left Dararitu. They moved northeast ward and settled in a place called Girja. There, they lived as prosperous cattle herders and barley farmers for many generations. With this long and prosperous stay at Girja it was said that they developed a strong emotional attachment to this land, an attachment which even today is expressed through various Guji songs. This seems to be the reason why most Guji today trace their origin to this land calling themselves Guji-Girja, Guji who originated in Girja. According to tradition, the descendants of Gujo later moved to the Uraga, Matti, and Hoku regions which they named after the first three sons of the Gujo, while their collective name remained that of the founding father---Gujo, later to become Guji.

All my Guji key informants in Bule-Hora, Abaya and Gelana woredas including the Guji Abba gada agree with the view that the origin of Guji is around the place called Girja, and from that particular place that the Guji expanded to different territories they have occupied today.

4.3.4. Clan Organization
The Guji society is composed of seven major groups. These are Uraga, Mati, Hoku, Halo, Woysitu, Otu, and Selo. However, only the first three of these have currently settled evenly adjacent to each other, the other four have been engulfed in other ethnic groups and settled there. As a result, only the Uraga, Mati and Hoku abide by gada rule, and hence these groups possess the hagana (political power), while the Halo group (also known as Alabdu) play the mystical role in the gada system, and are hereditarily
responsible for the provision of Qallu services (Dhadacha, 2006:15). The Alabdu are also
a confederation of two groups known as Halo and weysitu, each of which has its own
defined territory and leader. There are still other small groups----the Selo and Otu that
live deep into the Sidama territory who have adopted many of the cultural elements from
the people with whom they came into contact and therefore greatly diverged from the

Historically each of the above group had a defined and relatively separated and
autonomous territory. But in times of economic crisis, natural calamities, warfare, and
specially during gada rituals the three Guji confederacies were and still are firmly united
and mutually interdependent (Tadesse B., 2009:192; Taddesse B., 1995:49; Taddesse B.,
19994:310; Hinnant, 1977:16; Van de Loo, 1991:69; Abiyot, 2005:1;Girum, 2011:54;
Dhadacha, 2006:15 ). Though each group had its own political leader in the form of Abba
gada, they consider each other as blood relatives. Despite the existence of few cultural
differences, inter marriage is fairly common among the groups. Individuals are free to
move and settle in another’s territory. That is to mean, though each group has its own
defined area, there is no restriction to move and settle in each other’s territory (Hinnant,
1977:18; Taddesse B., 2009:192). Each of the three Guji groups, noted above, has its own
Abba gadas who administers its respective group except the Alabdu Guji phratry, who
lacks Abba gada. The Alabdu are not administered by the Abba gada as the other groups.
This makes the Alabdu Guji unique. It is only this group that provides all the Guji
groups/confederacies and the neighboring Gedeo people with Qallu services (Interview
with Guji Abba gada Wako Dube, and Hayyu Ano Tuka, Muri Turkuma kebele, Bule
One of the vital roles of the *gada* system in the past was to provide legitimate political, legal and ritual leadership. Though in each Guji groups the formal influence of each *Abba gada* is limited to his respective people and territory, the groups and their *Abba gada* are ranked in terms of their fictive birth order. Only the *Qallu* stands above these nearly equivalent leaders (Hinnant, 1978:230). However, by the virtue of his elderliness, the *Abba gada* of Uraga is by default taken as the prime minister although he doesn’t interfere in specific regional issues of other *haganas* (Dhadacha, 2006:16). My key informants in Abaya and Gelana *woredas* distinguish the distribution of these Guji groups territorially. Accordingly, the Hoku mainly inhabit Oddo-Shakiso and Waderra-Adolla *woredas*, while the Matti live primarily in Bore *Woreda*. Urraga, who are said to be the largest Guji group, stretch from Urraga *woreda* in the Southeast to Lake Abbaya in the West and Northwest. Alabdu, who were in the earlier period purely pastoralists, predominantly inhabit distinct territory of Galana and Abaya *woredas*. These days however there is no as such clearly defined territory to members of the confederacies of the three Guji groups. Tadesse B. (1998: 8-9) states this as follows:

Some of the territorial boundaries of the Guji *gosa* (phratries), and that of the whole ethnic group, are now significantly changed. The Mati have made major inroads into the territory of the Hoku. And the Guji, as a whole, continued their long term southward and westward expansion at the expense of the Borana. They are also gradually expanding over the land that was once occupied by the Arsi, crossing the Ganale Guda River to the east. This gradual expansion was largely a consequence, at least during early days, of ritual wars that were organized under the *gada* system every eight years. Guji in their turn had lost much of their land in the north due to other southward expanding groups---the Sidama and Gedeo.

In the past, the socio-political organization of Guji society was dominated by a moiety-clan-lineage-family structure and by the *gada* system, with *Qallu*, ‘spiritual leader’ at the apex. There are two non-exogamous moieties, known as Kontoma and Darimu, which cut across the three groups. Under these moieties, there are seven non-totemic and
exogamous clans each in Uraga and Hoku and three in Mati. Each clan is divided into a variable number of segments called Mana, literally ‘house’, which in turn are divided into a great number of patrilineages (Hinnant, 1977:19; Tadesse B., 1994:311; Tadesse B., 2004:2; Tadesse B., 2009:18). Except in areas where they are bound by hostile ethnic groups, where houses are clustered together for mutual protection against raids, the Guji live in Olla (neighborhoods) of dispersed homesteads. A typical Olla contains a single house, or a cluster of two or three round straw houses separated from each other by cattle kraal, and by crop, and / or grazing land. It is quite common for family and lineage members to live next to each other. This, however, is not always the case. In previous days the head of a polygynous family would spread his family members over different ecological zones to disperse his herd and / or to prevent fights among co-wives. Young men were also sent to distant areas to graze cattle for years (Tadesse B., 1988:9).

Neither territorial separation nor autonomous pattern of administration is a divisive factor among the Guji groups. Instead, all the Guji groups consider each other as brothers and cooperate in times of common problems or to enjoy cultural practices together. The recent cooperation among all the Guji groups regardless of their settlement and administrative differences in their fight against the Gedeo can be taken as a good illustration.

4.3.5 Agro-ecology and production practices

The Guji have a diverse ecology with wide ranging altitudes and climatic conditions. As a result, they have mixed economy of animal husbandry and cultivation of a great variety of crops on the fertile land which stretches over a wide variety of altitudes, with the
emphasis on the former (Tadesse B., 1994: 311). In terms of altitude, the Guji land possess rift valley, hot area, in the west, which is as low as under 1700 masl, and mountainous areas in the north of the rift valley, which is as high as 3000 masl (Hinnant, 1977:16). In the northern part of Guji, which has the average temperature is $14^0\text{C}$ is characterized by cold climatic condition, high rainfall, high fertility of soil and ever green environment. Crop production, mainly barley cultivation is the predominant activity in this area. Bee keeping is a common engagement in the area. Here we do find permanent settlement of the people with a relatively high population density. The midland areas of Guji land show the features of the highlands and the law lands. Crop cultivation (such as maize, *enset* and coffee), moderate animal husbandry and bee keeping are common in this area. In the law land parts of the Guji, which is as law as 1700masl, animal husbandry is the predominant activity. Of course, to some extent teff and maize are grown there.
Though presently the Guji are agro-pastoralists who make their livelihood from animal husbandry and crop cultivation, such type of economy was not the feature of their economy in the past. Formerly, cattle rising played a predominant role in their economy. This activity was not limited only for economic purposes. Cattle plays important role in the social as well as cultural life of the Guji. It is also said by many that the social status of a Guji man finds its expression in the number of cattle that he owns. Ritually, cattle were used for sacrificial purpose (Tadesse B., 1994:311; Tadesse B., 1988; and Tadesse B., 2009:192). People who do not own cattle are not considered to be ‘proper’ Guji (Baxter, 1991:9). In addition, cattle are important for paying guma (blood money) if one
is found guilty of killing people. It is, thus, due to the social, cultural and economic importances, that the Guji give more weight to the herding of cattle over the cultivation of crops.

Figure 6: Live stock products’ market (Torre)
To see how cattle are important in defining one’s status in the Guji society, it is enough to have a look at what Abiyot (2005:3-4) has stated. As to him, traditionally, if a rich Guji man’s cow gives the birth of the 1000th calf, the owner calls people to celebrate a kuma gate (discarding the 1000th) ceremony. In this ceremony, one of these heifers was firmly tied and taken into the forest where it was left as an offering to wild animals. This was an indication that the man has reached the ultimate of herd development for which he would be widely known after this ceremony.

In the earlier days, cultivation was despised, and people who are working on land were called as gagurtu or gara (those who do not have knowledge for cattle breeding) (Tadesse B., 1994:311). If there was any cultivation practice among the Guji in earlier times, as to my key informants in Bule-Hora, it was the cultivation of barley in the highland zones, and badala (maize) in the lowlands in a limited amount. Today, however, crop production has gained greater importance among most Guji as population increased. Particularly, the mid 1960s live stock disease breakouts in Guji localities (which claimed the lives of numerous cattle) contributed to the need of crop cultivation to supplement their livestock based subsistence (FGD with Guji elders, Torre, June 2012). Thus farming combined with herding and beekeeping became the accepted norm. All my Guji informants in Bule-Hora and Galana woredas acknowledge that they adopted the crop cultivation (mainly enset and coffee) from the Gedeo people.
4.3.6. Customary System of Administration

Most of the peoples in southern Ethiopia have their own indigenous social organizations, customary practices and cultural institutions. In contrast to the northern Ethiopian Christian highland that exercised the feudal mode of production and administration, the autonomous states of the south had egalitarian systems of administration, democratic ways of power transfer and communal economic systems (Asebe, 2007:24). Among the Oromo this system of political, economic, ritual, and judicial organization is referred to as the gada system.
The *gada* system is a very comprehensive institution of the Oromo people. No Oromo cultural and historical concepts would be understood without understanding the role of *gada* system and the value attached to it by the community. As part of the general Oromo people, the system has been an important mechanism that facilitates legal, political and cultural interactions among the Guji as well (Hinnant, 1977:181; Asmarom, 1973; Van den Loo, 1991:26). The *gada* system is a complex life style that embraces many interrelated concepts, and hence all agreed upon definition is not yet reached (Israel, 2009:20). Nevertheless, the well-known definition is given by Professor Asmarom Legesse, an anthropologist reputed for his intensive research on the system. He defined the *gada* system as an institution that represents an extreme development of a type of social structure known to anthropologists as age-sets (Asmarom, 1973:50). He further describes it as a system of *gada class*\(^{25}\) (*Luba*) that succeed each other every eight years in assuming political, military, judicial, legislative and ritual responsibilities. Each *gada* class remains in power for a specific term (*gada*) which begins and ends with a formal power transfer ceremony (Asmarom, 1973:8).

Asmarom himself asserts that the concept cannot be given a universal interpretation because it stands for several related issues. Of the several related issues he discusses, three of them need due attention. As to him, *gada* first stands for the whole way of life. In this sense, it refers to a systematically integrated economic, political and social life of the people as a whole. That is, it governs almost every aspect of the relationships of the society. Second, it refers to a period of eight years during which an age grade stays in

\(^{25}\) *Gada* class is the group of people who share the same status and who perform their rites of passage together, whereas the *gada* grades are the stages of development through which the groups pass. The former pair of concepts refers to the collectivity, the latter refers to a conceptual scheme that defines the kind of activities, rights, and duties the groups assume successively throughout their active careers (Asmarom, 1973:51).
power. Every age-grade has a life span of eight years after which the members of the age-grade transcend to another grade assuming new responsibilities. In the third sense, gada refers to the 6th age-grade (out of the total 11 grades among the Borana), a grade\(^{26}\) that plays the leadership role. However, my key informant at Bulle-Hora state that the Guji had developed a separate term called balli (literally feather) to reduce the apparent terminological complication. Therefore, the institution and any eight years period during which a gada class stays in power were referred as balli, whereas the word gada only refers to the sixth grade of the system.

Furthermore, it is of paramount importance to properly understand the three major organs of the system separately and together. These are gumi (the national assembly), Qallu (the religious institution) and gada (political leadership of the system). Whether we call them institutions or organs understanding their dynamics would help us comprehend the overall system.

Gumi is a national assembly of all gada assemblies of the Oromo who meet once every eight years to review the old laws, to proclaim new ones, to evaluate the men in power and to resolve major conflicts that could not be resolved at lower levels of their

\(^{26}\) Though the figure differs from place to place among different Oromo branches, the maximum number of gada grades is eleven among the Borana of southern Ethiopia and the minimum is five among the Matcha of central, western and south-western Ethiopia. There are thirteen such steps in the contemporary Guji gada grades (Hinnant, 1977). Each gada grade has eight years interval for members to move to the next gada grade. It is not merely founded on the basis of age-sets in which the younger succeeds the older age-set in assuming these responsibilities. Members of each gada class are recruited on the basis of their genealogical generations as well as their chronological age (Asmarom, 2000:31). To elaborate this more, according to the Oromo gada system, the newly born infant boy always enters the system (the grades) exactly forty years (five grades) behind the father regardless of the age of the father. In other words, if a man gives birth to a son at thirty years, the son has to wait for another ten years until the father becomes forty. The gada rules also prohibit marriage or at least bearing children before they become forty years old---- entering the second phase of the fifth grade (Asmarom, 2000:124). This means new children continue to be “born” into gada class throughout most of its development and as a result classes incorporate people of different ages. In each of the grades members of every class have their own distinct responsibilities (i.e. distinct responsibilities from the other class) (Asebe, 2007, 24-25).
judicial organizations. This is the ‘meeting of the multitude’ that come from age-grade leaders of all clans, councilors of gada at different levels, ordinary citizens who have the wit to understand issues of national concern and able to express their thought. According to my informants in Bule-Hora, Gumi gayo that is the assembly of the representatives of the entire society is a law making body. This body has the highest degree of political authority. The gumi is held under a green tree known as dhaddacha gumi. Green for the Oromo, as to the same informants, is a symbol of justice.

Once in every eight years a great ritual ceremony used to be undertaken in southern parts of Oromo land (i.e. Arsi and Borana areas) on which many thousands of Oromo pilgrims participated travelling from as far north as Wollo and west as Wellega and Jimma (Asmarom, 2000:100-103). It is through this ceremony that members of a certain grade transfer the power held for the last eight years to the succeeding class. This manifests its democratic nature in addition to many mechanisms of checks and balances of power to prevent power misuse, abuse, and other elements of dictatorship or autocracy, which was a common trend among the highland Christian kingdom of Ethiopia.

The Qallu is the other organ of the gada system that manifests the ritual aspects of the system. The institution of Qallu is hereditary and held for life as opposed to that of the political office. The Qallu are the ritual leaders of the Oromo, representing the two great societal halves of the nation, whose shrines are historically associated with the cradle lands of the Borana and the Barettuma Oromo. Oromo pilgrims who come from far and wide honor him; to take part in the ritual called Muda (the anointing). The Qallu is showered with gifts, and in turn, he gives his blessings. He doesn’t bear arms or shed
blood (Hinnant, 1978; Asmarom, 2000; interview with Guji Abba gada Wako Dube and other gada officials, Muri Turkuma kebele, 28 May, 2012).

Indeed, the Guji division into distinct confederations was bridged by the Qallu institution. Unlike the Borana Qallu, the Guji possessed only one Qallu who enjoyed a real political power than the Borana ones (Hinnant, 1977:58, and 208). No Abba gada or his advisors will be legitimate unless they get recognition and blessing of the Guji Qallu (Hinnant, 1977:198). The notion of peace, gada laws, respect to and fear of the great Qallu as spiritual mediator have all contributed towards social cohesion, orderly life and continuity of the tradition for long. It was this strong value attached to the Qallu institution that made peace making more lasting and binding. The multidimensional nature of this institution seems to have had an integrative function.

The third important organ is the leadership of the system known by the generic term gada. This involves the 6th age-grade responsible for leading the nation (Oromo). This organ symbolizes the socio political life of Oromo people and represents the core element of their cultural identity. It also leads the making and unmaking of laws and adjudicates conflicts.

Guji is one of the few Oromo branches who have retained the gada system (Asmarom, 2000:102-103; Hinnant, 1977). The politico-administrative significance of the gada system of Guji-Oromo becomes more obvious when one considers the selection, structure and operation of the system generally. In order to understand the role of each grade in the customary system of administration among the Guji-Oromo, it would be useful to first look into the main structural and functional features of the system.
### Table 1: Structure of the Guji-Oromo *gada* system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Duration in <em>balli</em></th>
<th>Remarks</th>
<th>Specific role in society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Sulluda</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Childhood and early adolescence</td>
<td>Have little social duty and are depicted as small children going from house to house begging milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>Dabbale (Gudurru)</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Childhood and early adolescence</td>
<td>Have responsibility for herding small animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><em>Qarra</em></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Formal recognition of adulthood</td>
<td>Speak in public debate and may openly address the <em>Abba gada</em>, herding the full grown cattle and join in both the hunting of large game animals and riding for cattle against ‘enemy’ groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>Kuusaa</em></td>
<td>½</td>
<td>Politically significant</td>
<td>Take part in organized war practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>Rabba Midho</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>A period of preparation for the assumption of full authority</td>
<td>Marks a slight raise in ritual authority; he is in a position to be listened to and obeyed by the others, mainly those of <em>Qarra</em> grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><em>Dori</em></td>
<td>½</td>
<td>Beginning of full involvement as a senior man</td>
<td>In ritual realm, Dori marks the end of the trainee period and the beginning of full partaking as a senior man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><em>Gada</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Politically the most important of all stages</td>
<td>He vastly assumes power, administer and give the leadership of each of Gossa(confederacies) of Guji through his councils (ya’a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><em>Batu(yuba I)</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Seen as period of transition into full priesthood</td>
<td>He leaves the public life to the junior generations, other than being consulted as an expert on law and custom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><em>Yuba (II)</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>A period of transition into full priesthood</td>
<td>Freed from public life; increasingly pure (<em>Qululu</em>). More of advisory role in the society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><em>Yuba Gudda (III)</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>A period of transition into full priesthood</td>
<td>Freed from public life and become increasingly pure (<em>Qululu</em>). More advisory role in the society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td><em>Jarsa Gudurru (Gadaamojjii)</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Retirement stage</td>
<td>Senior advisory role in the society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td><em>Jarsa Qululu</em> (pure old man)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Retirement stage</td>
<td>He has no real responsibility and is cared for by his confederacies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td><em>Jarsa Reqa</em> (old man who has ended)</td>
<td>Until Death</td>
<td>Stage of old age / the final retirement from <em>gada</em></td>
<td>At a stage to be cared for until his death</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adopted from Jemjem and Gololcha (2011); Hinnant (1977) and Tadesse B. (1995) with slight modifications

As can be seen from the table above, the first two age-grades are the *Sulluda* and *Dabbale (Gudurru)*. They are youth and early adolescence. While the *Sulluda* are
children having little social responsibility and are regarded as small children going from
house to house begging for milk, Dabbale (Gudurru) are in charge of herding small
animals, but are not still old enough to take part in any communal affairs.

Following Daballe, the boy passes through the Makabasa (name giving) ceremony
and becomes Qarra. This structural acknowledgment of adulthood comes with its
 corresponding duties and rights and is accompanied by a total release from subservience
to the father. He may speak in open debate and may perhaps directly address the Abba
gada. In the ritual sphere, he can begin to engage in ceremonies. Qarra has vital
economic responsibility as well, i.e. he herds full grown cattle. In addition, he joins in
both the hunting of large game animals and riding for cattle against the Borana, Sidama
and Arsi (Hinnant, 1977:126-7).

The Kusa group follows the Qarra, are the group that take part in organized war
practices and are politically significant. There are certain things that they deal with at
their capacity while referring others to their senior man. It is central to note that each
level of gada administrative structure is a kind of training ground for the next rank. Then
what follows is Rabba Midho. This official, as a ritual authority, is in charge of
organizing people in the lower grades for music and dance during the gada transition
ceremonies (Hinnant, ibid).

According to the information from the discussion with focus group discussants in
Bule-Hora, the final grade before the gada is Dori, which lasts only four years (one half
Bali). This phase symbolizes the end of novice period and the beginning of full
involvement as a senior man; indeed, there is no as such huge variation between Rabba
Mido and Dori regarding the social responsibilities that are matching to the balli. This officer is in charge of assisting Abba gada on administrative matters. He deals with some issues himself and refers others (matters that he deems to be beyond his competence) to the Abba gada. Dori would develop into the rank of a qualified Abba gada. It should be noted, however, that there is no guarantee for a Doorii to be ‘promoted’ to the status of Abba gada. The reason for this is that Abba gada is recruited by the Haiyotta (Haiyu group) after a long process of investigation. No one can hold office arbitrarily or through short cut mechanisms.

When the Dori assumes the gada title, he should be at the height of his political and economic power. Abba gada is appointed for office for eight years from among his gada group. With regard to the selection of potential candidates as Abba gada, a person should pass through long process of selection and recruitment and meet certain standards set, which would qualify him for such a highest and complex public office. Abba gada is assisted and advised by Hayotta (wise-men), who have equal status with him. The Hayotta would advise him to administer the society genuinely and fulfill his responsibilities seriously. This is a system of collective leadership. Thus, Abba gada can be removed from his office before his term of office if he fails to discharge his responsibilities sincerely.
The *Abba gada* chairs the *Gumi-Bokko* (the general assembly of Guji group), which gathers in Bore *Woreda* at *Me’e Bokko*, the sacred place where key *gada* rituals and gatherings take place. The *Gumi* is composed of representatives of all the Guji groups. It is open to the Guji public, regardless of age, sex and social status. Though they are not
elected in the *gada* system of administration, women can attend the assembly to study rules and regulation, to follow deliberations, and observe decrees to be made. Thus, *Gumi* is not just an administrative structure. It is also considered as a forum for educating the younger generation for future administration and management of societal affairs.

In his capacity as a leader of his community, the *Abba gada* deals with key matters presented to him in two ways: the first are issues which would be directly presented to him by his advisory body. The second are the issues that are referred to him by his deputy, the *Dori*. According to the information from the discussion with my key informants in Bule Hora, *Abba gada* is seen as the figurehead of the whole of Guji, and is often described as a president. Matters are referred to him and his council when a decision can not be reached at a lower level. For example, when conflicts break out between *Ollaas* (the smallest unit of settlement consisting of 30-100 households) or if there is a conflict between ethnic groups, then the case are presented there. Having assessed the nature and level of a matter submitted to him, *Abba gada* handles issues of great importance, of course in consultation with, his *Hayotta* (entourage) and refers others to *Dori*. 
Guji informants in Guangua revel that the Alabdu Guji, however, adhere to the Qallu as the highest court of appeal rather than office of Abba gada. Concerning this Hinnant (1977:58) states that in the gada administration of the Alabdu, the Qallu institution seems to have impact on the political authority of the gada leaders. This was because the Alabdu territory accommodates the Galma Qallu. Thus, the proximity of an imposing power of the Qallu seems to have completely overshadowed their power. Minor cases that could be solved by gada leaders were often taken to the Galma Qallu.

The three grades before the final set grades are all Yuba. The first stage of Yuba, Batu, is seen as a period of transition into full priesthood. Although Batu withdraws from
economic and political lives, his duty is conveying his knowledge of the key gada grade to the junior generations who have just entered it before retiring from legal and political concerns. The second (Yuba) and third (Yuba Gudda) grades are growingly freed from public life and become gradually Qululu (pure). In short, they leave the affairs of daily life to the junior generations.

The final set grades, the three Jarsa, who have seen scores of gada cycles, are considered as the far-sighted and most respected elders. They have passed through the entire life cycle and accomplished purity. In consequence, the Jarsa grades combine huge reverence with full amount of freedom from social or ritual obligations with the exception of senior advisory role in the society particularly by the first two grades of Jarsa (Hinnant, 1977:129-34). In case of any dispute between individuals or group conflict, the cases would be initially seen by the Jarsa Biyya (local elders) who are among the last gada grades and who demonstrated ability of good leadership, tolerance, dignity, and commitment for peace both during and after their terms of office in gada grade (Interview with Abba gada Wako Dube and other gada officials, Bule-Hora, 20 May 2012). Before closing this section, let’s see how Marco Bassi (1996:150), an Italian anthropologist, describes about gada:

>Gada is certainly a very strong symbol of Oromo ethnic identity, but as with many symbols, it may have many meanings. It manifests itself in a wide range of social phenomena, including prescriptive rules, ceremonies, rites, public offices and actual villages…. Gada becomes a conceptual abstraction, something in which all Oromo are supposed to identify themselves because they recognize it as a root feature of Oromo culture or as a symbol of a pan-Oromo national political identity (as distinct from the Ethiopian national identity).

However, more recently the gada system has been challenged (Asmarom, 2000:102-103; Hinnant, 1977: 217-220) from varied external and internal factors which all in all currently reduced its roles to ritual activities in the case of the Guji. The incorporation of
the territory into Ethiopian state and the successive imposition of culture from the center were the key factors behind the decline of the system. The assimilative policy of the imperial regime strongly worked towards eroding indigenous cultural practices, denouncing any of such practice as illegal. They appointed their own patrons in the place of *Abba gadas* and Orthodox Christianity and the priest instead of the great *Qallu* (Hinnant, 1977:217-220). Equally important, the introduction of Missionary activities since 1950s also undermined the spiritual world of the Guji that was closely related to the *gada* system. The internal challenge was the force of ‘modernity’ among the youth who began to question about the advantage and expediency of the *gada* system. Caught between the forces of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ the young generations have more recently become passive participant in the system. Despite both internal and external challenges, the Guji preserved some of their customary institutions up to this date.

Though the *gada* system has survived despite strong pressures from the imperial as well as the *Derg regimes*, nowadays the Guji are allowed to exercise their customary values, beliefs and practices freely. In Yabello and HagereMariam towns zonal and *woreda* culture and tourism offices told me that they work in collaboration with the *gada* officials. I have also discussed²⁷ with the current Abba *gadas* of Gedeo, Guji and Borana (in their respective localities) regarding their freedom and relationship with government offices, and they confirmed the revitalization of the roles and functions of the *gada* institutions in their respective localities. But they could not tell or show me any visible thing they did so far.

²⁷Interview with Gedeo *Abba gada* Shalo Bosha, Bule, Dec., 2011; Guji *Abba gada* Wako Dube, Bule-Hora, May, 2012; and Borana *Abba gada* Guyo Goba, Yabello, April, 2012.
4.3.7. Guji’s incorporation to the Ethiopian empire

Regarding Guji’s incorporation into the Ethiopian Empire, McClellan Charles (1988:22-26) in his book entitled *State transformation and national integration: Gedeo and the Ethiopian empire, 1895-1935*, states as follows:

After the bloody welayta campaign, [the Menelik forces led by] Lulseged took the first submission of the Mati and Hoku Guji before proceeding to the edge of the rift valley escarpment, where he met the Gedeo in 1895…. The Alabdu Guji surrender had coincided with that of Gedeo…. There followed the Uraga Guji, Burji, Borana, and Konso. These last campaigns of the 19thC went rather swiftly, probably for two reasons. First, a devastating drought and animal epidemic had ravaged much of northern Ethiopia and had also wreaked havoc among the south’s pastoral populations, making them easier prey. Second this time after the Battle of Adwa in 1896, the threat of external colonialism in the north had temporarily diminished, and the flow of firearms and personnel to the south likely increased.

Thus, Guji were conquered and incorporated into the Ethiopian empire in the mid 1890s by the forces of Menelik-II with the assistance of European fire arms (McGlellan, 1988; Tadesse B., 2004). The incorporation soon followed with the expansion of the feudal land holding system. The vast territory of the Guji land, which was once free for every member of the society to move about without paying for, is now distributed among the landlords---*naftagna*, and the land tax is implemented for land use. The Guji who had once the right to use the land in common now laid under tribute. It was required that the *gabar* (serf) provided animals for slaughter, along with labour in the field and households of the *naftegna* (Hinnant, 1977; Tadesse B., 2004). After the conquest, the government used both direct and indirect rule of administration by assigning *balabats* and *koros* to administer and collect taxes from Guji. In the process of incorporation, the central government directly applied its rule to paralyze the roles of the *gada* system of administration by superimposing its legal institutions. As a matter of fact, the method of subjection was carried out in such a way that at the bottom of the administration systems
were native people appointed to maintain peace and administer the law. Accordingly, a Guji Qallu leader was also appointed as balabat (local chief). Each of these officials (the balabat and karo) was responsible for specific territory within which he was charged with reporting any problem and with bringing miscreants to the towns for punishment. These officials take problems to the Ethiopian courts, while the Guji prefer to settle matters according to their own law. At best, the role of Guji officials is difficult one. They must act as cultural mediators, acting for the national regime while at the same time attempting to make laws and demands of the nation acceptable to the Guji (Hinnant, 1977). The practice of some other traditions and customs (e.g. traditional Oromo religion) were looked down upon as inferior and evil and, thus, discouraged. The Guji were looked down upon as inferior and evil and, thus, discouraged. The Guji were viewed as primitive, without any useful culture and tradition, lazy, dirty, savage, etc. The ultimate objective was the total absorption of the conquered groups into the dominant Amhara group and culture (Tadesse B., 2004:20).

Subsequently, on the course of the expansion of feudalism, especially during the reign of Haile Silassie, the integration of the Guji people into the economic and administrative structure of the central government was enhanced. More vividly, in the half of the 20thC, the government’s intervention in these spheres had increased the total but gradual control of the Guji area with setting the officials such as tax-collectors, judges and local governors. Under these well structured wings of the central government court system and police force in the Guji land, the gada lost its capacity to enforce the sera and take administrative measures thereby the Guji society lost not only self administering political capacity but also their law.
Apart from these, the government allowed the ‘Amhara’ in the newly established towns in the Guji localities to snatch livestock from the Guji so that Guji men were compelled to work in the fields owned by these ‘Amhara’ and to carry loads on their back like donkeys’. Guji women were sometimes forced to work as domestic servants in the homes of these people and to be their mistresses (Hinnant, 1977:22). As a result of the expansion of the feudal land holding system, therefore, the cattle raising mode of life, especially among the highlanders was reduced and instead cultivation of the land further increased. More important, plantation of *enset* and coffee, barley were accustomed at length. Although cattle herding is still primarily in some (lowland) Guji areas, crop production became the main in the highland areas. In the main, the majority of the Guji happened to be mixed agriculturalists and, in turn, settled life happened to be fashion of the day.

In conclusion, as we have discussed in this chapter, before the Menelik forces’ takeover the areas of Gedeo and Guji, the indigenous peoples lived in their respective small, decentralized, economically self-sufficient communities. Members were tied by kinship networks, a common language, common political and social organization, and common land holding. Local elders acquired power and prestige by personal achievements; community decision making was reached after serious deliberation and consensus. The arrivals of Menelik’s forces at the Gedeo-Guji areas radically altered the economy and polity of the groups. The introduction of Abyssinians involved the forcible acquisition of indigenous land, enslavement of the people to provide cheap labor, the systematic extraction of resources, and reformed of the economy aimed at export production for foreign exchange and imperial gain. The material foundations of the indigenous order
were being altered with the introduction of cash crops, and a large-scale monetized economy. It is also reported that to attain their ends, the Abyssinian settlers applied a new social order with its own hierarchy of ethnic rankings. Abyssinian values and ways became the measure of excellence; the Abyssinians occupied the top tier in the new order. The Gedeo and Guji unfamiliar with Abyssinians ways were made to lay at the bottom of this scheme. Even when a Gedeo or a Guji acquired education and acculturated to Abyssinian ways, he was still considered to be inferior to any one from the north. Having these in mind, let’s now see the historical as well as contemporary relationship between the Gedeo and the Guji.