

Addis Ababa University

School of Graduate Studies

Department of History

A History of Konso *Woreda* from 1941-1991

By

Wondu Argaw Yimam

June, 2011

A History of Konso *Woreda* from 1941-1991

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Addis Ababa University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Masters of Arts(MA) Degree in History

**Department of History
Faculty of Social Sciences
Addis Ababa University**

By

Wondu Argaw Yimam

Advisor

Belete Bizuneh (Phd)

June, 2011

Preface

The history of Konso *woreda* has not yet been comprehensively studied. The existing works, which have been carried out by some anthropologists, geographers, economists are characterized by either imbalance of themes or scope. Thus, the purpose of this study is to fill the existing gap in the literature by reconstructing the political, economic and social history of the district. The major historical events that are discussed in this paper are discussed chronology.

The study is conducted through the systematic collection, investigation and analysis of written primary and secondary sources together with oral sources. However, the sources are not sufficiently available at both local and national level. For example, the first two chapters are discussed through sources that are collected only from Institute of Ethiopian Studies Wolde Mesqel Tariku Memorial Center, National Archives and Library Agency. I was not able to find local archival sources which support materials generated at the national level. Similarly, I relied only on local (*woreda*) sources to discuss the socio-economic developments of the *Derg*'s period.

To solve the above stated limitations of archival sources, gathering oral data from knowledgeable personalities through interviews have been another vital component of the research method. Age, gender sub-regional representation

and professional relevance to the topic are used as major criteria to the identification of informants. Secondly, the data which I collected from oral sources were crosschecked with archival sources before interpretation.

My experience in field work was successful because of two reasons. The first reason is associated with my skill in Konso language. Except minor technicalities, I had no problem communicating with the members of Konso society. On a few occasions, when the informant failed to understand my question, I used an interpreter in order to make it clear for him. The second reason is associated with my friendly relation with Konso officials. When I was in Arba Minch High School; I learned with most of the present Konso officials. I also taught history in Konso High School during 2002 and 2003. So, I have exposure to the Konso culture as well.

I have received the support of different individuals and institutions in realization of this project. First of all, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to my advisor Dr. Belete Bizuneh, who gave me brotherly advice and guidance in the research and writing of the paper thesis.. My heartfelt thanks also go to all members of the staff of Konso Special *Woreda* Administrative Office, for their willingness to provide me with important documents during my field work in Konso. I also would like to express my heartfelt thanks to all informants. Finally, I would like to thank Addis Ababa University School Graduate Studies for its material and financial support to undertake the project of this thesis.

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Abstract.

This thesis discusses the major forces that shaped the history of Konso Woreda from 1941-1991. It focuses on the administrative, economic and ecological changes that evolved during the period of Emperor Haile Selassie and the Derg. The study is based information gathered from national and local archives, together with interviews of various oral informants.

Based on archival and oral sources, my study concluded that the post- 1941 reform policies of the emperor and the Derg have great significance in changing the socio-economic life of the Konso. The 1941 land reform helped the Konso farmers to be free from the old gabar system. Similarly, the 1975 land proclamation was among the constructive policies which helped the Konso farmers to be free from the old gabar system the yoke of land lordism . The transformation of craft workers in to one of the trading community of the region, which evolved as a result of the shift of social -economic alliance among the Konso society, also served as an evidence to strengthen this argument.

The second issue is associated with the controversy on ecology versus government policy in affecting agricultural productivity and resource use of Konso. Accordingly, my research work argues that Konso's food insecurity was not because of the weakness of government policy to address the problem rather, it has direct link to environmental degradation, which was aggravated by the increase in population.

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Chapter I

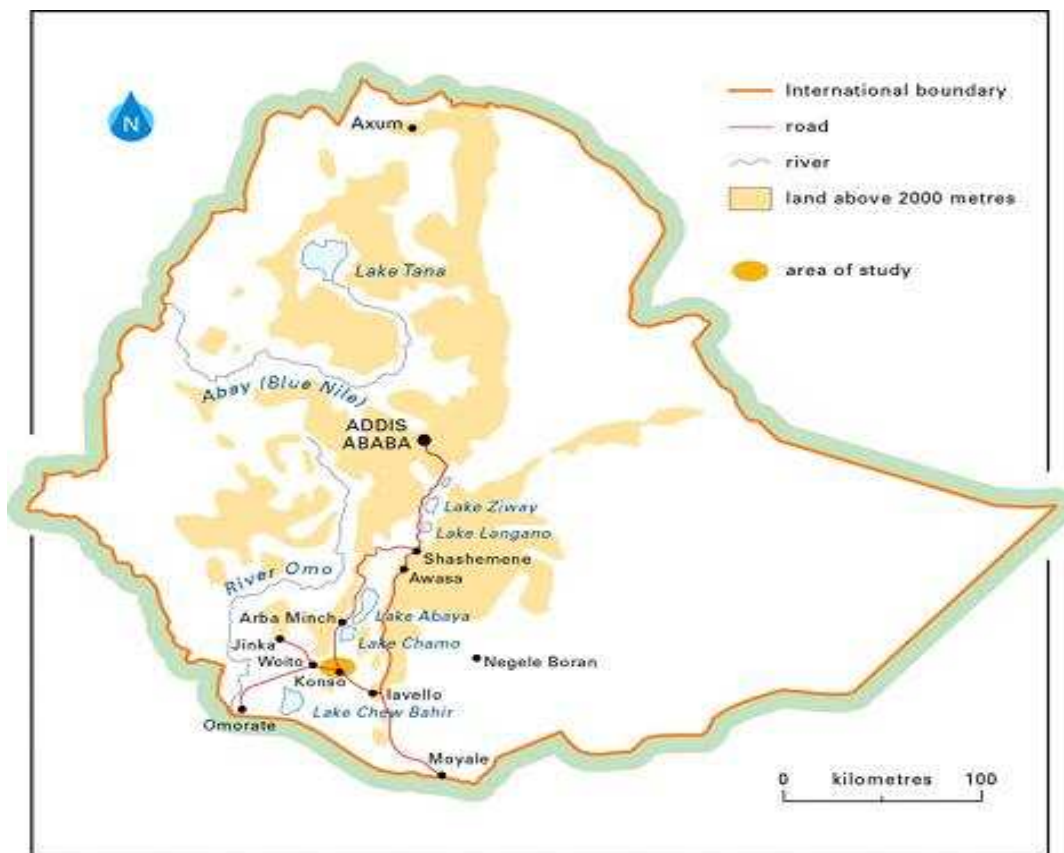
Geographical and Historical Background of Konso Woreda

1.1. Physical And Human Background of Konso Woreda

1.1.1. Location, area, and population

The term Konso (Xonso) which literally means “heavily forested hill”, has both ethnic and territorial connotations.¹ The word represents the people or an individual who speaks *affa Xonso* or Konso language.² The second context of the word Konso has territorial dimension. Accordingly, Xonso or Konso stands for the territory or the place where the people of Konso live, that is Konso Special Woreda (district).³

Map 1: Location of Konso in Ethiopia.(adapted from Watson,1998)

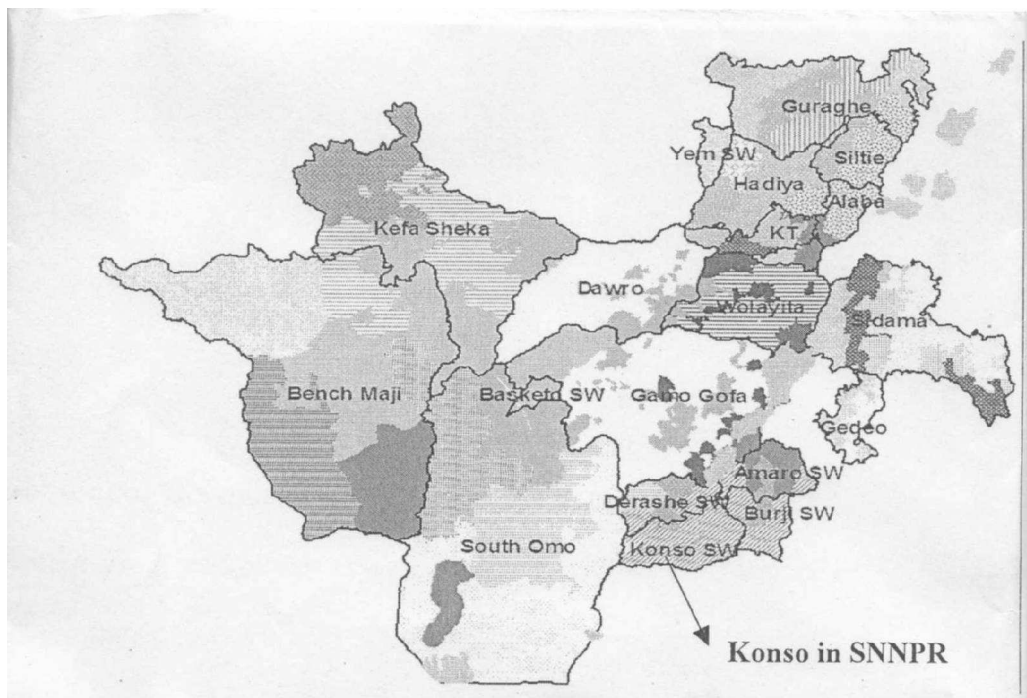


Konso Special *Woreda* is one of the eight special *woredas* of the Southern, Nations, Nationalities, and People's Regional State (SNNPRS). The capital of the district, Karat town, is located 595 Kilometers and 360 Kilometers from the national capital Addis Ababa and the regional capital Awassa respectively.⁴ For administrative purpose, Konso special *Woreda* has been divided in to five *agelgilotes* (sub- zones of the district), namely Fasha, Karat, Turo, Gawada and Gumayide. The *agelgilotes*, in turn, are further subdivided into fifty *paleta* or villages.⁵

Konso's territorial extent has been one of the controversial issues that have been discussed by previous scholars. In older times, physical features like mountains, lakes and rivers have been used as points of reference to indicate the extent of Konso's boundary. The French traveler Leon Darragon, who visited Konso in 1897, stated that the Konso territorial extent never exceeded more than twenty kilometers.⁶ Contrary to this, the British Consul for southern Ethiopia Arnold Hodson, who crossed the Konso area in 1916, reported that the Konso people inhabit the area between the Gardula and Amaro highlands.⁷ Moreover, the research work of the British anthropologist C.R. Hallpike, which was published in 1974, reveals that Konso land is bounded by Lake Chamo in the north, Woyito River in the west and Sagan River in the east and south.⁸ Contrary to this, Mamitu Yilma (2002) reveals that Konso is bordered by Gumayde in the north instead of Lake Chamo as stated by Hallpike.⁹ Furthermore, some scholars prefer using cultural features to indicate Konso's boundaries. In other words, they utilized the neighboring ethnic groups as a point of reference to indicate Konso's territorial extent. According to the *Encyclopedia Aethiopica*, Konso land is bordered by Borana and Burji, Tsamay and Karmat (Wata) on the east, north, west and south respectively. It ignores Dhirashe (Gidole) and Gawada the traditional northern neighbors of Konso which have been discussed by other scholars like

Ernesta Cerulli.¹⁰ The difference among the works of scholars while labeling Konso's territorial extent could be associated with the lack of sufficient information about the area. Meanwhile, the major reason for the fluctuation of Konso's boundary seems to be associated with the increase of its population¹¹.

Map 2: Location of in SNNRP. (adapted from Mathewos Gelebo, 2008.)



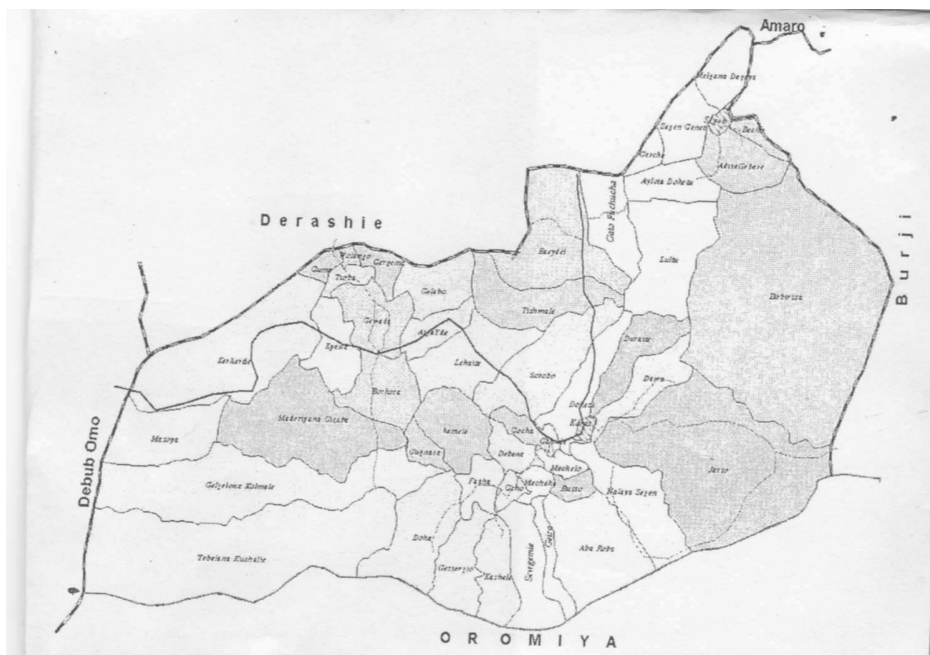
My research work relies on the current political map of the district which has the official recognition of both national as well as regional states. I hope it will solve the above stated controversy on Konso's boundary. According to the functional political map of the district, Konso Special *Woreda* is bordered by Dhirashe Special *Woreda* and Amaro Special *Woreda* in the north, Borena Zone of the Oromia Regional State in the south, South Omo Zone in the west

and Burji special *Woreda* in the east. Konso special *woreda* with its area 2355 Km² lies between 5015'-5030'N latitude and 3710' - 3737'E longitude. Population in Konso has been characterized by fast rate of population growth in the country. It increases 3% each year.¹² The total population of Konso was 55,701 in 1966¹³, 91, 680 in 1974^{and} 157,585 in 1994.¹⁵ According to the 2007 Central Statistical Authority (CSA) census report, the total population of the district is 234,984.¹⁶

1.1.2. Topography, Drainage System and Climate

Altitude in the district ranges from 500m around Woyito river valley to 2100m at Batigama Mountain in the center.¹⁷ The topography of the district is not uniform. According to the research work of Mathewos Gelebo, it comprises 10% mountains, 60% undulating hills and 30% flat and plain surface.¹⁸ Moreover, highlands are concentrated at the center while low lying areas are found on the periphery. Konso highland which comprises the mountain areas of Karat and Takati is marked by rugged and spur vallies.¹⁹

Map 3: Map of Konso Special *Woreda*.(adapted from Mathewos Gelebo, 2008)



The area is also known for its water resource. Most intermittent streams and perennial rivers have their source in the springs of these highlands. These perennial and intermittent rivers join either the Sagan or Woyito river system as tributaries.²⁰ The highlands of Konso are the traditional home land of the Konso people.²¹

Most of the time, Konso has been depicted as consisting of only a mountainous territory. This assumption of the scholars is incorrect. Konso has both highlands and low lying areas. The lowlands of Konso, which had served as hunting grounds for generations, are mostly concentrated along the Sagan and Woyito river vallies and in the north in Komayita which lies with in the Great East African Rift Valley system.²² The lowlands of Konso are marked by the existence of a substantial deposit of alluvial soil together with vast tracts of cultivable lands.²³ The area is also bisected by large water bodies like river Sagan and Woyito. After watering the vast lowlands of Konso, both Sagan and Woyito rivers flow down towards Lake Stephanie or Chew Bahir.²⁴

There are two rainy seasons in Konso. These are *Kadana* or the big rainy season and *Hagaya* or the little rainy season. The big rainy season, during which almost 83% of the total amount of Konso's rainfall falls, begins in February and ends in April. The maximum amount of rain fall recorded during the big rainy season of year is 881mm. The little rainy season, which constitutes 17% of the total amount of Konso's rainfall catchment, begins in September and ends in November. 282 is the minimum amount of rainfall recorded so far during the little rainy season. Moreover, mean annual rain fall of the district never exceeded 551 mm. Based on the variation in weather condition among different regions of the district, 70% of Konso *woreda* has been classified as *qola*(lowland) while 30% of the district is *woyina dega*(mid altitude) zone.²⁵

1.1.3. Origin of the Konso People

Konso *Woreda* is one of the earliest settlement areas in the region. This is partly because of its location within the Great East African Rift Valley System. Konso attracted a world wide attention among the researchers who are interested in research in the field of human evolution. Various far dating discoveries have been made since 1993.²⁶

Konso peoples are one of the ancient people of the Ethiopian region and the Horn of Africa. They have cultural identities which are manifested in their social organization, language and religion.²⁷ Konso social organization is primarily based on clan or lineage. Konso society is classified into nine exogamous clans namely, Toqmaleta, Elayta, Saudata, Pasanta, Kertita, Ishalayta, Mahaleta, Tikisayta and Argamyta. Marriage among clan members is forbidden. This is because all clan members are siblings of the same family (*kaffa*). According to Konso oral tradition, each clan bears the name of its founding father.²⁸

The Konso speak a language which is similar to its neighbours. According to C.R. Hallpike, the Konso language shares 67%, 44% and 26% common words with Dhirashe, Borana and Gawada respectively.²⁹ Based on this evidence, he concluded that Konso speak lowland east Cushitic language which is akin to its neighbours like Dhirashe, Borana, Gawada and Burji.³⁰

The origin of the Konso people has been among the major themes that needs further research work by scholars. The existing research works have been written by some anthropologists, linguistics, and geographers.³¹ However, there is no consensus among these scholars. Some scholars like P.Murdock argue that the Konso ancestors came from the present day Kenya.³² Others like P.Blanc proposed that the probable origin of Konso has been a place called Aylota.³³ Still some others argue that the Konso came out of the calabash.³⁴ Further more other

scholars like C.R.Hallpike argue that the Konso founding father came from the surrounding communities.³⁵ Generally all the assumptions can be classified into two categories: those who argue Konso came from outside Ethiopia and those who argue that Konso home land is within the Ethiopian territory. The old assumptions of the scholars like Murdock, which externalize the origin of Konso out of the Ethiopian region have no tangible evidence except some similar cultural features like terracing.³⁶

The second assumption, which has the support of most scholars, argue that the original home land of Konso to be within the Ethiopian territory. Some scholars like C.R. Hallpike, Shako Otto and Amborn argue that all the Proto –Oromo speakers were not dispersed before the middle of the sixteenth century. They used to live together.³⁷ According to these scholars, the relation between Konso and its neighbours is not limited only to linguistic and cultural similarities, but also share the same origin. To strengthen their argument, they mention the existence of similar oral traditions, the generation set and similar way of counting genealogy and clan structure as major evidences.³⁸

There is strong belief among the Proto-Oromo speakers like Konso that, they share common origin with Borana Oromo. Oral traditions among the Konso, Burji and Dhirashe discuss that their original homeland used to be in Liban (a place which is located in Borana).³⁹ In addition, all the proto- Oromo people have generation set, which is similar with the Borana.⁴⁰ Konso's belief in the presence of the same clan structure among the neighboring societies is also supported by the research work of some scholars. In the works of Braukamper, it has been stated that the original Borana clans are nine. Similarly, Hansemo Hamela argues that the Dhirashe (Gidole) has nine clans. Further more the research works of other scholars reveals the presence of nine clans among the Gawada and Tsamay. Except some little variation, all the neighbors of

Konso has nine clans each⁴¹ In addition to clan structure, they have also similar religious institutions like *Poqala* (Konso), *Daema* (Dhirashe), *Gani* (Burji) and *Qalu* (Borana) .⁴²

1.1.4. Konso Settlement Pattern

Literally, the term Xonso or Konso refers to a heavily forested cool highland area, as opposed to *Komayta* or dry and inhospitable lowlands.⁴³ The association of this term with the presently observed barren and dry highland of Konso land has great significance for those who are interested in the study of the district's ecological history. A century ago, the Konso highlands, which are like an island within a low lying environment, were much more resource-rich than they are today.⁴⁴ For example, Konso was a place where a large number of wild animals roamed in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Donaldson- Smith, who visited Konso in 1895, was highly amazed by the rich fauna of the area: "I never saw a greater variety of game at one time than I did in this march. Borchelles Zebras, Coke's Harte beests, Waller's and Thompson's gazelles, Water bucks, (*Cobus defassa*), Oryx Beisa, ostrich, wart-hogs, elephants and rhinoceroses abounded".

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Logically, herds of wild animals can not flourish with out sufficient savanna grassland. The present forest patches of Konso like that of the sacred forests of *poqalas* are a major indicator of the past vegetation cover of the area.⁴⁶ Before the 1960s, Konso land was covered with giant trees like *pirpirta* (juniper tree) and *Oipata* (*terminalia brownii*). In the past, the presence of dense forests, together with the relatively high altitude of the Konso highlands, facilitates the occurrence of precipitation easily. This, in turn ensured the fall of sufficient rain and continuous flow of streams and rivers. Perennial rivers like Orbula and Dalbena flow all the year towards Lake Chaw Bahir.⁴⁷

The intensity of human pressure on natural resources like forests, water, and grazing and farm lands was limited in the past. This is because of Konso's smaller population. The small size of Konso's population and its settlement area has been well discussed by C.R.Hallpike based on the works of Leon Darragon who visited Konso in 1897. According to Darragon the settlement area of Konso never exceeds more than twenty kilometers.⁴⁸

Konso used to live at the top of the highland areas where the resource was relatively abundant. Konso's preference to settle in the highland area is associated with two factors. The first reason was the severity of mosquito infestation in the lowlands. The presence of mosquitos in the Konso lowland area has been reported by some European diplomats as well. Arnold Hodson, who visited Konso and its environs in 1916, reveals that Konso preferred the highlands due to the less occurrence of malaria.⁴⁹ In older times, Konso associated death due to malaria to the act of evil spirit (*Orrita*) who dwelt in the lowlands. As a result of this, lowlands are considered as the home of evil spirits which causes men to die.⁵⁰

The second reason for Konso's preference of the highlands is associated with its importance for defense purpose.⁵¹ Older villages of Konso are situated at the top of hills to enable the residents to observe the movement of their enemies easily. In addition, they constructed strong walls around these villages and across the paths through which the enemy may be approaching. In Konso, there is strong belief that they are at peace with the farming communities to the north but are enemies with the pastoral communities to the south and south east. This logic of Konso is clearly manifested from observing the area where the defensive walls have been constructed. Out of three traditional settlement areas of Konso, Karat and Takadi have walls because they shared boundaries with pastoralists like Guji and Borana. Turo, however, was left unwalled, because it does not share boundary with these pastoralialists.

The settlement pattern of Konso is unique when compared with settlement pattern of the neighbouring population. They live in densely populated and walled villages which are further subdivided into wards (Kanta). The increase in the number of wards depends on the increase in the number of population. The new wards have strong relation with the parent or the older villages. The conical shape of Konso houses together with its walls and complicated road pattern of its roads highly impressed foreign travelers who got the chance to visit Konso villages which they preferred to call “towns”. This is clearly manifested by the work of C.R.Hallpike as follows: “Konso towns (villages) make an over whelming impression of antiquity and mystery up on the stranger. As one passes through their gates one is at once conscious of a generous for corporate life, for these towns are undoubtedly works of art”.⁵²

1.1.5. Socio-Political Structure.

Before 1897, there was no king or central authority who acted as sovereign power over the three regions of Konso that is Karati Turo and Takati. The regions were further sub-divided into various wards. Each ward of Konso village was ruled by the council of elders or officials (*hayyota*) which are elected directly by the active participation of all male members of the ward.⁵³ The most important criteria for the selection of these people is merit rather than heredity. Moreover, qualities like bravery, intelligence, ability to keep one’s temper, honesty, knowledge of affairs etc are among the criteria up on which the Konso relied to elect these officials.⁵⁴ While electing the council members, efforts are made to represent different social groups of the society. According to Hallpike, at least the representation of the following major groups and individuals was imperative. These are:⁵⁵

1. **Kada age grade:** - represents elders who make decision.
2. **Xela age grade:-** the warrior age groups or who provides policing services.

3. ***Shoroketa:*** - represent the priesthood.
4. ***Nama dhawra:*** - the holy man who stops fighting between wards.
5. ***ApaTimba:*** - a man who holds the sacred drum of the warrior generation set or *xela*.
6. ***Apa Saleta:*** - a town crier. He announces any information's to the public.

Age grade is another form of Konso's social organization which embraces almost the entire male population of the society. The age grade of Konso is called *xhelta*.⁵⁶ The *xhelta* system has been based on a fixed cycle of years which starts at the birth of each boy. However, the practice of age grade among the three regions of Konso has a little variation. This is because each region of Konso wants to magnify its complete autonomy which makes it different from the rest.⁵⁷ Hallpike attempted to discuss the development in the three regions of Konso as follows: "All three regions have their distinctive *gada* system. These systems are based on a fixed cycle of years: eighteen in Karat, nine in Takati and five in Turo".⁵⁸

The Karati System⁵⁹**The Takati System⁶⁰****The Turo System⁶¹***Ukuta**Ullula**Raga**Qulula**Orshata**Pulada**Qurula**Apata (Kata)**Dallta**Orshada**Akota**Farida**Kata**Suuka**Xrela**Xrelita**Farayta**Forita**Farayta I**Farayta*

Generation set in Konso seems to have emerged probably about four centuries ago.⁶² Some anthropologists like Hallpike argue that generation set of Konso is an institution which Konso adopted from the neighboring Burji Society.⁶³ However; he failed to discuss why, how and when Konso adopted this institution. Some other scholars like Eike Haberland argue that Konso and its neighbors adopted generation set from Borana Oromo. According to these scholars, Konso adopted generation set for survival. This notion of the scholars has been stated by Haberland as follows “... many of the Oromo’s neighbors-the Sidama, Darasa, Burji and all members of the Konso group-saw the *gada* system as a strengthening of military might and adopted it in some what modified form”.⁶⁴

Konso age grade has some element of similarities and differences with that of the Boran age grade. In both cases, the generation set has been effectively utilized to mobilize the entire warrior

group of the society for attacking alien invasion or to mobilize for conquest. However, while, the transition from first age grade to the next takes eight years among the Borana, it takes eighteen years among the Konso.⁶⁵ This minor variation could be more than enough to show the existing difference between the two generation sets. However, the major point of variation between Konso and Boran generation sets has been their difference in objectives. The major aim of Boran generation set or *gada* system is providing authority and power to next ruling generation with specific time interval, that is every eight years.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, Konso's generation set put more emphasis on informing what responsibilities are expected from each age set as an elder, warrior or a boy. In Konso the responsibility of governing the people was left to elder's council or *hayyota*. Especially the transition from childhood to *xela* is accompanied with a big feast called *killota* to magnify the significance of the defensive role of the warrior grades. On this ceremony, the new, age set also erects *olahita* to commemorate power succession⁶⁷

The *poqala* institution which has been held hereditarily is an important aspect of Konso's traditional authority. Literally, the term *poqala* stands for "lord" or "rich man". In a religious context, however, *poqala* indicates priesthood. The *Poqala* acts as an intermediary between God *Waqha* (the sky God) and the Konso people. The *poqala* has neither direct political authority nor his own army to enforce his power. The people simply obey the office of *poqala* because of his divine power. In older times, the major task of the *poqalas* has been limited to religious and conciliatory functions.⁶⁸ This notion of the *poqalas* has been discussed by E.Wattson as follows:

*Poqalas are men who inherit a position that passed down from eldest son to eldest son in their family. These men are a Konso institution; they are leaders, educators, arbitrators and sacred men. Their position derives from the fact that poqala families were among the first ancient immigrants to Konso and are believed to have begotten the rest of Konso.*⁶⁹

Photograph1. *Qagnazmach Kalla Bamale*. (Adapted from, Jenson, 1942)



There are two types of *poqalas*. These are regional and local *poqalas*. A regional or clan *poqala* acts as a symbol of his respective clan. He presides over regional religious ceremonies and age grades. Similarly, local or ward *poqala* presides over the religious ceremonies that are held at ward level.⁷⁰ Both regional and ward *poqala* wear *Xallasha* (an object worn on the forehead by certain dignitaries like *poqala*). The only difference between the two *poqalas* is their place of residence and the kind of bracelets they wear. The regional *poqala* who live outside villages wear a *tuma* bracelet (a single thick band of white metal). On the other hand, the ward *poqala* who live in the walled villages wear *mugla* bracelet (five heavily iron bracelets).⁷¹

1.1.6. Economic Life

Agriculture is the major economic activity of the Konso. Agriculture in Konso is carried out by the *etenta* (farmers) *social* group. Konso agriculture, which is supported by a family labor, has been subsistence in nature.⁷² Konso farmers practice crop production, livestock rearing and bee-keeping activities. Based on the climatic zones of the district, various crops like barley, wheat,

sorghum, maize, cotton, coffee, kidney beans and cow peas are grown in Konso. Among these crops sorghum is the major staple of the Konso people.⁷³

The agricultural practices of Konso have some unique features. The Konso people are well known for their stone works. All the hills and valleys of the Konso highlands have been terraced in order to hold running water and prevent soil erosion. The practice of terracing, together with their use of animal and human fertilizers enabled Konso farmers to produce sufficient food for an ever increasing population.⁷⁴

The densely populated Konso highland is located in a dry environment at the edge of the rift valley. In addition, Konso's location within an area which is almost circumscribed by the hostile pastoral communities and mosquito infested lowlands made the expansion of farmland to the surrounding lowlands difficult. Thus, Konso were forced to develop agricultural techniques which enabled them to produce sufficient amount of food within small plots of land. In other words, they learned how to maximize production through intensive agriculture and the conservation of natural resources like soil. The construction of terraces in addition to their conservation value also helps to get additional farm lands by converting the rugged and hilly landscape into more plain farmlands. The harvest of large quantities of grain from small plots of land is unthinkable without using additional compost ingredients. This in turn necessitated the use of fertilizers. Konso's intensive agriculture is also supported by selection of plant genes which could withstand the weather condition of the area. All of this is evidence of the skill of Konso farmers in developing adaptive techniques which suits their natural environment.⁷⁵ Watson discusses this as "...a fairly balanced and integrated system of specialized agricultural technology".⁷⁶

Konso's agriculture which had been subsistence in nature has been supported by the labor of family members.⁷⁷ However, labor intensive activities like construction of elongated terraces across the valleys and mountains, transporting compost fertilizers and tilling the land are beyond the capacity of the family's labor. As a result, Konso preferred working in groups or *Parga* (working party).⁷⁸ Food crops like sorghum, barley, wheat, maize, taro, yam, finger millet, tubers, flax, various kinds of pulses and beans etc are grown in Konso depending on the climatic zone of the region. In addition, crops like coffee, cotton and *chat* are also grown traditionally to generate income. Among these food crops, sorghum constitutes the bulk of Konso's local consumption.⁷⁹ According to C.R.Hailpike; some twenty four types of sorghum were grown in Konso. All sorghum varieties are not equally important for the users. Thus, the selection of seeds is based on test, suitability for beer or bread and the amount eaten by birds or other insects. Moreover, Konso's selection of sorghum has been associated with its yield and resistance to arid weather conditions. This has been stated as follows: "Sorghum is particularly suitable to the Konso environment because of its drought resistance and its fast maturing, enabling two crops to be obtained from one sowing the first harvest producing 70% of the total yield."⁸⁰

In addition to crop production, Konso also raised different kinds of livestock. Domestic animals such as cattle, goat, sheep, donkey, chicken are raised in Konso.⁸¹ In older times, when Konso access to the pasture of the lowlands had been restricted due to the presence of the hostile populations like Guji and Borana, the livestock population was smaller.⁸²

Konso agriculture is also supported by bee-keeping. Konso farmers are well known honey suppliers in the region. The involvement of Konso in the production of honey for both local use

and income generation has been discussed by various scholars. Among these scholars, Kliteberg, for example, described Konso's beekeeping as follows:

*The hives are cylindrical baskets lined with clay and placed in the tops of acacia trees. The number of hives can be as high as 50-100 for one household, and a conscientious beekeeper can make an income of 60-100\$ in a good year. In Dara Waro area, 15 hives per household is normal.*⁸³

Next to agriculture, craftwork is the other major economic activity of the Konso. Konso is known for its craftwork among the societies of southern Ethiopia. The early European travelers who visited Konso were highly amazed by looking at the craftworks like *Waka* (the funeral statue made by konso for their hero). Craftwork was carried out by a minority group called *Khawdha*.⁸⁴ The craftworkers of Konso represent minority social groups like potters, tanners, butchers, black smiths and weavers.⁸⁵ The *khawdha* produce various kinds of ornaments, household utensils and ritual artifacts which are very important in the daily life of the Konso people. Konso's craftwork has been known for its strength and quality ⁸⁶and is therefore demanded by neighbouring communities. In older times, Konso traded with its neighbors who are in need of their craftworks. In the nineteenth century for example Borana camel caravans, brought salt and cowries to exchange with cotton cloths of Konso .⁸⁷ According to some informants, they also took some eluminating rock mineral from Konso.⁸⁸

1.2. Historical Survey to 1941

1.2.1. Menilik's Conquest and Subsequent Developments up to 1935

1.2.1.1. Conquest, Resistance and Accomodiation

There is no consensus among scholars concerning the reason why Menilik decided to conquer Konso in 1897.⁸⁹ Some scholars like Hansemo Hamela argue that Menilik conquered the Ethio-Kenyan borderlands, including Konso, to create a buffer zone in order to stop the advance of the

British colonialists.⁹⁰ To some extent, the argument of these scholars has certain element of truth in it, when seen in the light of the repeated provocations and visits of colonial explorers in places like Saba plain, Sagan valley and around the southern Rift valley lakes in the name of “scientific research”.⁹¹ In addition to this, however, the forces of both *Dejazmach* Leulseged and *Fitawrari* Habtegiorgis never attacked Konso from the northern or Shawan direction.⁹² Rather, they first reached the hunting ground of Saba-Sagan plain where elephants were abundant.⁹³ Both Menilik and the British had economic interest on the southern borderlands. Although the conquest of Menilik ended the confrontation between the colonialists and Ethiopia, the British never stopped claiming the area even up to the Second World War. They repeatedly accused the Ethiopian administration for its failure to preserve peace and order in the region.⁹⁴

The forces of Menilik who conquered Konso in 1897 were led by *Dejazmach* Leulseged Atnafseged who was directly involved in the conquest of Sidama, Gedeo and Burji.⁹⁵ The name of this man is remembered in Konso and Burji in its garbled form as “Lusagati”. It seems that the forces of *Dejazmach* Leul seged were one of the contingents of *Fitawrari* Habtegiorgis who received the responsibility of conquering the southern borderlands.⁹⁶ The expedition of *Dejazmach* Leulseged which was later on supported by the forces of *Fitawrari* Habtegiorgis followed the old hunters route, that is the Sidama-Gedeo-Burji-Saba-Sagan-Konso route. According to some sources, a certain Bubisa Gasare, a man from Alata (Sidama) showed the route to the forces of *Dejazmach* Leul Seged.⁹⁷ After they controlled the resourceful lowland area, the conquest proceeded to the highlands of Konso.⁹⁸

Some scholars like K.Mude argue that Konso submitted peacefully to the forces of Menilik as a result the devastating defeat of the Burji.⁹⁹ Contrary to this, some other writers like Hodson, Hallpike, Hansemo and Elizabeth Watson argue that the Konso resisted the conquering forces of

Menilik.¹⁰⁰ According Watson, the eastern part of the Konso villages like Jarso and Dekato were devastated by the forces of Menilik in response to their resistance to the conquest.¹⁰¹ Watson's argument is also confirmed by Hodson who visited the area in 1916. Hodson argues that the Konso presented a formidable resistance during the conquest of Menilik.¹⁰²

The existing imbalance in armament between Menilik's troops and Konso forces seems to have been the major reason for the easy defeat of the latter by the former. Konso accepted the overlordship of the *Kaweta* (northern invaders) due to the presence of rifles in the hands of the conquerors which Konso never had before. Since the conquest, the northerners have been associated with rifle by Konso and its neighbors. For example the Burji and Drashe used the term *kawe* to call the northerners. The term *Kawe* or *Kaweta* is derived from the Oromo word *Kawe* which means rifle. Konso and its neighbors borrowed this term from their neighbors, the Borana Oromo.¹⁰³

The conquest resulted in the creation of the vast province of Borana, which comprised almost the southern half of the country.¹⁰⁴ *Fitawrari* Habtegiorgis became the first governor of Borana province.¹⁰⁵ This province comprised the territories of Gardula, Konso, Gamo, Goffa, Gumayde and Borana proper.¹⁰⁶ In the early days of the conquest, the province was governed from its capital at Gardula. Gardula town was located on the major trade route which connects Wolayta, Gamo, Amaro, Konso and Borana.¹⁰⁷ Besides its commercial importance, the selection of Gardula as a political seat for the newly formed vast province has been associated with its strategic significance in controlling and watching the activities of colonial powers in both Kenya and Uganda. However, the vastness of the old Borana province together with Konso's backward infrastructure like roads hindered the movement of the people from one place to another. This in turn created a great problem to provide good governance in the region. The governors at Gardula

were not able to restore peace and order. In those days, looting and killings were common in the frontier districts like Konso. British colonial reports reveal the intensity of the problem.¹⁰⁸

The conquest of Minilik, which ended the traditional authority of Konso villages, was followed by the introduction of the *gabar* system.¹⁰⁹ Under the *gabar* system, two third of the land in Konso was appropriated by the state and distributed among the officials and local *balabats*. The farmland of the officials was cultivated by the labour of *gabars*.¹¹⁰ The reality after the conquest of Menilik has been discussed by Watson as follows:

*The whole of Konso was divided up under different melkagna. At the time there was no money. So people worked for melkegna instead. The melkagna, however, soon introduced money and the exchange of oxen and sheep ... after the northerners introduced to money they showed people that the money could again buy oxen or sheep or honey and then these also can be sold again for money and you can go [to] other places and buy other items. Then the first tax money was introduced.*¹¹¹

However, one of my informants told me that the *gabar* system was not practiced in Konso like other places of southern Ethiopia before 1935. According to this informant, Konso's traditional administration was not interrupted by the forces of Menilik.¹¹²

Konso response to the conquest and the subsequent socio-economic and political developments was one of the most controversial issues that has been discussed by scholars. Some scholars like Herman Amborn argue that the entire people of Konso continued resisting any external influence by developing collective confidence in their own values after the conquest of Menilik.¹¹³ According to these scholars; there is no change at all after the conquest. Konso remained as it has been before the conquest. Contrary to this, other scholars like E. Watson argue that some Konso groups collaborated with the forces of Menilik.¹¹⁴ For example, some marginalized social groups like crafts men or *kawdha* viewed the conquest as an opportunity to rid themselves of the social domination imposed on them by the majority Konso farmers. They adopted the new faith of

Orthodox Christianity as an ideological weapon for their struggle against the traditionalists who undermined them.¹¹⁵

Alliance with the conquering force was not limited to the marginalized groups at the bottom of the social hierarchy. It also manifested itself among the traditional rulers of Konso as well. Wastson reveals that the ruling elite of Konso were sided with the victorious forces of Menilik in order to ensure the continuity of their authority.¹¹⁶ The traditional rulers of Konso like *Kala* accepted the Ethiopian title *Qagnazmach* and *Girzmach* in addition to their religious authority.¹¹⁷ This in turn transformed the office of *poqala* to a political office called *ballabat*. The transformation of the *poqala* institution to that of the institution of *balabat* resulted in competition among the regional *poqalas* of Konso.¹¹⁸

1.2.2. The Italian Period (1935-1941)

1.2.2.1 The Italo-Ethiopian War and Konso

Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935 from the northern and southern direction. The major purpose of this aggression was to establish vast colonial empire in East Africa and meet out punishment for Italian defeat at the battle of Adwa in 1896.¹¹⁹

The southern front covered the vast territory of Ogaden, Bale and Sidamo. In this front, Italy deployed a well trained and numerically superior army under the leadership of Marshal R. Graziani. It comprised Italians, Libians, Eritreans, Arab and Somali troops together with local collaborators. In addition, the forces of Italy were supported by aeroplanes, tanks, armor, cars artillery and machine guns.¹²⁰ This huge invading force of Italy, under the command of three generals, launched its first attack on Ethiopia in three directions. The left column of the Italian

army was led by General Nasi, the center by General Frusci and the right column by General Agostini.¹²¹

The Ethiopian forces, under *Ras* Desta Damtew were composed of peasants and ill-equipped when compared with the Italians. *Ras* Desta mobilized his forces in three directions in order to stop the advance of the Italian forces. He assigned the forces of *Dejazmach* Habte Silassie in the right, the forces of *Dejazmach* Nesibu at the center and the forces of *Dejazmach* Abebe and *Dejazmach* Mekonnen in the left flank.¹²² According to this arrangement, the forces of the old Borana province which Newman calls “chief of Konso and Gardula regions laying between lakes Stefani and Margherita” were assigned on the left flank of the battle front.¹²³ The forces of *Dejazmach* Abebe Damtaw were the best among the contingents up on which the *Ras* relayed. In one of the engagements, Marshal Graziani himself barely escaped from an attack by the forces of Konso and Gardula .¹²⁴ The bravery of the forces of *Dejach* Damtew together with the rest two contingents were manifested in various battle fields. Among this, the battle of Ogaden, where more than 3,000 Ethiopians have been massacred was the most important of all.¹²⁵

Konso response to the Italian aggression is one of the controversial issues that have been discussed by scholars. Scholars like K.Mude and H.Ambron argue that the Konso never resisted the Italian forces. According to these scholars, Konso viewed the Italians as liberators from the old *naftagna-gabar* system.¹²⁶ Contrary to this, Wattson argues that “...the Konso resisted the Italian invasion, but they were attacked by force on the ground and from the air and soon over powered”.¹²⁷ In addition to this, oral information and war songs reveal the presence of Konso resistance to the Italians. According to these sources and other written materials, the forces of Italy which envaded the Konso area in 1936, was led under Colonel Monitara. When the Italian

forces reached a place called Sarite, which is located in the eastern part of Konso, they faced a swift attack from the forces of Konso. In the battle of Sarite, the warrior generation of Konso, under the leadership of Kusia Salito exploiting the topography led a surprise attack and inflicted a great damage on the Italian forces.¹²⁸

The Italians who were well known for their subversive policy did not want to harm relations with Konso. After this initial incident, they reached an understanding with Konso. Through this agreement, they were able to convince Konso that their ambition was to fight the Amhara, and not Konso.¹²⁹ According to oral informants, Kusia Salito told them that, “there is no Amhara in Konso land, the Amhara live in Gumayde.....if your ambition is to fight Amhara, I am willing to show you where the Amahara were found.”¹³⁰ By so doing, Kusia managed to divert the attention of the Italian forces to Gumayde and then Gardula. Kusia’s action, which saved Konso from devastation by the Italians, earned him local fame among the Konso. His deeds were praised by songs. One of these runs as follows: ‘*Kussia Salito sabagna sarite*’ (Kussia Salito is the hero or gate keeper of sarite).¹³¹

Following the conquest, the old Borana province including Konso, became part of the newly assembled governorship of “Galla and Sidama” whose governor was General Geloso.¹³² Colonel Montara was the governor of Borana “residenza”. He administered the region, including Konso from his newly built capital at Gidole.¹³³ The Italians had no administrative center in Konso. Understanding the value of traditional rulers, the Italians adopted a system of indirect rule.¹³⁴ They assigned traditional rulers as *balabats* and *chiqashum*. Hence, some scholars argue that the Italian administration in some parts of southern Ethiopia seems to have been a continuation of the pre-1935 northern administration. As Watson notes, “... for the rest of the south, there was

not much change in administration at the ground level. The Italian simply took over the next work of intermediaries that had been set up by the previous regime.”¹³⁵

Initially, the Italians attempted to apply a policy of divide- and- rule in the southern provinces. They portrayed themselves as the friends of the southern people and that their only enemies were the northerners or Amhara. To this end, they declared the abolision of slavery and the end of the *gabar* system.¹³⁶ This gave them recognition among some southern groups like Konso. Some even joined the Italian army considering them as true liberator from the oppressive *gabar* system. As Mude stated: “...not only Burji but the Konso and many other tribes identified themselves with Italians”.¹³⁷ The alliance between the southerners and the Italians indicates that to acertain degree Italian conquest of Ethiopia and subsequent colonial rule was maintained with the help of local people.¹³⁸

However, the intial positive attitude towards the Italians dramatically changed within a very short period of time after the introduction of corvee.¹³⁹ The Italian officers forced people to construct roads, office and residence buildings, and carry their luggage while moving from one place to another. People provided all these services without any payment. Moreover, the Italian merciless measures such as mass killings, arrests, and deportations pushed many local people to join anti-Italian resistance movements.¹⁴⁰

Anti-Italian resistance in Konso and its surroundings were led by *Fitawrari* Tadese Wolde, *Fitawrari* Hayile Dagaga and *Dejazmach* Tesfaye Wolde. Their forces attacked the enemy by moving from one place to another in the lowland areas of Teltele, Konso, Sagan, Saba, Gumayde, Burji, Ottolo and Gardula. The presence of organized contingent together with their determination to fight the enemy enabled the patriotes of the region to score repeated

victory.¹⁴¹ The second reason behind the success of these patriots was their ability to ensure the continuity of their link with those in exile. This relation helped them get information about the development of the war and import arms from Kenya.¹⁴² The third reason for the success of the struggle against fascists was the support provided by the local people. The people provided the patriots with food supply and information. Especially, the deportation and final execution of *kala* Bamale by the fascist forces, the support of local people to the patriots increased. The Italians killed this man due to his refusal to expose the patriots. One of the informants also told me that some people hated Italians because of their sexual abuses. This in turn resulted, the shift of local people's support to patriotic elements.¹⁴³

Italian administration had significances beyond its drawbacks. Italian attempt of using the pre-1935 administrative structure had apposite role in strengthening the unity of newly conquered territories like Konso. They were also pioneered in Konso's modern infrastructures like road, which had great importance in the future development of Konso. The post liberation Konso's road pattern also followed the framework of the Italian dry weather roads. Further more, Italy's attempt of using Konso soldiers to fight other peoples like Gedeo, Sidama and Arsi provided an opportunity to move into other parts of the country and remain there after liberation. In places like Yirgacheffe these people continued serving as an agent of Konso traders in post 1941 years.

Chapter Two

Konso Under Imperial Administration

2.1. Restoration of Imperial Power

2.1.1. Administrative Reforms of Haile Selassie I

The fascist Italian forces in Ethiopia were defeated by the combined forces of local patriots and the British.¹ Leading this victorious force, Haile Selassie entered Addis Ababa on May 5, 1941. The restoration of imperial power marked the end of Fascist rule in Ethiopia². When Haile Selassie was restored to power, the reality of Ethiopia is not as it has been before the year 1935. The emperor inherited a country whose administrative framework has been laid down like western colonial powers to some extent. He was also accompanied by the British who played a dominant role in the country's military, financial, educational and administrative sectors.³

Although fascist occupation of Ethiopia ended by the combined effort of Ethiopians and the British, peace and stability was not easily restored after independence. In remote areas like the Ethio- Kenyan border, looting and killings were common as a result of the desperate activities of some fascist remnants and their supporters.⁴ In addition; the effect of enemy's divide and rule policy which had deepened the rift between northerners and southerners was not easily uprooted from the minds of some southern local elite. Thus, in order to restore peace and stability in Konso, Haile Selassie administration resorted to the use of local institutions like *poqala* together with modern bureaucratic institutions.⁵ Haile Selassie's economic reform intended to end the *naftegna-gabar* system through the privatization of the land. Accordingly, many *gabars* were transformed to independent tax paying subjects. Of course, in some places like Konso, where land was held privately, privatization of the land had no immediate socio-economic significance

as compared to the end of corvee. One of the great achievements of the imperial economic reform in Konso and Ethiopia at large was, therefore, the abolition of corvee.⁶

2.1.2. Modern Administration and Konso's Traditional Authority

Konso witnessed some important changes in socio-economic and administrative sectors after the liberation. The development in the fields of administration, finance, judiciary, education and health has been associated with the reform policies of the emperor directly or indirectly. In the administrative sector, Hailes Selassie wanted to re-arrange the administrative structure of the old provinces into small and manageable units whose officials are directly appointed from the center. Accordingly, the old provinces were restructured into provinces, sub-provinces, districts and sub-districts.⁷ The motives of this administrative restructuring was to ensure the effective control of the provinces through loyal subordinate officials. The extension of central state control to the district levels benefited peripheral societies like Konso which had been seriously affected by administrative inefficiency and the prevalence of lawlessness in the pre-1935 period.⁸

Konso *Woreda* with its newly assigned governor *Fitawrari* Tadesse Wolde emerged in 1942. Together with the *Woreda* institution, two *Mikitl Woredas* (sub-districts) were also established at Fasha and Turo. However, the *Mikitl Woredas* were dissolved after a short period of time.⁹ The administrative capital of the newly established *woreda* was Bakawle. In this arrangement, Konso *woreda* was put under Gamo Gardula province which later on became Gamo Gofa *Teklay Gizat*. The administrative capital of Gamo Gofa province was in Gidole and later on changed to Chenchu and Arba Minch.¹⁰ The new district of Konso comprised the territories of the three *balabats*, i.e Kala, Bamale and Quffa.¹¹ According to some informants, the territorial extent of Konso *woreda* at the time was three hundred *gashas*.¹² The territories of each *Balabat* were sub-

divided in to wards (*chigas*). Together with the office of *woreda* administration, Ato Abebe Negash was appointed as the Secretary of the district. Various institutions like judicial, finance and police offices were also established in the district.¹³

Under the new arrangement, the police office was established in Bakawle the capital. In addition, six out- post police stations (*netib tabia*) and custom posts (*kela*) were established in remote areas like Darawaro, Abaroba, Jarso, Duro, Kolme and Fasha between 1941 and 1943. In each police station, two to five police officers were assigned.¹⁴

The opening of these police outposts had been associated with the need to restore peace and order in pastoral dominated peripheries. In those days, except in the north, most of the district's borders were surrounded by the pastoral communities like Guji, Borana, and Tsamay. Especially, the Guji Oromo, group with whom the Konso had the most hostile relationship in the period lived at a distance of not more than eleven kilometers from the capital, Bakawle.¹⁵ Travel to any place outside Konso could cost some one's life. Thus, the Konso could not travel even to Gidole, Gumayde or Burji safely. The establishment of police stations on the borders of these hostile pastoralists minimized the security risk for travelers like merchants. This development has a long lasting effect on the development of cross-border long distance trade which flourished in Konso and elsewhere in the region in the post-liberation period.¹⁶

The appointment of officials like *Fitawrari* Tadese Wolde and the secretary, Ato Abebe Negash, seems to have been based on administrative efficiency, knowledge about Konso culture and education (Church education). It also considers one's contribution to the liberation struggle or pacifying the region. These were qualities which *Fitawrari* Tadese Wolde clearly had. *Fitawrari* Tadese Wolde was the son of, one of the Generals of Menilik, *Fitawrari* Wolde. He was born in

Gumayde *woreda* at a place called Melissie (Gumayde *woreda* is the immediate northern neighbor of Konso before 1988. After 1988, Gumayde was divided among the Konso, Burji, Dhirashe and Amaro special *woredas*). Since he was born in the south after the conquest of Menilik, he speaks local languages like Konso and Oromo fluently. He also acquired some church education.¹⁷ *Fitawrari* Tadese Wolde also had a significant role in the struggle against fascism. In the early days of the conquest, he was exiled to Kenya. However, he returned later on and joined the resistance against the fascist presence in Konso area. After independence, he was given the title of *Fitawrari* together with the governorship of Konso *woreda*.¹⁸ *Fitawrari* Tadese Wolde was successful in administering Konso smoothly. This is because he had good personal relationship with the Konso.¹⁹ In 1966 he was assigned to administer the Militia Office of Gamo Gofa, in addition to his previous post as governor of Konso *woreda*.²⁰

Emperor Hailes Selassie's attempt to assign officials on the basis of their efficiency to the provinces has been criticized by some scholars who suspect the development as an act that aimed to dislodge the authority of traditional rulers. Based on this idea, they concluded that Haile Selassie's administrative reforms have nothing to do with the regional authority of peripheries, but was rather to strengthen the dominance of the center.²¹ However, when we analyze the newly evolving alliance between the center and peripheries, it is difficult to accept that the reforms of Haile Selassie were aimed at dissolving the local autonomy of the regions. The imperial administrative policy has been tolerant to the autonomy of the regions to some extent. In some places like Konso, the administrative system of the imperial government has been a mixture of traditional administration and modern system.²²

Administrative centralization under emperor Hailes Selassie did not completely uproot the authority of Konso traditional rulers. Instead, the administrative policy of the emperor succeeded

in instituting a system through which the modern and traditional authorities worked in harmony. In other words, it created a system which comprised some modern elements and some traditional elements.²⁷ The new system avoids direct contact between an individual and the *woreda* officials. Between the government officials and the ordinary people, there was an office of *poqala* or *balabat* who has the recognition of both the people and the state officials. When a government official wanted to inform the people about the affairs of the state or tribute, he communicated the matter to the office of *poqalla*. The *poqala* transmitted the message to his people using the traditional channel of communication.²³

Some scholars like C.R.Hallpike argued that the power of the office of *poqala* was limited to only communicating decisions and proclamations of the *woreda* administrators. However, this idea is not correct. The job of the office of *poqala* was two- dimensional.²⁴ The office of *poqala* has the right to present the grievances of the people to the local governors as well. As one of my informants told me “when the amount of land tax of the year is beyond our income, we asked the *poqala* to bargain with the *woreda* officials so as to reduce the amount of tax to be paid”.²⁵ Thus, the *poqala* acted as an intermediary between local people and state authorities throughout Hailes Selassie’s period in addition to his clan or lineage presidency.

Elizabeth Watson argues that Konso *balabat* or *poqala* didn’t receive any land for the service they delivered to Hailes Selassie’s government.²⁶ According to Watson, the *paqalas* were assigned to the post of *balabat* because they owned vast tract of land which was supported by corvee. Moreover, she concluded that the *poqala* of Konso was transformed to landlord class before the conquest of Menilik. This argument is totally incorrect. These scholars seem to have misunderstood the land tenure system of Konso. Land is traditionally owned privately. An individual has an exclusive right on his land including the right to pass it through inheritance to

his elder son. Since the *poqalas* are the first born sons of the family, they may inherit a large tract of land.²⁷ The *poqla* land is not cultivated by corvee or by the *poqala* himself. It was cultivated by the entire people willingly.²⁸ This trend has continued up to the present.

The last but most important point about the office of *poqala* has been related with rewards provided for his services. For some scholars like Hallpike, the *poqala* provides all these services freely. He argues that, “they were not given land by the Amhara, nor were they allowed to keep any of the tax money they collected”.²⁹ However, when we analyze the development in relation to the administrative system of the country, the above argument is incorrect. *Balalbats* in all parts of Ethiopia including Konso, received economic benefit for the service they rendered.³⁰ The *balabats* enjoyed not only social and economic benefits as landlord, but also some times abused their office improperly to get benefit or harm others like northern landlords or *balabats*.³¹

Konso’s involvement in Haile Selassie’s parliament was almost zero.³² Through out the period of Haile Selassie, Konso were not represented in the national parliament. The figure also includes the involvement of traditional rulers who were considered as “the real rulers of their people”. One of my informants characterizes Hasile Selassie’s period with a system which aimed at exploiting the majority population through assigning some few elite like *poqola* at lower hierarchies.³³ In Konso, the 1942 proclamation which abolished corvee labor and payment of tax in kind was not practical. The local officials continued exploiting the labor of the local people as their own property. The lands of *balabats* were farmed by corvee labor. The peasants present gifts in kind. His wife rendered different kinds of house services.³⁴ Moreover, some local officials even abuse government revenue which was collected from the people in the form of land tax.³⁵

2.2. Economic Reforms and Major Economic Activities.

2.2.1. Land Tenure and Taxation

As a first step towards ensuring the continuity of government revenue, Haile Selassie's government declared the 1941 land proclamation.³⁶ This proclamation has been the first radical measure which legalized the payment of tribute with cash. The proclamation also classified the ownership of the land into *rist* (Communal ownership), government land, *maderia*, church land and *siso*. According to this proclamation, land tax depended on the fertility of the land and the number of people settled on it. For this purpose, the proclamation classified the land into *lem*, *lem tef* and *tef* whose tax would be 15, 10, 5 Ethiopian birr per *gasha* respectively. The 1944 land reform was the continuation of the 1941 land proclamation except the increase in the amount of tax and the transfer of church *tithe* to be paid by land user together with land tax. In this proclamation land tax per *gasha* increased to 50, 40 and 15 in *lem*, *lem tef* and *tef* respectively.³⁷ The proclamation also declared that church *tithe* to be paid in lieu with land tribute. The justification for this was its administrative cost effectiveness.³⁸

The land tenure system of Konso comprised government land, church land and private land.³⁹ The government land comprised the vast lowland areas around the Konso highlands and lowlands along the Sagan and Woyito river valleys.⁴⁰ In Konso highlands, where the majority of the Konso live, land ownership is based on long established tradition. In Konso land is traditionally owned privately and inherited to one's offsprings.⁴¹ In between the government owned vast tracts of lowlands and the privately owned highlands of Konso, there was *maderia* land which was owned by officials. This comprised the plains along the river valleys of Dalbena and Kaile which was suitable for plough farming.⁴² This land was given to these officials by the central government.

Land tax in Konso was not uniform. Like other parts of Ethiopia, land has been classified based on the fertility and the number of settlers. According to this arrangement, the Konso highland area, the traditional homeland of the Konso people was categorized under *lem* while the unpopulated lowland areas were classified as *tef*. The transitional area which lies between *tef* and *lem* was considered as *lem-tef*. Since 1942 land proclamation, which abolished *covee* labor and tribute in kind, Konso, started paying 15, 10, and 5 birr per *gasha* for *lem*, *lem tef* and *tef* respectively. Together with the land tax church *tiithe*, educational tax health tax has been paid by each farmer.⁴³

In Konso highland areas where the traditional rulers serve as middle men between the people and the government, land tax was not paid individually. It was paid collectively through the office of traditional rulers or *poqala*. The *poqala* or *balabat* informs the amount of land tax levied on the people of sub- region. Then, he collected the money from each person and submitted it to the *woreda* finance office. This role of *poqala* or *balabat* avoids the direct contact between the private land holder and the government tax collectors.⁴⁴

2.2.2. Agriculture and Konso Ecology

Like other parts of Ethiopia, agriculture supported the livelihood of the majority of the Konso people during the imperial period.⁴⁵ However, the system of production, was based on the old-age techniques of production. Agriculture in Konso was subsistence in nature. Modern agriculture has been among the least developed agricultural sector in Konso. The research work of the imperial government, which was carried out to estimate the economic significance of the Sagan and Woyto Vallies reveals that Konso has substantial potential for the development of commercial farm. The study also revealed the presence of vast tracts of land along the Sagan and

Wayito river vallies which was suitable for commercial agriculture.⁴⁶ However, none of the investors were attracted by the investment opportunities of Konso like that of the central provinces of Ethiopia. This is partly because of the inaccessibility of the district during the imperial period. Except a few Italian made dry weather roads, Konso had no roads which facilitates the movement of investors from and to Konso.⁴⁷

However, after the post-1941 pacification of the area, the lowland area of Konso, which had been settled by Guji Oromo pastoralists, was given to some administrative officials like *Fitawrari* Tadesse Wolde.⁴⁸ These officials in turn rented the land to anybody who wanted to use it. The new development enabled Konso to get access to the nearby lowlands which were conducive for livestock production. It increased the number of Konso who were engaged in animal husbandry. They had begun constructing temporary camps for their animals. This initiative was taken by *Fitawrari* Tadesse Wolde himself. He constructed the first *fora* or temporary cattle camp along the vallies of Kaile, which is located at a distance of ten kilometers from Bakawle.⁴⁹

Konso agriculture during the imperial period was characterized by a gradual shift from traditional and locally bounded subsistence agriculture to that of plough agriculture and production for the market. After the year 1941, Konso farmers were no longer producing only traditional crops as they did before. They also began producing new crops that were needed by neighboring societies and urban centers. The expansion of the market forced Konso to adopt some crops which were not well known at home. New crops and fruits like banana, papaya, prickly pear, limes, oranges, citron, onion, garlic, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, cabbage, etc were introduced from other parts of Ethiopia for local as well as commercial value.⁵⁰ Konso's quick adaptation of some new crops was not only because of their commercial significance, but also has to do with the suitability of the crops to the weather condition. For example, finger

millet, which was brought to Konso by Missionaries, was adopted by Konso farmers in the 1960's. Konso understood that this crop had great significance for its high yield and its importance as cattle fodder. Consequently, finger millet became the second major food crop in Konso later on.⁵¹

Konso's encapsulation by the broader Ethiopian political economy was not limited only to the selection of northern or foreign origin cultigins, but also was clearly manifested itself through the adaptation of some northern agricultural technology as well. As a result of early contact with northerners, out of the three regions of Konso, Turo became no more dependent on hoes unlike the past. A substantial number of Konso farmers started using the plough in the post-1941 period. This was also true among the northern lowland part of Konso.⁵²

Agriculture in Konso was supported by planting of different trees which were used for various purposes. According to some sources, Konso used to plant various trees like *shelqada* (*morenga*) in the middle of their fields. The leaves of *shelqada* tree are used as cabbage throughout the dry season. It has medical value as well.⁵³ They also planted *Oipata* (*terminalia brownii*) tree in between the terraces. *Oipata* is a tree planted for its different uses. The leaves of this tree protect the soil from the direct solar beam. It also protects the young plant from the scorching sun in order to withstand the heavy shower of the big rains. Furthermore, the trunk and the branches of the tree are used for building houses and constructing fences.⁵⁴ Most of my informants told me that the eucalyptus tree was not known in the area until 1960's. People used local trees and other mangrove trees like *Oipata* to build their houses.⁵⁵

Research works which have been carried out during the *Derg* period argue that Konso and its environs have not been self-sufficient in food production, before 1975.⁵⁶ To justify their

assumption, they mention the infertility of the soil and uncertainty of rainfall in the area. According to these scholars, the district of Konso was depicted as a place devoid of natural resources at all. Contrary to this, the research work of the imperial government which has been carried out with the objectives of assessing the economic feasibility of Konso's natural resources and its surroundings reveals the conduciveness of Konso highland for agriculture and its potentials for investment. The information from oral informants also reveals Konso's self sufficiency in crop production.⁵⁷ In addition to this, research by Kora Gara and Enrico Casteelli shows that the springs from the Konso highlands served as the source of some streams and perennial rivers during the imperial period.⁵⁸

The conclusion of the scholars, which depicts pre-1974 Konso with food insecurity and drought, could have emanated from projecting the realities of the post-1974 period to that of the imperial period.⁵⁹ These scholars have also the problem in using and analyzing data. For example, as dicused by Hallpike, Meseret Legebo's research which was carried out in 1990 tells the presence of drought in 1966. However, his eye witness account of the priod reveals that Konso highland received sufficient rain in that particular year.⁶⁰

During the imperial period, most of the Konso highlands and lowlands were covered with various kinds of natural forests. My informants told me that there were no eucalyptus trees in those days. There were different wild animals which roamed in these forests. In those days, people used to hunt animals for both fame and meat consumption in the nearby forests, around the present capital Karat town.⁶¹ The presence of dense forests at the top of the mountains and elsewhere also facilitated the development of perspiration not only for Konso but also for the surrounding lowlands as well. The sufficiency of rain fall together with long established culture of soil and water conservation enabled Konso farmers to produce sufficient grain for

consumption. Konso has been self sufficient in food production in those days as stated by C.R.Hallpike.⁶² Generally life had been very simple for those who till the land, raise cattle and keep bee hives.

2.2.3. Craft Work and Trade

Konso weavers are excellent in the production of cotton clothes. According to Hodson, Konso traders took cotton made cloths to the markets of distant places like Gidole and Mega.⁶³ Konso smiths have good knowledge of metal work. They produced various articles like ornaments, house utensils and *Kalacha* (an object worn on the forehead by certain dignitaries). For religious ceremonies like *Gada*, the Borana imported *Kalacha* from Konso.⁶⁴

Borana Oromo, which is located immediately next to Konso, are one of the major trade partners of Konso. According to E.Cerulli, the trade between Borana and Konso was carried out through bartering up to the end of the 1940's. Konso cotton cloths and articles were exchanged for cattle, sheep or goat.⁶⁵ Trade with Borana was interrupted several times when conflicts arose or in times of flooding. Most of the time, the trade had been carried out in dry seasons. When the summer comes, travel across the Sagan River was difficult as a result of the absence of a bridge across the river.⁶⁶ The intermittent nature of this trade, and absence of the use of money in commodity circulation, put the life of the craft workers in disadvantageous position. Konso traditional society was self sufficient in all aspects of life. Their need for the products of craft workers were either very limited or were easily satisfied. As a result, the craft workers faced a great problem even to get food. To get food for survival they were forced to be dependent of Konso farmers. This in turn decreased their status in society. Konso craftsmen were looked down by farmers before 1960's.⁶⁷

The negative outlook of Konso towards craft workers, together with the long established imposition by the society which prohibited them from owning farmlands, forced craftworkers to search other options. One of these was migration outside Konso which was seen with disfavour by Konso. Before 1960's the majority of Konso migrants were craft workers. The nature of Konso's early migrant has been discussed by different people. One of my informants, who migrated to Kenya, told me that he had been worked as farm laborer instead of his previous profession⁶⁸

The post- 1941 socio-economic reforms had great impact on the life of Konso craft workers. The administrative reforms of HaileSELLASE, which resulted the prevalence of peace and order in the region, contributed for the expansion of trade in Konso and the surrounding areas in general.⁶⁹ Together with the safe flow of people, goods and ideas, Konso's effective incorporation into the wider Ethiopian political economy created additional market for Konso local products like cotton made blankets. Moreover, the expansion of the use of cash as a medium of exchange in trade increased the flow of goods and the number of people who were engaged in this sector. Of course, money had been introduced in to region before 1935. But according to some sources, money is not widely utilized in the region even through out the 1940's.⁷⁰

Two new trade routes emerged in Konso in the post-liberation period. The first was the cloth exporting route that is Konso Burji-Yirgacheffe- Yirgalem-Kofale trade route.⁷¹ Konso with its excellent weaving culture served as the major source of this commodity. The pastoral societies of the south central highlands like Guji and Borana have no established tradition of weaving.⁷² Therefore, Konso's cotton product had great demand among these societies. Karten argues that "the Konso hand woven material is specially reputed to be very strong and to last very long. This is said to be, the consequence of the exclusive use of hand spun yarn".⁷³ In the pre-1941 period, Konso's cotton products couldn't reach the markets of south central highlands as a result of

insecurity created by the hostile Guji. After liberation when the police station was established at Jarso, near the Sagan bridge, it eased security related problem. People began moving to Burji on foot crossing the Sagan valley.⁷³

This new development was exploited by both Konso merchants and northern origin traders who settled in Konso. Soon, they opened trade route which linked Konso with Yirgachefe via Burji -- Barguda -- Birindar -- Ageremariam -- Jebasire -- Chelelektu. Among these traders, *Ato* Sobe Morme, *Ato* Tesema, *Ato* Regasa Bekele, *Ato* Jemaneh, *Ato* Gebeyehu Gnirata, *Aba* Badhadha, *Ato* Gelgelo and Gola Chirsamo were the most prominent. In the early days of the cloth trade, the commodities were transported by donkeys or by the individual merchant himself. The journey from Konso to Yirgachefe took them six days. Sometimes, the journey was interrupted by floods during the summer. In this long distance trade, payment was not conducted immediately. First, a Konso merchant took the commodities and delivered it to a Konso men like Mekonin Deneba and Galgalo Chirsamo, who lived in towns like Yirgachefe. The merchant then returned back to Konso without receiving payment for the goods. Payment would then be conducted in the second-round when the resident merchants completed selling all the commodities.⁷⁵

Gradually, donkeys were replaced by Lorries in the 1950's. This in turn led to the abandonment of the old route through Burji. The new route now passed through Konso-Yabalo-Yirgachefe-Yirgalem-Kofale. The use of lorry, which was associated with the arrival of two Somalis, Mohamed Dero and Lungo, increased the volume of trade activity since the first half of the 1960's.⁷⁶ In those days, Konso traders exported more than 8,000 pieces of cotton made blankets each year.⁷⁷ This increased the income of traders. As stated by Karsten in 1972, "the aggregate income of the Konso weavers is then about \$ 60,000 with the average income of the weaver of

\$175 ... “⁷⁸ Such amount of money is quite a lot in a country where the *woreda* administrator was paid only 100 birr.⁷⁹

The second long distance trade that expanded after the liberation was the cattle trade.⁸⁰ This linked major cattle raising societies like Hamar, Borana, Tsamay, and Bana with that of the major meat consuming peoples of the Gamo highlands where large number of cattle are slaughtered each year on traditional feast days. Before 1940's, this trade route was untraversable because of insecurity. The presence of robbers and some hostile groups like the Guji across this route was a major security problem. As dicused by one of the informants of Hallpike, let alone Gamo, Konso traders were not able to trade safely with its neighboring Dhirashe (Gidole) which is located at a distance of some twenty kilometers. Based on the above stated oral source, Hallpike attempted to discuss the insecurity that prevailed in the area at the time as follows:

In the past, people travelling on the road were robbed. There was no government, and people were killed on the road. Someone going to the path Majella was killed; someone going to another territory like this was killed. Therefore in time of famine, when there was nothing to eat in the house.... They couldn't go to buy corps as they were killed on the road, so they starved to death... now, under the authority of the government when men are hungry they go to Gidole, they go to Yabalo.....⁸¹

The post- 1941 pacification, together with the inclusion of Konso with the province of Gamo Gofa, facilitated the movement of people ideas, goods and service. This situation, in turn, transformed Konso's cattle markets like Turo, Gawada, Kolme, Bakawle and Abaroba, as one among the most important destination for Gamo cattle traders. In those days, various cattle traders from both Borana and the former Geleb and Hamer Backo province passed through the territory of Konso. This fact was stated by Klintberg as follows:

Two trade routes for cattle used to converge in Konso. One went from the Geleb territory over Jinjero Gadal Dimaka-Hamar-Bura-Nachsar-Delbena River to

*Bakawle, Covering 160 km in 8 days, with a weekly average of 50 heads of cattle. The other went from Tertele to Abaroba- Bakawle-Gato River-Arguba-Arbamich-Chencha, Same 190Km, with a weekly average of 100..... On 30 December a total of 163 animals were driven north from Konso, and a few weeks earlier a man from Geleb reached with 200 animals.*⁸²

The second and the most lucrative cattle trade route was that of Teltele-Abaroba--Bakawle—Gato River-Arguba-Arbaminch-Chencha route. This trade route exceeded other trade routes in the volume of its export. One of my informants told me that the volume of livestock that plied this route was not the same through out the year. It increased during the *Meskel* festivity of Gamo. Some times, the number of cattle at the market of Ocholo (Gamo) could reach up to one thousand. In addition to its volume, the route was known for its higher profit. The cattles were bought for 20 to 30 Ethiopian *birr* from Teltele (Borana) and sold for between 50 to 80 *birr* at Ocholo. Peoples like Haile Mariam Worku, Mandefro Kidane, Assefa Gebre Mariam, Demise Habte Mariam and Feyisa Agala were among the most prominent merchants in this trade.⁸³

Before 1974, Konso farmers did not migrate to the land of others. Most migrants of Konso were craftworkers. This act of *khawdha* gave them exposure to other cultures. This in turn made *khawdha* to be well versed in languages of the surrounding communities than the *etenta*. They can speak different languages, like Afan Oromo, Dhirashe and Gawada alternatively as the need arose. This trend of *khawdha* has been discussed by one Konso farmer as follows:

*The etenta parts of society are farmers who are said to be honest, straight forward, genuine, and innocent people.... They are easily angered and sensitive. They limit themselves to tilling the land and do not travel much to neighboring societies or learn new things from them. They do not know much about business and have no experience in hand crafts.*⁸⁴

Khawdha's proficiency in various languages together with Konso's strategic position on the long distance trade route of the cattle helped Konso traders to play a dominant role in this lucrative trade. The interactive nature of the *Khawdha* attracted the attention of both Gamo cattle traders and merchants of northern origin who lived in Konso. These traders had been engaged in various trade activities since the older times. When the lucrative cattle trade route opened, they had been among the first to join the business. Their similarity in livelihood tied their fate with the Konso *khawdha*. The northern traders provided *Khawdha* with the initial capital which helped them to start cattle trade. As a result of such mutual economic interest, together with the similarity in faith, they transformed this into mutual alliance formation. They established *fuldo* organization; an organization of trading communities of Konso and its environs, regardless of their ethnic background. The acting chairman of *fuldo* told me that the foundation of the organization goes back to older times. The main objectives of the organization were aimed at facilitating protection for traders and free flow of goods among the neighbouring community. It also punishes those who did not willing to work according cultural values of the region.⁸⁵

2.3. The Expansion of Christianity

2.3.1. Orthodox Christianity

After independence, a new Orthodox Church, that is Silasie church, was established in Bakawle town with the aim of providing its unifying role. By way of expressing their loyalty to Ethiopian nationalism, the traditional rulers of Konso like *Kala Qagnazmach* Kayote were baptized publicly with one of the sons of *Fitawrari* Tadesse Wolde as his God Father.⁸⁸ After this event, some of the population were baptized and converted to Christianity. When compared to other Christian sects, the evangelical process of Orthodox Church faced little resistance from the

traditional rulers as well as the people. This is partly because of its tolerant nature to some cultural practices of the people. In Konso's Orthodox Christians were loyal to both Christianity and their own traditional religious and cultural practice.⁸⁷

Khawdha or craftworkers constituted the majority of the Orthodox Christian population of Konso. The reason for the inclination of *khawdha* towards the Orthodox Christian faith has been controversial among scholars. Some pro-western writers attempt to associate the matter with economic reason. According to Watson *khawdha* became Orthodox Christians in order to get money from the northern Christian traders who settled in Konso for a long period of time.⁸⁸ Contrary to this, one of my Christian informants, who is Konso ethnically and a known *khawdha*, argues that he became Christian because of genuine belief in the teachings of the Orthodox Church. He further noted that people accused the Orthodox Church because of the mistake of individuals who abused their church responsibility.⁸⁹

Of course the coming of Orthodox Christianity in Konso has direct link to Menilik's conquest and the pre- 1935 early Christian settlement at Turo, a place which is located in the northern part of the present day Konso. When the first Ethiopian Orthodox Church was built in Turo, its major objective was limited to serving the Christian communities.⁹⁰ They did not attempt to baptize the local population or the traditional leaders unlike some of the conquered areas. In other words, the church did not play its unifying role at this point. This could be because of two factors. The first result could be absence of effective control. Konso was not effectively controlled before 1941.⁹¹ The second reason could be power struggle at the center. Before 1935, the rulers of region including *Fitawrari* Habtegiorgis have spent most of his time at the center.⁹² As a result, the church could not play its unifying role in Konso before 1935. In those days, the Christian communities of Turo enjoyed cooperative life in their daily life and have friendly relationship to

each other in their personal relation. This love and affection among Christians has been based on the teachings of Christianity. In order to assist the religious life of the new converts, an individual Christian or priest was assigned to each of them as a God Father. In other words, when some one becomes a Christian, he gets the affection and love of the Christian community regardless of his social status or ethnic back ground.⁹³ Such life of the Christian community has long lasting effect on the minds of the mobile *Khawdha* who have been discriminated and marginalized by their own society. Thus the *khawdha* accepted Christianity before 1935 in order to liberate themselves from the discrimination by the farmers. The role provided by the Ethiopian Orthodox church in providing hope of freedom among the *khawdha* social group has been discussed by Haberland as follows: “It (the Orthodox Church) has had a positive effect on the emancipation and human development of one African population”.⁹⁴

2.3.2. Protestantism

The expansion of missionary activity in the southern part of Ethiopia was not only the result of the strength of missionaries but was also a consequence of the contribution of the central government.¹⁰¹ The alliance between the emperor and missionaries emanated from the similarity in major objectives of the emperor and the means through which missionaries attempted to achieve their goal, that is, the construction of modern institutions like clinics and schools.⁹⁵

The introduction of modern educational and health facilities in Konso and other parts of southern Ethiopia has direct link with the activities of missionaries. The missionaries built schools and clinics together with churches.⁹⁶ They constructed modern facilities with a huge amount of capital in Konso. They also provided provisional aid to inhabitants of these areas. They constructed all these facilities in order to attract new converts. In other words, the provision of

modern facilities has been to use them as a means to expand their evangelizing mission in Konso.⁹⁷

The inclination of the emperor towards missionary activities has been not because of their evangelical work, it was rather due to the devotion showed by the missionaries in educating Ethiopians. Of course he himself has exposure to one of the mission schools while he has been in Harar. In addition to this, he sought the possibility of educating Ethiopians through the exploitation of the resource of missionaries.⁹⁸ This is why he tolerated the activities of missionaries.

The coming of missionaries to Konso dates back to 1954. The early missionaries like Mr Olafsson and Mr Jasonarsson, were from the Norwegian Lutheran Church.⁹⁹ A year later, they opened a school and clinic in Bakaule together with a church. Gradually, their evangelical work attracted some Konso men and women. One of my informants told me that people were attracted to mission churches because of their use of the local language as a media for preaching and the devotion showed by missionaries in their evangelical work than the priests of the Orthodox Church.¹⁰⁰ As a result, missionaries were targeted by both the Orthodox Church and the traditionalists.¹⁰¹

The initiatives for harassing the activities of missionaries were taken by the priests of Orthodox Church. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church accused missionaries for converting its members. As stated by Hallpike, Orthodox Church claimed that Konso and its environs were Orthodox Christian territory. Exploiting their long established relations, with local and traditional authorities, the priests of Orthodox Church succeeded in banning the activities of missionaries in Konso after 1956.¹⁰² Immediately, the missionaries who knew that, the emperor was on their side

sent their representatives to the central government and accused the priests and local authorities who created problem on their missionary activity. The emperor ordered the local rulers to lift the bann and gave the missionaries legal protection in 1962.¹⁰³ He dispatched a circular to all over Ethiopia which notified local people not to hinder the work of missions. The words of the emperor made clear the importance of respecting one's choice of religion. "now listen; it has been granted to the people to worship their creator as they see fit, and we have declared that religion is the affair of the individual and the nation the affair of all the people".¹⁰⁴

The second opposition to missionaries came from the traditional elements within Konso society.¹⁰⁵ The major reason for the conflict between the traditionalists of Konso and modern European missionaries was European cultural bias. Many Europeans felt that western culture is superior to that of African traditions and practices. Submission to their cultural values like Christianity has been considered as a key to join the "civilized" way of life. To this end, Africans must abandon their traditional cultural practices and accept European cultural values like Christianity. Since the colonial period, they worked hard through their missionaries.¹⁰⁶ The missionaries in Konso were also intolerant of Konso's traditional practices. My informant told me that they undermined local traditional religion considering them as Satanic, they failed to discriminate between Satan and traditional religious practices. The cultural chauvinism of Europeans led them to conflict with almost all traditional societies of Africa like Konso.¹⁰⁷ To avoid this, Europeans preferred to use modern institutions like clinics, schools or provision of aid services in order to achieve their mission of evangelization of the south.¹⁰⁸ The construction of these institutions not only attracted new Christian converts, but also the local rulers as well.

Before the coming of missionaries, there was no modern school in Konso.¹⁰⁹ The missionaries were pioneers in introducing modern institutions like schools and health center. The first modern

school, which was run by missionaries, was established in Konso in 1955.¹¹⁰ The opening of this school at Bakawle was welcomed by both the local authorities and the people who began sending their children to the school. Although he was an Orthodox by faith, the governor of Konso district, *Fitawrari* Tadesse Wolde was among the first to send his children to this school. The traditional rulers of Konso were also among the early families who sent their children to the mission school.¹¹¹ However, the eagerness of the people for modern education and the coming of a substantial number of non- Christian students did not please the missionaries at the time. This is because their primary objective was not to expand modern education but rather to spread their faith. Thus to change this situation, they adopted a discriminatory rule and regulation which restricted access to education on the basis of acceptance of Protestantism.¹¹² This discriminatory approach forced most members of traditional families to be absent from the school up to the opening of a government school in the 1970's.

Generally, there is a mixed feeling about the activities of missionaries in those days. Some argue that the Protestant missionaries were agents of change and had played a dominant role in educating the people. One of my informants told me that the senior members of Konso elite are among the graduates of the early mission school. He also listed the establishment of clinic in Bakawle as an indication of their contribution to local development.¹¹³ Contrary to this, some argue that Protestantism is a threat to their cultural values. They mention the missionary association of every traditional practice with the devil has played a great role in eroding the cultural values of Konso in the long run.¹¹⁴

2.4. Konso's Ecological and Socio-Economical Realities at the Eve of the Ethiopian Revolution

According to some oral informants like Matewos Gelebo and Kambiro Kusiya, the first half of the 1970's was considered as watershed in the history of Konso. Various changes were witnessed in Konso in those days.¹¹⁵ The changes have both positive and negative effect on Konso society. Of course, there are some scholars who refused to accept the idea that Konso was changing. Wattson argues that none of the Konso life was changed.¹¹⁶ According to these scholars; Konso continued to enjoy its traditional way of life during and after the period of the *Derg*. However, these scholars did not specify which parts of Konso life remained unchanged. Konso evolved considerable changes which could be clearly manifested in social, ecological, economical and political aspects of its people.¹¹⁷

At the end of the first half of the 1970's, more than 1000 families from Abaroba area requested the government to resettle them in other parts of the country. The reason behind this unexpected request of the farmers was increase in population and shortage of land.¹¹⁸ The period was characterized by doubling of Konso's population for the first time. The total population of Konso which had been 55,701 in 1966 reached 91,680 in 1975 without subsequent increase in natural resources like farmland, pastureland and water supply.¹¹⁹ This population growth marked the beginning of ecological imbalance in Konso and its environs. The research work of some scholars like Klinteberg reveals that the population of Konso has been growing at the rate of 3% in 1975. The research also warned both the people and the government to take corrective actions like contraceptive methods in order to balance the number of population with the resource of the district. However, none of them listened to his advice.¹²⁰

To solve the problem, migration in to the lowlands or areas out side Konso- land was the only option proposed open to the Konso people. These measures, however, violated the cultural values of Konso.¹²¹ In older times, migration to the lands of others was considered as an act of unethical men among the *etenta* or formers of Konso. Mostly, it was associated with the activities of *Khawdha* or craftworkers.¹²² Meanwhile, since the 1975 Konso's attitude towards migrations seems to have changed. This change in attitude gradually transformed in to the appropriateness of migrating to other areas in order to get farmland.¹²³

The eucalyptus tree arrived in Konso in 1974. Most of my informants told me the tree was brought by missionaries in order to replace the fast rate destruction of Konso's natural vegetation caused by population pressure.¹²⁴ The first nursery in Konso was established in Dalbena by a missionary called Keitl Fuglstad. In those days, the missionaries paid 1.5 Ethiopian birr for an individual who work at this nursery.¹²⁵ Thus, changes have also ecological dimensions. Like other parts of the country, the occurrence of an intermittent drought has been common in pre-1974 Konso as well. Meanwhile, its intensity and scope of disaster was not as such serious. In 1973, Konso area was registered in the list of major drought affected regions of the country for the first time.¹²⁶ The drought in Konso resulted from shortage of rain fall. The fluctuation in time and amount of rain fall has direct relation with change in ecological balance of the region. The destruction of natural forests was followed by decline in precipitation. It also resulted in the extinction of wild life in the area and decrease in the productivity of bee keepers.¹²⁷

Economically, Konso showed a significant change on the eve of socialism. The economic change that has been evolved since the first half of the 1970's has a mixed implication on the livelihood of Konso people. On the one side, the deterioration in ecological balance together with the rapid increase in population has a negative role on the future development of Konso agriculture. The

fragmentation of farmland and decrease in rainfall together with the clearing of natural vegetation deteriorated the productivity of Konso's soil.¹²⁸ The gradual decrease in the productivity of Konso's agriculture has also negative effect on the social status of Konso farmers. This marked the beginning of economic competition between farming social groups and those engaged in trade.¹²⁹ Contrary to this, the period also witnessed the transformation of *Khawdha* social group from traditional craft workers to newly evolving Konso trading community who envisioned a long term of hope of playing a significant role in the economy.¹³⁰ This has been facilitated because of two factors. The first reason for the emergence of *Khawdha* as a major social group in the economy of Konso has been the efficiency of *Khawdha* to free themselves from the economic dependency on farmers. It had been achieved through their efficiency in creating alliance with northern traders and effective exploitation of the relative peace created during Haile Selassie.¹³¹ The second reason was associated with the modernization effort of the consecutive governments which favored the mobile *Khawdha*. It includes the prevalence of peace and the construction of roads since 1941.¹³²

In older times, traditional religious and cultural practices have central position in Konso's traditional life. The entire Konso population has been loyal to these traditional institutions.¹³³ However, as a result of cultural dynamism since the conquest of Menilik and the post- liberation developments, Konso's attitude towards these institutions and traditional practices has been gradually changing. In this regard the effect of Christianity on the traditional life of Konso was very strong.¹³⁴ On the eve of the revolution, some Konso began to develop either mixed loyalty to both traditional and modern institutions or totally abandoned the traditional religious practices in favor of the newly arrived institutions like Christian faith. The words of Hallpike which says, "Where there was direct conflict between Konso customs and Christianity, it taught

that christen principles must take precedence”,¹³⁵ indicates that how much the new development has been influencing the traditional values of Konso. The changes were not only confined in cultural practices, but also followed by shift in socio-political alliance. In older times, participation on Konso’s religious ceremonies has been forbidden even for craftworkers were considered aliens. Such old traditions were gradually started to be replaced by inclusive ceremonies and positive attitude towards aliens who shared similar faith with Konso.¹³⁶

The period, also witnessed the moment when the authority of both modern and traditional authority had been at its weakest point. *Fitawrari* Tadesse Wolde, who assigned as *woreda* governor in 1941 was no more effective in administering Konso as a result of age limit in the first half of 1970’s.¹³⁷ The fate of Konso’s traditional rulers like *poqalas* was not different from that of Haileselassie or *Fitawrari* Tadesse Wolde. The *poqalas* were also ignored by some radical elements of their respective society like missionaries. More over, the association of the office of *poqala* with that of land lords began creating dissatisfaction and seriously affecting the legitimacy of the traditional institutions.¹³⁸

Generally Konso has been at cross road during the early 1970’s. Firstly, the increase in population heralded that, the complete distraction of plant and animals is inevitable unless corrective measures taken. Secondly, the negative effect on ecology heralded that the *etenta* or farmers of Konso no more dominant as before. That means the agricultural sector of Konso faced competition from the newly evolving trade sector. While the Konso was moving as pendulum, between modern and traditional institutions, the 1974 Ethiopian revolution erupted.¹³⁹

Chapter Three

Konso Under the Derg (1974-1991)

3.1. Outbreak of The Revolution

The 1974 Ethiopian Revolution, which erupted suddenly, ended the power and authority of Emperor Haile Selassie.¹ Opposition to the imperial government broke out in February 1974. Teachers, taxi drivers, urban dwellers and soldiers were involved in the riots. None of the Ethiopian regions, and society was not affected by the revolutionary turmoil of the period.² However, the initiative to force the emperor to step-down and take power was taken by the military. This was because of their relative organization and absence of political party to take the responsibility of providing effective leadership. On September 12, 1974, emperor Haile Selassie was deposed by a military group who called itself the *Derge* (committee).³ The military who assumed power established a government called the *Derg*, which means committee in Amharic.⁴

The *Derg* introduced radical reforms like that of the 1975 Land Proclamation. The main objective of the Land proclamation, which ended landlordism in Ethiopia, was to redistribute the most important economic asset, the land and political power among the ordinary people.⁵ When land and other private property were nationalized, the process was not peaceful. The *Derg*, who encouraged class struggle, ordered the peasants to confiscate the property of landlords through violent actions.⁶

The assumption of power by the *Derg* and its radical reforms led to instability and contentions throughout the country. In Konso also the transfer of power was followed by lootings, harassments of the previous officials. One of my informants reminisced about the early days of the *Derg* as follows: “When the coming of the *Derg* was heard in Konso, I was young. They told me that the *Derg* ordered the poor to confiscate all the property of the landlords. In those days,

we were singing and dancing while looting the property of land lords.”⁵⁷ The radical reforms of the *Derg* created not only enemies, but also friends as well. *Derg*’s enmity with local landlords and its policy of equality of labor which favoured the craftsmen played a great role in shifting Konso’s political alliance and changing the status of craftworkers.⁸

On 20 September 1974 the military government declared its manifesto.⁹ The declaration made clear that its aim was to build *Hibretesebawinet* or Ethiopian Socialism, which means “equality, self reliance, and the dignity of labour the supremacy of common good and the indivisibility of Ethiopian unity”. They also made clear their determination to work for Ethiopia and Ethiopian under the slogan “*Ethiopia Tikdem*” (Ethiopia first). Based on the manifesto of 20 December 1974, the new military government started introducing the most radical political and economic reforms. Among these reforms, the 1975 land proclamation was the most important one. The proclamation ended the private ownership of land and abolished the practice of serfdom. The end of serfdom and corvee labor together with land nationalization had great significance in dismantling the structure of the old feudal government whose administrative and economic structure has been based on land –peasant- land lord relation.¹⁰ Moreover, in the country where the majority of the population was engaged in agriculture, the proclamation also has significance beyond dismantling the political economy of the feudal government. The reform created great excitement among the population of the country who were victims of both the harsh measures of land lords and economic hardships of the imperial period. This is why the *Derg* obtained a landslide support from the peasant.¹¹

The land proclamation also had the objective of reinstituting the new administrative system of the *Derg*. To replace the old *balabat* based structure, the proclamation declared the establishment of peasant associations (PAs).¹² According to this proclamation, every 80 *gasha* was to be

organized in to one peasant association which were to be governed by an elected committee.¹³ In order to tell the people about the essence of the new reforms, the military government mobilized students above tenth grade under *Edget Behibret Zemecha* or the *Zemecha* program, which means development through co-operation.¹⁴ The *Zemecha* students heralded the end of serfdom and private ownership of land. To fill the administrative gap created after the downfall of Haileselasie and dismantling of the office of local *balabats*, they established more than 30,000 peasant associations all over the country. Attempts were also made to fight illiteracy. Generally, the overall administrative frame work of the new government was laid down by the *Zemecha* students.¹⁵

The reforms of the Derg, had unique local manifestations in Konso. Of course land in Konso was owned privately. However, the reforms have words which excited Konso farmers who had been seriously affected by the practice of corvee labor and payment of taxes both in money and in kind. The *Zemecha* students in Konso, who were 80 in number, declared the end of corve labor and payment of any kind of tax to land lords together with the nationalization of private lands. They also promised that the revolution would bring modernity and development.¹⁶

When the *Zemecha* students arrived in Konso, they dissolved the old administrative hierarchy including the office of *poqala*. Before the coming of the *derg*, Konso *woreda* were governed under the authority of three *balabats*. All local government officials and the traditional Konso rulers like *poqala* were put in jail by the new military government considering them as exploiters of the people.¹⁷ The dismantling of the previous government institutions was also extended to the outpost police establishments. After 1975, there was no more outpost police service in Konso except the one at Bakawle, the administrative capital of the district.¹⁸

Under the *Derg* Konso was subdivided into 37 Peasant Associations in addition to one town (Bakawle) administration.¹⁹ The criteria upon which these peasant associations were established in Konso are not clear when compared with nationally accepted criteria that is 80 *gasha*. This is because the size of villages in Konso was and is very small and too close to each other. The leadership of these peasant associations who were twelve in number were elected by the general public.²⁰

Some scholars like Mathewos argue that the office of *poqala* remained influential up to the present time. In other words, the authority of the traditional ruler was fully exercised throughout the period of the *Derg*.²¹ This argument of the scholars did not reveal the reality about power of Konso's traditional rulers during the period of military administration. *Derg's* centralized system of administration did not tolerate the existence of any kind of alternative local authority except its own. Even traditional institutions like *poqalas* have been subject to the suppressive measures of the *Derg*.²² The office of *poqala* was not only harassed by the *Derg*, but also followed by confiscation of their properties and imprisonment of these personalities. It was after the down fall of the *Derg*, these local institutions began to revive.²³

Instead of the old elder's council, the military government institutionalized peasant associations.²⁴ However, the *Derg* was not able to institutionalize an institution which replaced the role of *poqala*. During the period of Haile Selassie, the *poqala* acted as both a religious and political figure of the Konso. As religious leader, the *poqala* prayed for peace and fertility of Konso. He also presided religious ceremonies and reconciliation of inter ethnic conflicts. In addition to this, it marked the representation of in the lower structure of the government. He acted as a middle man between the people and the government. When the *Derg* dissolved the office of *poqala*, the Konso people lost all these services and values.²⁵

Konso and its neighboring communities have long established mechanism of dealing with matters of insecurity in the region. They have also institutions which performed peace making activities. These peace making processes has been preceded by institutions like *poqala*, *apatimba* and *shorugeta*. Abolishing traditional institutions, which played significant role in peace making processes during the imperial government, had negative implication for the maintainance of peace and stability in the region.²⁸ Moreover the post 1975 harassment on the individuals who perform these ceremonies seriously affected the continuation of these institutions as well.

3.2. Economic Reforms

The supremacy of the common good(*Yehizeb Tiqim Masqedem*) has been among major themes that have been stated in the *Derg's* manifesto of *hibretesebawinet* or Ethiopian Socialism²⁷ All the *Derg's* economic reforms were derived from the above stated general term that gave priority to the interest of the people. According to the principle of the *Derg*, in a system where the supremacy of common good prevailed, all citizens were benefit equally from the national wealth of the country. When the *Derg* nationalized private property, its main objective was to ensure the benefit of Ethiopians. There was also strong belief among the *Derg* that if all means of production and business firms are privately owned, the exploitation of the poor would be inevitable.²⁸

The nationalization of private land had no immediate impact in Konso where land was privately owned. The declaration had eradicated the practice of corve labor. In other words, the reform helped to realize Haile Selassie's 1941 land reform which ended corve labor and tribute in kind, which had continued in Konso to 1974.³⁰ The declaration made Konso peasants happy. However,

the life of Konso farmers did not improve as expected by both the government and the people. During the period of the *Derg*, agriculture in Konso was characterized by decline in yield.³¹ In those days, some Konso farmers started to think of alternative means of supporting their livelihood. Some started weaving, an activity which had been left for marginalized social groups in the past. Others decided to migrate to the lowlands or to the territory of other neighboring ethnic groups.³² throughout the period of the *Derg*, the survival of the Konso people was more depends on foreign donation. In the last days of the *Derg*, as stated by Hallpike, “Konso have been reduced to one of the poorest ethnic group in Ethiopia”.³³

There is no consensus among scholars regarding the reason why *Derg* failed to achieve its economic promices in Konso. Some scholars like Hallpike who associate failure in Konso’s agriculture with the economic policy of the *Derg* , discussed the problem in relation to the limited financial provision of the *Derg*. According to these scholars, the *Derg* invested a large amount of money on government owned farm lands instead of individual farmers who produced a great proportion of the country’s food. In other words, if the government of the *Derg* had succeeded in providing fertilizers, pestside, etc to individual farmers, Konso would be self sufficient in food production.³⁴

Most of my informants told me that the problem of Konso’ agriculture was resulted from the shortage of rainfall, not the unavailability of fertilizers or pesticides.³⁵ The argument of these oral informants issupported by official reports of the local governors of the time. According to these reports, the major problem for crop failure in Konso were shortage of rain, fragmentation of land and population pressure.³⁶ Beyond the above stated factor, the failure of agriculture in Konso had direct links with the deteriorating condition of Konso’s ecological system.³⁷ This fact was descused by W. Forch as follows: “the limiting facters of production are the poor soils,

land scarcity, and most importantly the lack and unreliability of rain fall”.³⁸ Thus, failure in Konso’s crop production was not solely due to the failure of government’s agricultural policy.³⁹

However, despite its limitations, the military government had also a contribution for the growth of Konso’s economy. The expansion of education and literacy, health center, urbanization, the construction of all weather and dry weather roads and the struggle against the marginalization of craft workers were among the concrete evidence of the *Derg* contributions in Konso.⁴⁰

One of the major achievements of the *Derg* has been the progress made in educational and health sectors.⁴¹ *Derg*’s determination to expand education started right after its seizure of power in 1975. The first initiative of the *Derg* to educate the Konso people was the attempt made by the *Zemecha* students. Since then, a series of literacy campaigns were carried out to reduce the illiteracy figure in Konso. Through these campaigns, a substantial number of Konso peasants got at least the chance to write and read. The eagerness of the *Derg* to educate the Konso people was not limited to the campaigns of informal educations, but was also supported by formal education as well. Some schools like Maderya, Arfayde, Wolango and Kemale were constructed in Konso.⁴² The construction of these schools benefited many Konso youngsters.

The *Derg* also played a great role in enhancing the health condition of Konso’s people. Some clinics like Kolme, Gawada and Fasha were constructed in the district. The construction of clinics in the mosquito infested lowlands has a long lasting effect in changing the settlement pattern of the Konso. It facilitated the settlement of Konso in the lowlands, which had been considered as the home of evil spirits.⁴³ Thus, the health policy of the *Derg* in Konso has great contribution in providing an additional settlement area and farm land.

Other achievements of the *Derg's* development policy were manifested in the fields of road construction. Various roads with diverse size and quality were constructed during the period under discussion. These roads have a long lasting significance in promoting the economy of the district and changing the socio-economic status of some Konso. Initially, the *Derg* officials attempted to construct feeder roads which linked each peasant association with the capital of the district, Bakawle town.⁴⁴

Derg's road construction policy was not restricted to linking all the villages of the Konso with that of Bakawle. It had aims beyond that. The *Derg* had been a pioneer in constructing additional roads which linked different provinces. A new road which linked Jinka with Arba Minch via Bakawle was constructed during the period of the *Derg*. The construction of this road in 1976 together with the old Konso-Yabelo road placed Konso at the center from where the three roads radiated to Arbaminch, Jinka and Yabelo. This new development in turn boosted the trade activity in the region.⁴⁵

Administration of the *Derg* in Konso was remembered in building modern urban centers.⁴⁶ Of course, the previous government had also attempted to establish urban centers like old Bakaule. However, its location at the edge of a cliff and absence of infrastructure limited Bakaule's expansion in all aspects. During the imperial period, officials like *Fitawrari* Tadesse Wolde and his colleagues used to live on their land, which is located at the distance of ten kilometers. They came to Bakawle for administrative work using their mules. It in turn hindered the development of the old Bakawle town. Hallpike who visited the area in the 1960's expressed it as "the shapeless shanty town of Bakaule".⁴⁷

The Derg established new Bakawle in 1983, which later on was renamed as Karat in 1991, on the flat land of Garsale which is located five kilometers from the old Bakawle. The possibility of expansion in the future, water supply and access to roads were considered in the selection of the new site. Before 1983, the road which runs from Jinka to Arabaminch did not cross through the old Bakawle. The new development solved the problem and benefited merchants. It also created a center where craft workers or traders work freely without the pressure from traditionalists. This aspect of the new center was discussed by Hallpike as follows: "... The town of Karat never the less marks... a genuine capital of Konso. It is a truly urban center of the usual Ethiopian type, with none of the features of the traditional Konso town no more, no walls, no Ulahita." ⁴⁸

In its last days, the *Derg* began to adopt a policy which tolerates the owner of private property. However, in some instances we observe that some private property was tolerated by the *Derg* depending on size. We observe some exceptionalities where the *Derg* favorites an individual firms. In some parts of the country, the activities of some social groups and their right to own private property, was tolerated from the begging. This was the fact which has been manifested by the *Dergs* toleration to the activities of Konso *Khawdha*. ⁴⁹

The *Kawdha*, which has been on transition from craft working social group to more nascent trading community as a result of the economic freedom obtained during the imperial period, favored by the *Derg*. ⁵⁰ For the socialist *Derg*, the *kawdha* were considered as progressive. Under its principle of equality and the dignity of labor, the *khawdha* enjoyed unreserved right in social equality. The *Derg*, which respected the equality *Khawdha* with *etenta* social groups, tried to improve the economic status of the *khawdha*. In collaboration with non-governmental organization, the *Derg* attempted to introduce improved weaving techniques with the aim of

improving the traditional system of production. Two individuals from each peasant associations were elected to receive initial training in order to extend to others.⁵¹ The training increased the income of the *Khawdha*. Above all the improvement achieved in the weaving sector made the work of craft workers to be respected by the non-craftworkers. Since then, a number of non-*kawdha* started to be engaged in craft work activities like weaving.⁵²

3.3. The Emergence of Local Elite

The days of the *Derg* were not good for missionaries and their activities. Thousands were imprisoned while they were at church service.⁵³ Some others were imprisoned or killed. Christian churches were closed or turned to stores.⁵⁴ Such atrocities were also manifested in Konso as well.⁵⁵ The suppressive measure of the *Derg* did not end with the imprisonment of its pastors or members but was also characterized by closing of churches. Many churches were confiscated by the state.⁵⁶ The harassment on Konso Christians and the chaos of the period has been discussed as follows:

*Churches were closed building materials for churches were seized for other purposes and Christians were beaten and imprisoned. No Sunday worship was allowed on the grounds that it would hinder the instruction of young people in Marxist-Leninist.*⁵⁷

In 1978, the military government ordered that all evangelical missionaries leave the country within twenty four hours.⁵⁸ The order excluded those foreigners who were engaged in non-evangelical activities like doctors, teachers, construction workers, engineers and agricultural workers.⁵⁹ The expulsion of foreign missionaries had great significant. When all foreigners were expelled from the country, evangelical work and the administration of different development agencies fell in to the hands of local missionaries.⁶⁰ The event opened great opportunity for local

elite to come to the decision making positions of missionary institutions. Thus, the suppressive measures of the *Derg* which excluded non-evangelical professionals and favored local intellectuals elevated the status of Konso elite to decision making positions.⁶¹ When the *Derg* assigned its officials, the only criteria were party loyalty. Ethnic or religious representation was not considered. Rather, the traditionalists and Christians were subject to persecution considering them as proponents of backward culture.⁶² The *Derg* also followed the same pattern of selection criteria to assign civil servants. Some Konso local elites who got the chance to be employed in the government institutions were assigned into different parts of the country.⁶³

However, the assignment of local officials with different ethnic background depicted by nationalist elements as an act of pushing aside the Konso intellectuals from the political sphere of their own district. One of my informants told me that when the *Derg* assigned local officials and civil servants it never included local elites. It used those who did not have Konso background. According to this man, the only Konso man who got the chance to work at government institution was a guard at Fasha.⁶⁴ Konso has been governed by different individuals before 1989, but none of them were Konso. One of my informants told me that officials like Zena Demke, Desta Gessese, Negash Lema, Yonas Roba, Masresha Mamo and Muldhata Gonfa ruled Konso one after another. Yohanis Hadhia, a Konso took the position of *Awraja* administrator in 1989.⁶⁵

The indigenous intellectuals, who were totally removed from the political activities of their respective district, began to look for non-governmental organizations like missionary activities. Since all these institutions have been centered at Bakawle, a large number of Konso intellectuals began to concentrate at the center of the district.⁶⁶ This event developed into the emergence of two belligerent blocks of civil servants; that is government assigned civil servants and officials

with diverse ethnic background and those who were assigned by foreign agencies with Konso background. In the second half of the 1970's and the first half of 1980's Bakawle became a battle ground between these two factions. As the days of the *Darg* on, an opportunity which facilitates the opposition of local intellectual's emerged in Konso; that is the intensity of drought and famine.⁶⁷

The *Derg* which has been known for its anti- religious policies began tolerating the activities of missionaries after the late 1980's. *Derg's* shift of policy which included giving recognition to missionaries was not because of its determination to recognize the religious right of the Christians. It aimed at diverting the capital and logistics efficiency of these institutions towards supporting the relief programs of the Konso region.⁶⁸ In those days, the non-governmental organizations and missionary agencies of Konso mobilized a huge amount of capital, which has been donated by western countries. In addition to this, the institutions were also supported by relatively skilled man power and better logistics.⁶⁹

At this crucial point, Konso intellectuals started conspiring against the authority of the *Derg* using their economic and financial strength. They portrayed themselves as champion for development and the prevalence of democracy. This has been clearly manifested in the idea of one of my informant. He told me that they struggled for the betterment of Konso. In order to win the support of the people, the intellectuals started accusing local government officials of corruption.⁷⁰

The attempt of the local intellectuals in exposing corrupted officials together with their provision of a huge amount of relief aid to the peasants increased their fame among the majority Konso. Moreover, instead of government's contribution in development the allegation related to the

corruption of relief food aid by government officials was overemphasized. This created anti government sentiment among the Konso people.⁷¹ Gradually, it transformed in to two opponent blocs, one which supports the idea of local elites and the other who sided the government. As the confrontation continued, it began to be accompanied by intense ethnic hutter who seriously affects the peace and stability of the region.⁷²

The *Derg* officials, who were angered by the activities of these intellectuals, had been waiting an opportunity to take revenge on them. On the other hand, ethnically motivated nationalist group also, waiting favorable condition to blame government officials whom they called outsiders. In 1984 an event which was considered as an immediate cause for the outbreak of a riot emerged. The event started as a result of confrontation between two individuals. Gradually the quarrel turned in to shooting. The *Derg* official shot and killed one of the nationalist intellectuals who worked as head officer of the missionary sponsored Konso Development Program.⁷³ The killing of Garamaw Urmale by one of the *Derg* officials, served as an immediate factor for the conflict between the government and nationalist groups.

Ato Geremew Urmale was a man who was known among the Konso public for his struggle against corrupt officials of the *Derg*. In addition to this, his lucrative post as head of Konso Development Program gave him recognition among the entire Konso people.⁷⁴ The assassination of this man by a non-Konso was not perceived as a conflict between two individuals. It was considered as an attack committed on the interests of the Konso people.⁷⁵ A large number of people gathered at Bakawle town requesting the hand over of the killer, instead of the trial of the criminal.⁷⁶ When the police officials refused to hand over the criminal, Konso started encircling the town and confrontation soon started. Some people died in this conflict. However, the number

of deaths is not clear. One of my informants told me that twenty five people died in this incident.⁷⁷ Others like Hallpike expressed the number of casualties as follows:

*The most extreme of this (killings) occurred in 1984 (at Meskerem 1976 E.C), when a Konso Derg official shot another Konso at Bakawle. The people demanded that the murderer be handed over to them and when his colleagues refused there was a riot. The official's telephoned for help to Arbaminch, and several lorry loads of soldiers were sent to quell the disturbance. About, fifty Konso were shot dead and many more wounded, and their families were required to pay for the bullets before they reclaim their bodies.*⁷⁸

After the confrontation, the *Derg* continued killing those who supported the idea of these intellectuals. For example, a peasant who has sympathy for the struggle of local elites was killed publicly in the village of Masoya.⁷⁹ The 1984 killings alienated the people as well as the major aid suppliers of the region from the *Derg*. The moment also thought the *Derg* that the district could not be controlled by the use of force and began thinking about the system used by the previous rulers that is regional autonomy or *kefil ras gez*.⁸⁰

3.4. Socio-Economic and Political Changes in the Last Days of the *Derg*

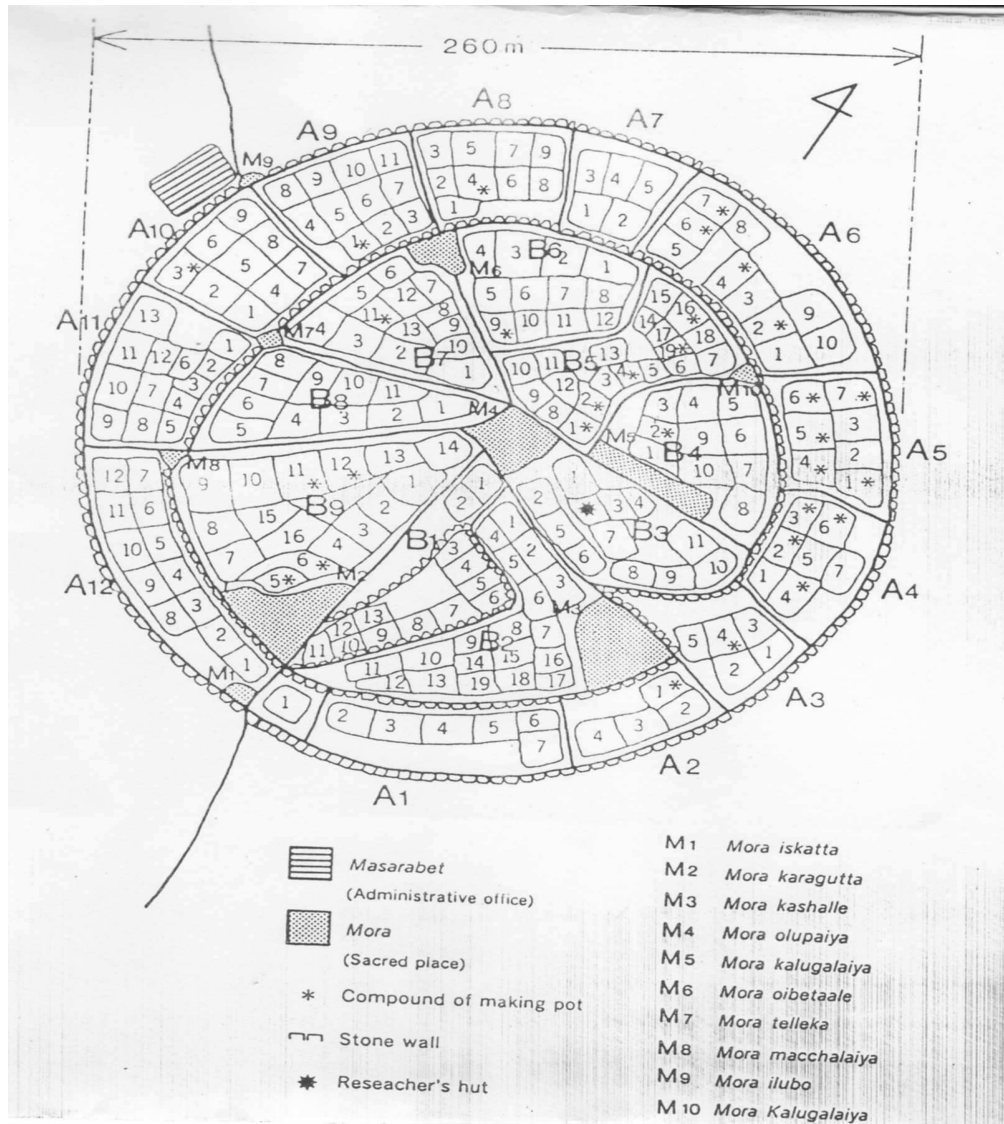
3.4.1. Expansion of Konso's Settlement Pattern and the Out come

After the 1970's Konso were no more restricted in the traditional home land areas as they had done before. The settlement area of Konso has been creeping to the surrounding lowland territories since then.⁸¹ The gradual expansion of Konso settlement area is clearly observed in the ever increasing size of the old villages and the radiating boundaries of the later peasant associations. Map 4 shows how a single village of Konso, that is the old Sogame village, expanded to various sub-villages which had strong relation with the original village.⁸² Similarly, map 5, shows the pattern of Konso's peasant associations. The delimitation of the boundaries of all Konso peasant association begins from the traditional home land of Konso or highland settlement areas. As it extended to the peripheries, the size of these peasant associations

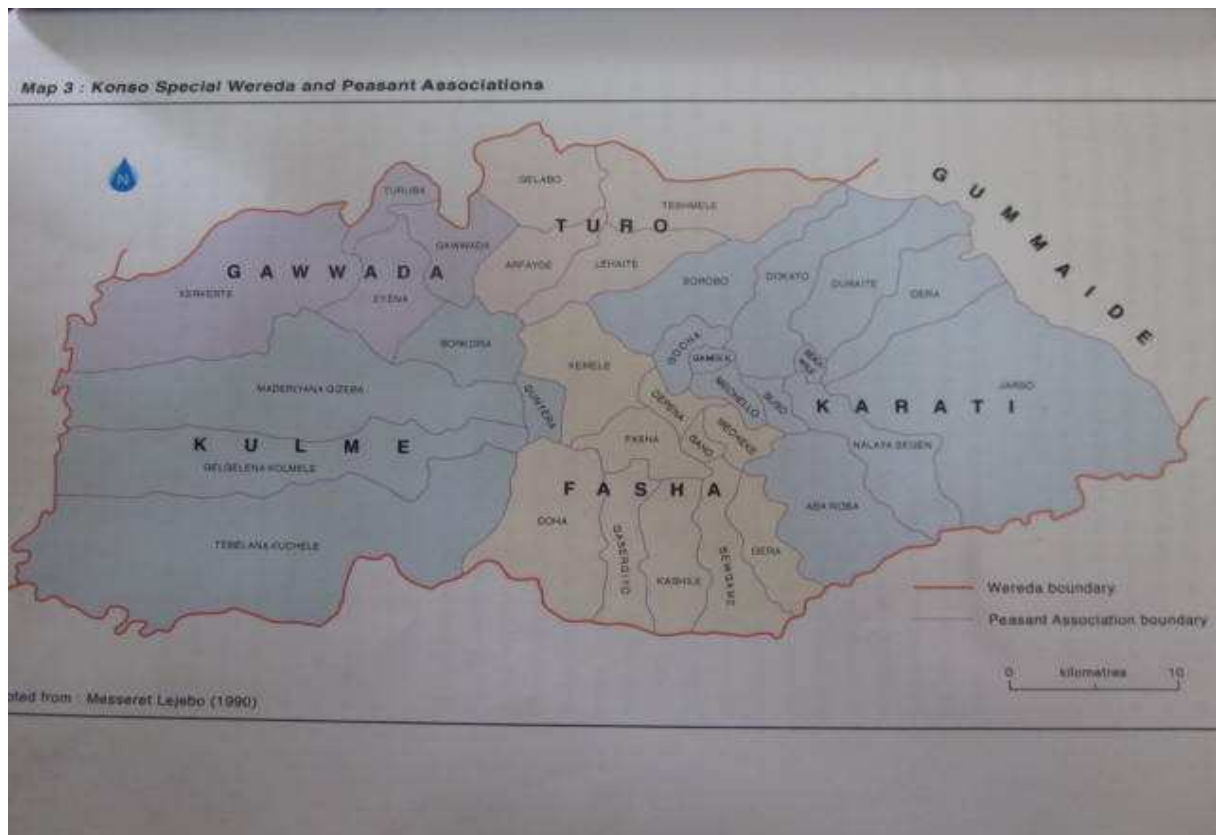
increases both in width and length. The radiation of the boundaries from the narrower central area to more wide scope at the periphery also indicates how much the farmland of each village has increased.⁸³ Furthermore, the expansion of Konso settlement area between 1960's to the early 1990's was supported by the satellite photograph as well.⁸⁴

Most of my informants told me that the expansion of settlement has direct relationship to the *Derg's* policy of public ownership of land. In older times, Konso solved its problem of land shortage through intensive agriculture. During the imperial period, since the land belongs to some one, the clearing of forests and moving to the lowlands was not an easy task. Meanwhile the *Derg's* policy which gives the responsibility of administering land to peasant associations seems solved the problem related to land ownership. If some body wanted to expand his farm land, he simply informed the village committee and started farming. This inturn accelerated the distruction of forests and the extinction of wild life.⁸⁵

Map 4. Village of Sogame. The double circles indicate that how a Konso village transformed in to extended settlement through time (Shinohora, 1993)



Map 5. Boundaries of Konso Peasant Associations.(Adapted from ,Watson, 1998)



The insufficiency of rainfall, failure of crop production and shortage of farmland were among the major problems that were discussed in the reports of local government officials, non-governmental organizations, and missionary aid agencies.⁸⁶ These reports reveal that, the living condition of Konso farmers had been deteriorating throughout the *Derg* period.⁸⁷ To minimize the problems related to land shortage and Konso's dependence on rain fed agriculture, resettlement has been among the solutions proposed to be implemented in Konso .⁸⁸ However, the resettlement plan of the government was not free from the critic of scholars.⁸⁹

Manyt scholars' accuse the *Derg* for its resettlement program. The vew of the scholars has been discussed by crummey as follows:

*The Dergs long term response to the famine was to re emphasize its commitment to a socialist development strategy and to resettle the famine victims in those parts of the country viewed as being less vulnerable to ecological stress... it launched a “campaign” by which it resettled well over half a million people.....*⁹⁰

However, resettlement had no relevance with development in Konso. In Konso, request for resettlement preceded the government sponsored resettlement programs. The governments attempt at resettling Konso farmers was based on the need of the people.⁹¹ Konso request for resettlement has been not only for farmland but also to get access to water and good pasture land for their ever increasing cattle. One of my informants told me that Konso’s cattle population was increasing since 1960’s due to the introduction of vaccination. He also told me that the increase in number was not supported by increase in the production of milk and butter. This could be due to the shortage of pasture.⁹² For example, more than 70 families from the villages of Borkora, Gungera, Madera and Gizaba resettled in Masoya in 1987. The resettlement of Konso in the pasture land of the pastoralists like Borana and Tsamai led to conflict in the second half of the 1980’s.⁹³ Some times the conflict cost life from both sides. The conflict on resources like land, pasture and water has been discussed briefly as follows:-

*The resettlement in the lowlands, also brought the Konso once more in to traditional patterns of conflict with other ethnic groups in the area (yanda). The conflict between the Konso and the pastoralists was said to be particularly serious since both groups have obtained automatic rifles. In July 1988, 10 Konso were killed, in one engagement. And in the way to area too, during armed clashes with local Tsamai pastoralists in March 1989... all Konso settlers returned to their home area.*⁹⁴

Some scholars like E. Watson argue that the majority of Konso were not relocated under the villagization program.⁹⁵ Information from government reports and oral sources reveal the presence of villagization program. Villagization was another manifestation of Konso settlement pattern since 1985. When villagization program was proposed by the *Der*, the aim

was to supply residents with infrastructure like road, clinic, school and water. Based on this idea, some thirteen new villages were established in Konso *woreda*.⁹⁶ However, villagization was not welcomed by the people. This was because the implementation of villagization program forced people to abandon their original homes, which had cultural and religious significance for the Konso.⁹⁷

The peace and stability of Konso during the period of Haile Selassie had been relatively better than that of its successors.⁹⁸ This is because, the establishment of different out post police stations in Konso. Together with their policing services, these police offices have their own contribution in calming down the periodic intra-ethnic conflict of the region. They also inform to the central government in order to control the problem before it developed in to more destructive wars. When the *Derg* comes to power, it dissolved all the police stations except the one at the center or Bakawle. The centralized system of the *Derg* together with the shortage of logistics created a great problem to provide effective police services to the district whose peace and stability was ever deteriorating during the last days of the *Derg*.⁹⁹ Since 1970's, the region Ethiopia and the Horn experienced a protracted wars.¹⁰⁰ As a result of these wars, different arms infiltrated to the Ethiopia region including Konso. The military government also played a negative role in dispersal of arms in the region.¹⁰¹ However, the arrival of automatic weapons was associated with the last days of the *Derg*. Automatic weapons like kalashinoves reached Konso either through the soldiers of the *Derg* or by cross-border smugglers from the neighboring countries like Kenya.¹⁰² The proliferation of automatic weapons, together with the increased need of land in the lowlands, seriously affected the peace and stability of Konso.¹⁰³

3.4.2. Kefil Ras Gez: A kind of *Derg*'s Regional Autonomy

The last days of the *Derg* in Konso were characterized by intense opposition to the *Derg*'s government.¹⁰⁴ The peasants who supported the *Derg* during the 1975 land proclamation turned their back on the system as a result of tax increases, religious persecution, and villagization programs.¹⁰⁵ Contrary to this, the collaboration of the people was much needed in those days in order to mobilize more soldiers and collect more money for the northern war.¹⁰⁶ The period also marked the climax of Konso's conflict over resources at border lands. The assassination of Ato Haileselassie Assfaw, the governor of the then Geleb and Hamer Bako *Awraja* (*sub-province*) in 1989 by Konso settlers, reveals how much the intra-ethnic conflict of those days was serious.¹⁰⁷ The incident happened in the lowlands of Woyito, where the government sponsored resettlement program was carried on. At this crucial point, it seems that the *Derg* understood the significance of local autonomy for the smooth relation of the central state and the regions.

The event coincided with the establishment of the Ethiopian peoples democratic republic in 1987.¹⁰⁸ The new republic was sub-divided into autonomous and semi-autonomous regions. Among these semi-autonomous regions, the administrative region of North Omo, the former Gamo Gofa province, was one. North Omo Administrative Region was also sub-divided into *Awraja* ending the old *woreda* structure. Thus, the new government structure elevated the status of Konso to *Awraja* after 1987.¹⁰⁹ In this new arrangement, efforts were also made to incorporate some local elites in administrative posts. For the first time, a Konso man, Ato Kumeda Kusia was assigned in the higher posts of Gamo Gofa Administrative Region at Arbaminch.¹¹⁰ At *Awraja* level, almost half of the administrative posts were held by local intellectuals.¹¹¹

The major challenge for the newly established governors was army recruitment.¹¹² Initially the army was recruited voluntarily. After the second half of the 1980's, forced conscription was introduced. This was because of the intensification of war in northern part of the country. However, as a result of the refusal of youngsters to appear in any kind of public places like market, the governors were not able to get sufficient number of recruits. In consequence forced conscription was replaced by a quota system. Accordingly, each village was expected to supply five to ten youngsters in every round of recruitment.¹¹³ In addition, the amount of tax paid which was 4 birr in 1975, reached 70 birr in 1990.¹¹⁴ In those days, the governors of Konso *Awraja* spent most of their time while discussing the shortage of rain, famine and reporting the number of people affected by the drought.¹¹⁵ Finally, after two years of administration, the *kefil ras gez* (semi-autonomous region) was replaced by the E.P.R.D.F. (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) in 1991.¹¹⁶

Conclusion

Some scholars argue that the Konso had been neglected in all aspects of life during the time under discussion. According to these scholars, the Konso were subject to political and economic marginalization under the government structure of both the emperor and the *Derg*. They also attempted to convince us as the Konso refused to collaborate with the central government. Konso was depicted as the people who totally ruled by the will power of an individual. For such people, every political and economic initiative was something imposed from above or practiced without the consent of the people. Furthermore, they publicly denied the development initiatives of these governments. However, the evidences at hand tell us the opposite. Konso experienced significant changes after the liberation.

The thesis deals with the history of Konso from 1941-199. In order to discuss briefly the socio-economic and political developments of Konso during the time under discussion, I attempted to classify all the major themes into three chapters. Topics like location, physical landscapes, settlement pattern and social organization of Konso are discussed in the introduction part. In addition; the origin of Konso is analyzed in relation to its neighbours. Accordingly, based on oral traditions, the presence of similar generation set and lineage or clan based social organization; the study concluded that Konso and its neighbours share the same place of origin; that is Liban. The main purpose of this chapter is aimed at extending one's perspective towards Konso's past in order to increase his/her understanding about the post-1941 developments.

The effect of Haile Selassie's administrative and socio-economic reforms are analyzed in relation with its effect on the real life of the ordinary Konso. The developments that evolved in administrative and socio-economic sectors have direct relevance with the reforms of Haile Selassie. The institutionalization of the *woreda* institution together with the out post police stations

had long lasting socio-economic significance in addition to the pacification of the post independent instabilities administrative reforms of the emperor. Haile Selassie's land reform and tolerance to local institutions had its own role in bringing economic development and stability in the region.

The alliance of local elite and craft workers with the central government and Christian traders respectively, are also discussed in this chapter to magnify the new development. Haile Selassie's tolerance to local institutions like *poqala* and his efficiency in creating harmony between traditionalist element and modern administration supported Konso's development in different ways. Firstly, it ensured peace and stability. In addition, it helped some Konso local elite to get exposure to modern administration. The alliance of craftworkers with the Christian traders was also another dynamism that had been manifested in the post liberation period. The collaboration *poqala* and *khawdha* with the central government and the Christian traders' respectively resulted observable change on their socio-economic status.

The second theme is related with the post 1991 development. *Derg's* radical economic and political reforms had some contributions in changing Konso's economic life. The *Derg* declared the 1974 land proclamation, which favours the Konso peasants. The *Derg* also played great role in enhancing the socio-economic status of the craftsmen. Throughout the period of the *Derg*, the Konso were ruled not only by those who are non-Konso, but also by the local elite as well. This is clearly manifested on the *Derg's* policy of *kefil ras gez* arrangement, which favours regional autonomy. Moreover, the effect of Konso's ecological degradation and population pressure on resource use, productivity and changing the settlement pattern of Konso are also discussed.

Generally, the research is an anti-thesis of the assumption of the previous scholars who accuse the governments of emperor Haile Selassie and the *Derg* for political and economic marginalizing Konso

from both the economic as well as political. As stated above, the period of Haile Selassie and the *Derg* were not only full of oppositions. It also witnessed a series of social collaborations and socio-economic dynamism. The year 1941-1991 had great significance in the history of the Konso. Economically, it marks the total absorption of Konso into a wider Ethiopian economy. Politically, it transformed Konso from a totally traditional system to a modern type of administration. Socially, it resulted in equality among different social groups of Konso. Thus, the policies of the emperor towards the Konso had great significance in facilitating the smooth transition to modernization.

End Notes

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Lists of Informants

NQ	Name of the informant	sex	age	Place and date of interview	Remarks
1	Asfaw Ayano (Ato)	M	42	Dokatu 9/9/2010	He has a good knowledge on the forests and animal extinction in konso
2	Argaw Yimam (Aba)	M	89	Segen 1/9/2010	He has a good memory about the cattle trade and pre1974 administation
3	Ayano Hanshe (Ato)	M	45	Dokatu 9/9/2010	Chair person of konso craft workers association or <i>Fuldo</i>
4	Barako Gibena (Ato)	M	50	Gamole 1/9/2010	He was a committee of one of the <i>Derg's</i> peasant Association
5	Demise Dayasa (Ato)	M	36	Dokatu 9/9/2010	He has a good knowledge about the effect of authomic weapon and animal extinction
6	Endale Muldhata (Ato)	M	70	Karat 8/9/2010	He has a good memories about the pr 1975 road pattern of Konso and the traditional rulers of konso
7	Engeda Manaye (Aba)	M	90	Karat 8/9/2010	He has a good knowledge about the expansion of Orthodox Christian in konso
8	Fiseha Gedene (Ato)	M	55	Tebana 7/9/2010	He has a good knowledge about the post 1975 peasant excitement and individuals who ruled konso
9	Gabino Songogo (Ato)	M	67	Karat 8/9/2010	He has a good knowledge about the dispersion of automatic weapons
10	Gahano Gudaya (Ato)	M	85	Segen 1/9/2010	He has a good knowledge about the problem with pastoralists and the roles of traditional rulers before 1975
11	Galabo Onage (Ato)	M	70	Jarso 1/9/2010	One among the early migrated to kenya
12	Galsho Gundudo (Ato)	M	72	Jarso 1/9/2010	He has a good memories about <i>poqalas</i> role in tribute collection and animal of konso before 1975
13	Gandala Biraya (Ato)	M	90	Segen 1/9/2010	He had a good knowledge about the per 1975 economic activities and the responsibilities of the traditional rulers
14	Garo Mila (Ato)	M	80	Segen 1/9/2010	He has a good memories about the per 1975 out post police service and coffee trade with Borana ,and Hamer
15	Garshana Gasito (Ato)	M	52	Karat 8/9/2010	He has good memories about the material support provided by missionaries.
16	Gasarto Galabo (Ato)	M	80	Gamole 1/9/2010	He had a good knowledge about the per 1974 land tenure system and the arrival of mangrove trees after 1974

17	Gebeyehu Gnirata (Ato)	M	95	Dara 7/9/2010	He was a known cotton cloth trader before 1970 's and has a good knowledge about Orthodox Christianity
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18	Gelsimo Dinote (Ato)	M	65	Dokatu 8/9/2010	He was one of an employees of the post 1975 nursery centers of the missionaries
19	Gemechu Genfe (Ato)	M	45	Karat 8/9/2010	Protestant preacher. He has sufficient knowledge about the contribution of Protestantism.
20	Guyalo Dalbole (Ato)	M	90	Duro 1/9/2010	He has a good knowledge about the pre 1975 will animals and the trade with Hamar and Borana.
21	Guyola Basiya (Ato)	M	65	Dara 8/9/2010	He has a good knowledge about the negative effect of communal land ownership of the <i>Derg</i> on forest resources of Konso
22	Guyo Jilo (Ato)	M	45	Karat 8/9/2010	He has a good knowledge about the effect of population increase on resource of konso
23	Haile Michal Gebale (Basha)	M	70	Karat 8/9/2010	Retired police officer. He has good knowledge about the per 1975 out post police services.
24	Hagaya Kuse (Woyzero)	F	55	Dokotu 9/9/2010	She has good memories about the cover labour during the peiond of hailleselassie.
25	Kagnew Mamo (Ato)	M	57	Karat 7/9/2010	Government employee who has good knowledge about the post 1987 political development in Konso.
26	Kadaye Gara (Ato)	M	67	Dokatu 9/9/2010	Resident of the area. He has good known about the resource of Konso
27	Kambiro Kussia	M	50	Durayte 7/9/2010	he was one of the members of the early ethno nationalists. He is a well verses man in both

	(Ato)				per and post 1975 konso history.
28	Kasaye Roba (Ato)	M	30	Dokatu 9/9/2010	He provide me with information about the extinction of animans and forest resources
29	Korbaydo Gando (Ato)	M	55	Karat 8/9/2010	He has a good knowledge about the missionaries afforestation programs
30	Kobaydo Shire (Ato)	M	78	Nalaya Segen 8/9/2010	He has a good knowledge about the destruction of animal and forest resources
31	Kuse Berisha (Ato)	M	40	Karat 8/9/2010	He has a good memories about the forests of Konso
32	Kuse Kure (Ato)	M	56	Dokatu 9/9/2010	He has memories about the forestr resources
33	Kuse Lemita (Ato)	M	80	Dokatu 9/9/2010	He has good memories about per and post 1975 trade activities
34	Kuse Samade (Ato)	M	70	Segen 1/9/2010	He has a good knowledge about the Geleb konso- Gamo cattle trade.
35	Lemita Sherto (Ato)	M	57	Dokatu 9/9/2010	He has a good knowledge about the significance of private ownership of land for resource wise use before 1975
36	Markos Olata (Ato)	M	65	Dokatu 9/9/2010	He has a remarkable about the general history of Konso.
37	Mathewos Gelebo (Ato)	M	50	Karat 9/9/2010	He was one of the post Konso administrations. He has a good knowledge about the ecological change in Konso.
38	Mengistu Kawada (Ato)	M	30	Dokatu 9/9/2010	He has good memories about the effect of the Derg's sliders on destruction of resources
39	Orkido Oshe (Ato)	M	35	Dokatu 9/9/2010	He has a good knowledge about the destruction of forest and animals after 1975
40	Oranto Guyola	M	55	Nalaya	He has a good knowlge about the pre 1975

	(Ato)			Segen 8/9/2010	economic activity of konso
41	Sagoya Bashiya (Ato)	M	78	Dokatu 9/9/2010	He has good memories about the pre 1975 measures taken on those who cut trees and the coming of mangrove trees after 1975
42	Soka Gignarta (Pastor)	M	60	Karat 8/9/2010	He has a good knowledge about the expansion and contribution of protestants.
43	Tefera Wolde (Veteran police)	M	73	Karat 8/9/2010	Retired police officer. He has a good knowledge about the conflict of konso with its neighbors
44	Tefra Gebaba (Ato)	M	40	Karat 8/9/2010	He has good knowledge about resettlement and education during the period of the <i>Derg</i>
45	Teshale Tadese (Ato)	M	48	Karat 8/9/2010	He has good knowledge about education during the period of the <i>Derg</i>
46	Yisako Shire (Ato)	M	45	Nalaya Segen 8/9/2010	He has a good knowledge about the main economic activity of konso

Glossary

Konso words

Affa xonso----- Konso language .

Apa Timba-----drum holder of the warrior generation set

Apa Saleta----- a man who announces any information to the public.

Etenta----- farmers

Hayyota----- elders

Hagaya ----- little rainy season.

Kadana----- big rainy season..

Kada-----an age grade which has the responsibility of make decision.

Kaffa-----clan

Kaweta----- Amhara.

Kanta----- ward

Khawdha---- craft workers.

Killota-----a feast which marks the transition from *farita* to *xhela*

Komayta-----in-hospitable lowland of northern Konso

Mugula-----a bracelet worn by clan *Poqala*.

Nama Dhawra-----a man who stops fighting

Oipata-----*terminalia brownii*

Olahita-----dried juniper tree erected by succeeding age grade

Orita-----evil spirit which makes people sick or die.

Paleta-----village.

Parka----- working party.

Pirprta-----juniper tree.

Poqala-----founder of the clan or divine chief.

Shelqata-----*moringa*.

Shorokita-----lineage priest.

Tuma----- bracelet worn by regional *Poqala*.

Olahita-----dried juniper tree erected by succeeding age grade.

Waka----- funeral statue made for heroes.

Kalacha(Xhalasha)—a head dress used in ceremonies.

Xhela-----warrior generation set.

Xhelta-----generation set

Amharic words

Abyot-----revolution.

Agelglots-----the post 1991 sub- districts of Konso.

Awraja-----sub-provinces of Ethiopia before 1991.

Balabat-----local land lord.

Chiqa-----the post- 1941 wards of Konso.

Dejazmach----- a higher warrior title of the Amhara .

Derg-----committee.

Fitawrari----- a warrior title , literally means “leader of the vanguard army. ”

Gabar-----tenant.

Grazmach-----a warrior title of the Amhara, literally means “left leader”.

Hibrete sebawinet----Ethiopian Socialism.

Kebele-----the post- 1974 name for villages.

Kefil Ras Gez-----semi-authonomous region

Kifle Hager-----province

Kola-----lowland

Lem-----cultivated land.

Lem Tef-----semi-cultivated land

Miketil Woreda-----the post- 1941 sub-district.

Maderia-----land granted to officials.

Netib Tabia-----out post police station.

Qangazmach-----an Amharic warrior title literally means “right leader”

Siso-----one third

Tef-----uncultivated land

Woreda----- district.

Woina Dega-----mid altitude

Zemecha-----campaign

