

The Present State of Nyangatom Social Organization and Its Relevance to Local Governance

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Abstract

The central goal of this study is to describe the Nyangatom social organization in the context of local governance. The study attempts to view the Nyangatom social organization as an African ideal of institution of governance. Methodologically, the study pursued qualitative approaches in terms of data collection and design of analysis. Ethical considerations and triangulation techniques were employed to make objective analysis, come up with sound findings and draw valid conclusions. The tools used to collect data were interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. In the course of data analysis the nature and function of the Nyangatom social organization is described in detail. Its key elements were identified and elaborated. It is also viewed within the local government trends of the Ethiopian state since the Nyangatom incorporation to the Abyssinian dominion in 1890s. Finally the study suggested possible ways through which the Nyangatom social organization could be integrated to the existing local governance structure.

Key Words: Social organization, Abyssinia, Generation set, Age set, Gerontocracy, Local Government

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CHAPTER ONE

1. Background

1.1.Introduction

Restructuring the state has become common phenomena of the state in the world. Contrary to the nation building approach that favors assimilation and homogeneity along the dominant culture there is a paradigm shift to accommodating diversity in the state system (Asnake, 2009). This process of state building can be associated with two factors. First, it is a response to the growing demands from national minorities in multinational states for autonomy and self-governance. Second, it is the difficulty of managing country's political, social, and economic activities from the center (Turtun, 2006 and Asnake, 2009).

In Ethiopia, however, decentralization had its own unique dimension. Here, it is a matter of responding to the question of self-determination and saving the country from overall disintegration after the down fall of the *Derg* government in the early years of the 1990s. In the political landscape of Ethiopia early 1990s was crucial in coming with very radical change in the state structure. The constitution of 1995 provides unconditional right to “*Nations, Nationalities and Peoples*” of Ethiopia to determine their matters by themselves. This constitutional provision is manifested in many dimensions including the right to self-determination up to secession, self-governance, and cultural, historical and language rights (FDRE, 1995). Here it has to be noted that the various ethnic groups in contemporary state of Ethiopia had their own indigenous political, social and economic institutions. The promulgation of the principles of self-determination with cultural, linguistic and administrative autonomy was expected as a situation that would at least accommodate indigenous social organizations in local government structures (Watson 2002).

The constitution of 1995 provides unconditional right to “*Nations, Nationalities and Peoples*” of Ethiopia to determine their matters by themselves. This constitutional provision is manifested in many dimensions at the local level including the right to self-determination up to secession, the right to self-governance, the right to preserve and promote cultural and historical heritages, and the right to use and develop language. This constitutional provision was viewed as a scenario of renaissance that would bring back indigenous social organizations to their “Golden Age” like the period before the incorporation to the Abyssinian empires (Watson 2002). The renaissance was anticipated because multi-ethnic federations like the post 1991 Ethiopia encouraged the incorporation of indigenous social organizations (cultural institutions) in the state system especially at the local level (Asnake 2009). Studies also affirmed that indigenous social organizations are efficient and effective when compared with the externally imposed “modern” centralized state institutions at the local level (Adams 1992). In developing countries, the newly imposed, so-called “modern”, western local administrative units have been seen as corrupt and inefficient (Watson 2002). However, the status of indigenous social organizations at the local level is almost like the pre-1991 period. At this level, administration is controlled and manipulated by the elite. Important decisions are made centrally at the national or regional state level. For outside viewers there seems to be decentralization legally and administratively, decisions are strictly centralized by the so called democratic centralism EPRDF’s inherent socialist philosophy¹. There is no efficient and effective system of mobilizing the community at the local for better livelihood. Inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic conflict became regular phenomena’s. Peaceful and sustainable management of conflict has become very far. The so called modern institutions of justice came up with pitiful result (Assefa 2006).

Therefore, this study was initially inspired on the assumption that the poor performance of the local structure of government is associated with the neglect to indigenous social organizations and the lack of attention to exploit the potential advantage of these systems at the grass root level. In light of this, this study will deal with the relevance of indigenous social organizations in the context of the existing contemporary structures of local governance.

¹ EPRDF (Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front) is the ruling party of Ethiopia since 1991 and its decisions are extremely centralized and uniformly implemented in all tiers of government.

1.2.Statement of the problem

The Nyangatom are among the indigenous agro-pastoralist groups in lower Omo Valley residing between Kibish and Omo rivers along the border area of Kenya, Ethiopia and South Sudan. Anthropologists mentioned that the Nyangatom had migrated north east from Uganda in the middle of 18thc. Linguistically, the Nyangatom language belongs to Nilio-Sharan linguistic family sharing genetic affiliation with the Karamoja cluster (Tornay, 1979 and Matsuda, 1994). Administratively they have their own district named Nyangatom *Woreda* (District) with its administrative center at Kangatin. The district is under South Omo Zonal Administration in the Regional of State of Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples and it has 20 sub-districts (*Kebles*).

The Nyangatom have attracted anthropologists since 1970s. Particularly they were repeatedly mentioned under the theme of armed conflict and warfare which characterized the region in the last decades of 20th c. They were portrayed as warriors whose life strongly linked to fighting with neighboring groups. It was repeatedly stated that the Nyangatom were at war mainly with Mursi Dassanetch and Sometimes with Hamar, Kara and Turkana. Especially after 1980s the Nyangatom armed with automatic rifles which they had easily obtained from South Sudan as a result the civil war there and this intensified the situation (Tornay 1979, and Turton, 1994, Fuki and Markakais, 1994 and Mburu, 2001).

Though the discourse with regard to the Nyangatom was largely dominated by warfare and conflict other themes were also addressed. The work of Torny that was produced in 1981 could be mentioned here “*The Nyangatom: an outline of their ecology and social organization*”. Colson, J (1996) also mentioned their social organization in his ethnological dictionary “*The People of Africa*”. Elias (2016), on the other hand described Masculinity, Violence and Development Intervention PhD dissertation. However, we don’t have recent intellectual works describing the contemporary status their indigenous social organization and scholarly re-counting in the framework of African indigenous ideal of governance and local governance perspective. Yet an attempt is not made to analytically look in to the potential areas where the Nyangatom social organizations may contribute in mapping solutions for the multifaceted problems that these people are facing from governance perspective.

In addition, it is obvious that like many of indigenous communities in south lower Omo valley the Nyangatom social and cultural values are being eroded gradually which may lead to lose of core aspects of ethnic identity. This is mainly because of the continuous state interventions, undermining of local autonomy and globalization. This is further aggravated by Mega development projects that affects their ecology and brought large number of people to the region with urban way of life.

When we see the existing local government structure, the principles of self-determination and which are the integral parts of FDRE Constitution of 1995 are interpreted and implemented according to the Western model representative elite democracy. In this case indigenous groups like the Nyangatom will be forced to use elites from outside to fill the state bureaucracy because it is difficult enough educated personals from among their people. As a result the day to day development and other public activities of the people is managed by people who are alien to their culture. Furthermore, the attention given to indigenous social organization is very poor. Consideration to the principle of legal pluralism and alternatively using indigenous institutions for governance and justice administration is minimal not supported by legal frame work. Therefore, the situation in Nyangatom requires empirical description about the contemporary status of their social organization and point out how it could be relevant to the existing local governance structure.

1.3. Questions of the study

- What are the basic features and characteristics indigenous social organizations of the Nyangatom?
- Which aspects of the socio-political values are compatible to local governance?
- Is there any way that it can be integrated to the existing local governance system?

1.4. Objectives of the Study

General Objective

The main goal of this study is to systematically analyze the relevance of indigenous social organizations to local governance among the Nyangatom of southwestern Ethiopia.

Specific Objectives

- To describe the basic features and characteristics of indigenous social organizations of the people under study;
- To indicate how the Nyangatom indigenous social organizations are relevant to local governance.
- To pinpoint the aspects of the values which are compatible to local governance

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study is significant in terms of local governance with better understanding of the social and cultural context of the governed. It also promotes the continuity of ethnic identity, social cohesion and peaceful co-existence of the Nyangatom through integrating their indigenous social organization to local governance. Furthermore the study will be an insight for other researchers who have an interest to address similar issues. Besides, it will help policy makers with regard to approaches of local government and development agents who work with the local community.

1.6. Scope of the Study

Because of the nature of the title and other constraints, this study is limited thematically and geographically. Geographically, it is confined to the Nyangatom District of South Omo Zone, in South Western Ethiopia. Thematically, it is concerned with the social organization of the Nyangatom and its relevance to local governance.

1.7. Limitations of the Study

This study has two major limitations. The first one is the inability of the researchers to observe cultural activities, rituals, ceremonies and dispute settlements. In order to observe such issues researchers are expected to stay in the field for a relatively longer period of time. But the research policy of the university does not allow staying in the field for more than 15 days. The other limitation is the less coverage of the gender aspect of the social organization.

Chapter Two

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. Defining Social Organizations, Governance and Local Governance

There appears to be a dilemma in the conceptual explanation of social science terms. Scholars and experts confront this dilemma by defining and analyzing concepts within their interest and scope. Here also an attempt is made to conceptualize social organization and local governance within the scope and attention of this study.

Social Organization refers to the pattern of individual and group relations. The term "organization" signifies technical arrangement of parts in a whole, and the term "social", indicates the fact that individual and group relations are the outcomes of social processes (Broom and Slezinky, 1973). Thus, for the purpose this study social organization could be defined as the way by which different parts (individuals and groups) of a certain society are organized for the survival and common good of the society.

Many experts agree that, as concept governance comprises a set of institutions, mechanisms and processes through which people can articulate their interest and needs, mediate their differences, exercise their rights, fulfill their duties and work together for common wellbeing. It is concerning how power is exercised, and how important decisions are made in a given society. It is also about both a set of institutions and performance of these institutions in achieving the social, political and economic goals of the society they serve (Lutz and Linder 2004).

Local governance on the other hand refers to an institution, which deals with matters concerning the people living in the particular locality (Sikander, 2015). It represents the interests of the locality leading to the broader concept of welfare and happiness of its people. According to the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, as cited in Sikander, local government may be loosely defined as a public organization authorized to decide and administer a limited range of public policies within a relatively small territory which is a sub-division of a regional or national government (2015). The United Nations Development Program defines local governance as a set of institutions, mechanisms and processes, through which citizens and their groups can articulate their interests and needs, mediate their differences and exercise their rights and obligations at the

local level. The major concern of local governance is strengthening of grass root democracy and empowering citizens, communities and their organizations.

In the context of this study by indigenous social organization we mean organization rooted in the history, values, norms and customs of indigenous people² (ECA, 2007). They are systems that properly fit the cultural context of the people concerned. They are systems and institutions that existed before the introduction of alien systems and might have continued to exist in one or another way till today. Since such organizations are established upon the values, norms, traditions and beliefs of the people concerned they are well understood and respected by the people concerned, interpreted contextually and flexibly and are strongly associated to identity.

2.2.The Debate on the Relevance of African Social Organizations to Governance

There is no consensus among the African ruling elites and social engineers with regard to the relevance of indigenous social organizations to governance as well as to the contemporary socio-political and economic affairs of the continent. Literatures on this issue show divergent view and skepticism on the question of utilization of indigenous social organizations. There are many factors that have contributed for this.

One of these is the assumptions that the role and behavior of the major actors of indigenous forms of governance (elders, chiefs, kings etc.) have been largely transformed by policies and administrative changes of both the colonial and post-colonial states. Given the dynamic nature of any social phenomena, the changes that took place in the roles of indigenous leaders with the political changes they have passed through is not surprising. Despite, these institutions have continued to be relevant to their respective societies till today (Miller, 1968, Kuper, 1970, Beinart, 1985 and Semahgn, 2016).

The failure of both African and Non-African scholars to differentiate between the various forms of indigenous social organizations is another factor. These systems vary in terms of their hierarchy, even within the same geographical and historical context. However, they were understood as homogenous regardless their variations. Another very important factor is the

² According Martinez Cobo report to the UN Sub-Commission defined indigenous people as “Communities, peoples and nations having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies ... consider themselves distinct from other sector of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems.”

outcome of the ethnographic nature of the study of indigenous social organization. Therefore, the findings of the studies also vary widely. Carefully designed comparative research is likely to explain the phenomenon deeply and avoid the divergence of views resulting from differences in methodological approaches. Analytical problems have also contributed to the highly skeptical view concerning the relevance of African social organizations. Much of the skepticism emanates from the perspective that the African systems served both the colonial and post-colonial states, by betraying their responsibility to their communities. This charge against them is undeniable in many cases. However, what most scholars and researchers failed to notice is, the colonial and post-colonial states and their adoption of Western style of governance are at the center of the problem. In most cases the African social organizations were studied and analyzed outside the ethnographic and historical context of the state. In addition, the anti-African tradition proponents failed to provide convincing arguments to explain why the large segment of African population continued to adhere to their social organizations and respected their leaders more than “modern” state authorities. On the other hand there are evidences indicating that indigenous social organizations were instruments of resistance to colonial and post-colonial state policies (Miller, 1968, Kuper, 1970, Beinart, 1985 and Semahgn, 2016).

2.3.The Features of African Indigenous Social Organizations

Because of the legacy of colonialism and westernized education systems together with the impact of globalization, there has never been much attention to the development and utilization indigenous socio-political institutions in Africa. The primary institutions of governance in Africa are those formal structures which are state sponsored institutions inherited from the colonial legacy or imported from the west. On the other hand, indigenous institutions are institutions that involve pre-colonial form of governance with different forms of cultural authority systems. Though many of these institutions have been destroyed or incorporated to the imported system of governance, in most cases they remained significantly influential among African society. Still today cultural leaders or chiefs in particular have tremendous power in many parts of Africa, whether they have been officially recognized or not.

In many African societies, different cultural institutions still play significant role. For instance, “in many pre-colonial African societies, community wide gatherings known variously as *pitso* (Lesotho), *kgotla* (Botswana), *shir* (Somalia) and many other names, offered an opportunity for a

wider array of community members to voice their opinions on community affairs and participate in consensus based decision making (Longan 2008). According to a report from the Human Sciences Research Council and Pennsylvania State University on African institutions of governance, in the southern part of Ethiopia, “the Borena and the Gujji have administered themselves according to the age based organization known as the *Gadda*. Similar system had also been practiced in a similar fashion among the Gedeo and Sidama communities. These institutions play important role in settling inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic conflicts and disputes” (Semahagn, 2016).

In western Ethiopia also the Anuak and the Nuer mediated disputes and conflicts through the office of the chiefs and elders. In particular the Nuer, prevent blood revenge between different groups by designating an individual the “leopard skin chief”. This individual provides sanctuary to a murderer and attempts to negotiate compensation with the victim’s lineage. Similarly the Anuak resolve conflicts through the mediation of elders. The Gurages of central Ethiopia also use traditional conflict resolution mechanisms referred as *Yejoka* and *Gordanna* (Shengo Council), which have been in existence for centuries are still widely used by the local population (Semahagn, 2016).

In Somali, cultural institutions play significant role in the absence of a functioning government in the country. This is especially true in self-autonomous regions of Somaliland and Punt-land. In Somaliland, the first category of indigenous institutions consists of the *sultans*, who are senior leaders drawn from major clans. Under them are Boqar and Garaad representing the major clans and are also the clans’ highest authorities. These institutions are custodians of the customary law known as *xeer* (Mengisteab, 2009)

Despite the establishment of formal institutions in Africa, such indigenous social organizations remain important. Studies reveal that African indigenous institutions still play vital role in the lives of many Africans, particularly as mediators of violent conflicts. In some cases they further involve in ensuring equitable access to land in rural areas and for moderating inequality. Since cultural leaders like chiefs and clan heads live in rural areas within the community, they better represent the interest of their people. They also represent the interest of the community better than the leaders of formal institutions. In fact the formal institutions of the modern state cannot be effective if they contradict to the cultural principles of the indigenous institutions which

govern the lives of the majority of Africans who live in rural areas. Particularly, because of the fact that modern states of Africa cannot guarantee access to justice for rural population the role of indigenous institutions is indispensable (Semahagn, 2016 and Firew, 2017).

African indigenous institutions also have their own democratic features, in fact with some limitations. Researches indicated that pre-colonial African institutions had many liberties co-existed, including liberty of religion, liberty of association, freedom of expression, the right to participate in affairs of the state, and freedom of movement (Semahagn, 2016) . All over Africa, the people essentially form a community-based culture characterized by social harmony, solidarity and community values. Here it could be argued that there are elements of democracy in these cultural practices expressed in social association such as the council of elders, mutual aid organizations, and procedures dealing with conflicts and crime (Pausewang, 2002). Though the African indigenous institutions are primarily concerned with communal welfare, this does not mean that individual preferences are disregarded. Rather, as Menkiti argues, the African view of society asserts an ontological independence to human society, and moves instead from society to individuals, the western view moves instead from individuals to society. For the African, it is the respect for life and community that is a priority. The individual is seen within the community (1984).

The other fundamental feature of African indigenous institutions is its decentralized participatory decision-making system, which allows the empowerment of local communities to control local decisions and matters of their self-governance. The relatively centralized chieftaincy systems are generally more decentralized than the often autocratic post-colonial state. African indigenous institutions also have village councils where direct democracy is exercised. In many African communities, there are periodic public meetings that deliberate on the major social and economic issues of the village (Mengisteab, 2009). All such democratic exercises are compatible with the modern democratic conception

Resolving conflict through negotiations is another important feature of African indigenous institutions. These institutions involve in communal justice, which is an integral part of the principles of fundamental justice. Negotiated political solution work in the institutions to resolve ethnic conflicts, but it can also be applied to mitigate conflicts among state political parties. The

consensus based decision making allows respect for dissent, protects minority interests, resolve conflicts and promotes communication between political parties (Semahagn, 2016).

2.4.Experiences of Accommodating Indigenous Social Organizations in Africa

It is true that African constitutional system and governance has faced dilemma between the indigenous and modern institutions. Though a return all in all to indigenous institutions is impossible, African culture history and tradition still plays significant role in the lives of Africans in the 21st century. Although African countries have adopted western liberal governance systems, indigenous institutions remained deep-rooted. Because of the significance of these institutions in Africa, political elites, academics, activists, and chiefs themselves debate the proper position of indigenous social organizations with modern political systems becomes particularly acute at the local level, where indigenous socio-political values exert the most influence on the daily lives of the people, and where the contest with government authorities for resources and responsibilities is most intense.

In light of the contentions between the two systems, there is a need to rethink the role of African traditional institutions within the current democratic setup. To achieve the goal of accommodating the two systems, African governance need to adopt principles of legal pluralism whereby the formal and informal systems work together to achieve transitional democracy. Rather than forcing western liberal values on unwilling population, the appropriate procedure would install the western constitutional system with the context indigenous African socio-political values (Semahagn, 2016).

The primary step needed to reconcile the two systems is to realize the fact that, although there is tension between the two systems, they are not fundamentally incompatible. Rather than being alien to liberal values, as has been indicated earlier, African indigenous institutions have their own features that could serve as the foundation to build a democratic system of governance. African socio-political values that largely work on principles of consensus and reconciliation could serve as the foundation to build a democratic transition in Africa. Particularly, through a system of decentralization, there are opportunities for creating conducive environments to expand the role of African indigenous institutions at the local level.

In light of this, different African countries have adopted diverse forms of accommodating indigenous social systems (through legal pluralism) in the context of the existing formal structure of government.

2.4.1. Advisory Role Approach

This approach, adopted in countries such as Ghana and Uganda, incorporated indigenous authorities into the governance structure with a largely advisory role. In addition to recognizing the institution of the chieftaincy, the Ghanaian Constitution established a National House of Chiefs that has wide responsibilities in determining the role of traditional chiefs, the interpretation and codification of customary law, the elimination of customs and usages that are outmoded and socially harmful, and additional roles related to regulating traditional institutions. In Uganda, “subject to the provisions of the constitution, the institution of traditional leader may exist in any area of Uganda in accordance with the culture, customs and traditions or wishes and aspirations of the people to whom it applies.” In particular, the restoration of the Buganda Kingdom in 1993 significantly resurrected the role of traditional institutions in Uganda. In the last two decades, “with a king, a parliament that included clan elders, a government, an administrative structure, buildings, representatives deep in the country and abroad the Buganda kingdom has by and large acquired or recovered most of the political institutions which characterize states” Though such an approach has helped these countries to maintain traditional values, the role of traditional councils has been limited to advisory rather than having vital decision-making power. Thus, there has to be more political commitment to expand the horizon of legal pluralism whereby traditional institutions play a significant role in discharging their responsibilities (Ubink, 2008 and Semahagn, 2016).

2.4.2. Integrative Approach

This approach, initiated by post-apartheid South Africa, integrates traditional authorities into regional and local governance to avert conflicts between the new state and traditional authorities. The recognition of traditional leadership and indigenous law was enshrined in the 1996 South African Constitution. The rights of “Cultural, religious and linguistic communities” are enshrined in Article 31 of the South African Constitution. There are two distinct rights recognized by this section. The first is the right of communities to actively enjoy, practice, and use their culture, religion, or language. The second is the right to “form, join and maintain

cultural, religious and linguistic associations and other organs of civil society.” The Constitution further deals with the recognition of traditional leaders and outlines their role, but, most importantly, it allocates to them the power to deal with matters pertaining to African customary law and the communities that observe this law.

The various aspects of the traditional institutions in the Republic of South Africa are recognized in many ways. This recognition would among other things entail the right to a salary paid by the government, to adjudicate certain disputes according to customary law and to representation at various levels of government. In addition to this, provision is made for the establishment of a House of Traditional Leaders in each province which has traditional leaders and the establishment of a Council of Traditional Leaders at the national level. Each House of Traditional Leaders is empowered to advise its provincial legislature on matters relating to indigenous law, tradition and custom, while the Council of Traditional Leaders is empowered to advise the national government on the same matters.

2.4.3. Decision Making Role Approach

This approach that has been undertaken by countries such as Botswana and Somaliland is by far more successful than the previous two approaches. In these countries, traditional institutions have been granted wider decision-making powers. For example, in Botswana, the traditional chieftainship has been retained after independence, and the traditional structures were given recognition and authority. By recognizing the traditional chieftainship, the government realized that the people in rural areas continue to have respect for and faith in the indigenous social organizations. In addition to creating a House of Chiefs, Botswana utilizes traditional leaders in various capacities, including in its judiciary. The chief has a number of powers such as promoting the welfare of the members of his tribe, determining questions of tribal membership, arranging tribal ceremonies, and preventing the commission of offences within his tribal territory. The House of Chiefs also serves as a forum for the indigenous leaders to make their contribution on matters of interest to them or their tribes (Ubink, 2008 and Semahagn, 2016).

Customary courts in Botswana play a significant role in rendering justice to the community. One of the most significant roles of traditional leaders in Botswana is in imparting justice on

customary lines through the customary courts. The customary courts handle approximately 80% of criminal cases and 90% of civil cases in the country and these courts are popular in the rural areas, as these are easily accessible, fast and comprehensible to the ordinary people (Ubink, 2008 and Semahagn, 2016).

Somaliland's approach attempts to fuse the indigenous community-based consensual system of decision making with the modern institutions of democracy. In Somaliland, traditional institutions share power with the formal government structure. With respect to the role of traditional leaders in legislative organs, the country's House of Elders (the *Guurti*), a representative body of all of Somaliland's clans, reviews the laws passed by the House of Representatives . . . and acts as a constraint on the powers of the executive. In addition to this, the *Guurti* has other powers, including enacting laws concerning religion, culture, and peace; assisting and advising the government; and enquiring into the performance of the government's duties. The role of traditional leaders, the modern judicial system and the traditional court of clan elders also complement each other. Additionally, the governance structure at the center is replicated at the regional level, where representatives selected through multi-party municipal elections operate in tandem with traditional regional councils. For over a decade now, Somaliland has been an island of relative peace in the volatile Horn of Africa region due to such a comprehensive approach used to integrate traditional systems into the formal constitutional structures (Ubink, 2008 and Semahagn, 2016).

In light of the significance of indigenous social organizations in Africa, attempts undertaken by some countries to accommodate indigenous institutions are commendable. However, many other countries in Africa have failed not only to recognize the role of these organizations, but also may ultimately fail to develop vibrant transitional institutions that may bring about a viable transition to democracy in Africa. More political commitment, research, and reform are needed to transform the role of African indigenous institutions in the twenty-first century. Such an integrated approach is essential to transforming African democracy, which has been slow to develop because of the unmerited loyalty to Western institutional models without providing proper attention to indigenous local institutions (Ubink, 2008 and Semahagn, 2016).

Chapter Three

3. Methodology and Description of the Study Area

3.1. Methodology and Design of the Study

At the beginning of the field work the purpose of conducting the study was communicated to Nyangatom district administration and officials of the culture, tourism and communication. Contact was first made with the office of district administration and the letter from the University was submitted to them. They in turn wrote a support letter to the district office of culture, tourism and public communication. Fortunately, we found a graduate from the department of Social Anthropology of Arba Minch University who is junior expert of culture and tourism in the office. The researchers introduced themselves to the office and briefly explained the purpose their coming. Then consensus was reached on the work plan, sites of observation identified, key informants selected and the field work begun with location guides and translators assigned by the office. Preliminary field work with site observation was started on January 13, 2017 in Lopokori village of Kibish settlement. In this way the researchers visited Nyangatom villages three times for seven days for each visit.

The study was designed to employ ethnographic techniques including the procedures of selecting of participants of the study, tools of data gathering, ethical considerations and validation plan. The research dealt with the qualitative aspect of the theme under study. Therefore, researchers employed qualitative approaches in the analysis of primary and secondary data.

3.1.1. Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary data were used to generate information for the study. Primary data was collected from the study area through interview, focus group discussion and to some extent observation. Secondary data was gathered from published articles, books other relevant sources. Reports of government bodies, constitutions and proclamations were also consulted properly.

3.1.2. Selection of Participants of the Study

Participants of the study were selected purposively. Informants were selected strategically in order that their comprehensive knowledge on the research questions provides optimal insight of

the theme of under study. While selecting purposefully, the participant's life experience, knowledge, and position in the society, age, and other variables assumed to contribute to the quality of the study were considered. At the initial stage key informants were identified with experts of culture, tourism and communication office and later snowball sampling technique was employed to find other participants. In this way 15 key informants were interviewed among which only three of them were woman and two focus group discussions were conducted. The participants of the FGD were from the community, from district administration office and culture and tourism office.

3.1.3. Instruments of Data Collection

a) Document Analysis

At the beginning, the researchers focused on searching for books, articles, thesis and other materials in order to conceptualize theoretical part of the study. In the second phase an attempt was made to make reading and paraphrasing on issues like African social organizations and local governance. Then an effort was made to develop the conceptual frame work of the study based on the information obtained from the materials.

b) Interview

The kind of interview conducted was the unstructured one. This has given the researchers freedom to raise questions depending of the context of the situation and background of the informants. Interviews were facilitated in a setting that the informants feel free and assume that they are in the natural course of interaction. The depth of the interview was kept as far as the informant's capacity and to the level of data saturation. Most the informants were elders in villages who have the actual experience of the theme. The information produced from interview was used to construct the main body of the study.

c) Focus Group Discussion

Three Focus Group Discussions were organized during the field work. Participants of the focus group discussion were categorized on the basis of their age, experience and generation set. The information generated from the focus group discussion was also used to construct the main body of the research under result and discussion.

d) Observation

Observation is another important source of information. Initially it was planned to observe the day to day activities of the people under study in natural setting. Furthermore, the plan was to observe rituals, ceremonies, public discussions, and dispute settlements. However, the observation that was conducted was limited and it was not according to the plan. This was mainly because of constraints from research policy of the University. The policy does not allow researchers to stay in the field for more than two weeks in the field and it is impossible to make successful observation with this time. It requires relatively longer time. The bureaucratic financial and logistics system of the university is also not compatible to attend rituals and ceremonies in the field. Therefore, the gap in observation was covered by contacting wise and experienced people from the community and consulting relevant literatures.

3.1.4. Ethical considerations

It is true that research in the field of the social science disciplines is vulnerable subjectivity. The degree of the problem would be high when the subject is not widely addressed by researches or lacks enough literatures. With regard to this study, however, the researchers tried to avoid the problem by being as objective as possible. The researchers tried to place themselves in the position the people understudy while discussing the information's gathered according to the principle of "subjective understanding". The position of the researchers is also presented in a sound manner where it is necessary. Furthermore, ethical requirements stated under research policy of the university were also observed properly.

3.2. Description of the Study Area

3.2.1. Location

As a tribe Nyangatom reside in South Omo Administrative Zone in Nyangatom District of Ethiopia and partly in the Eastern Equatoria Province of South Sudan (Muburu, 2001:150). Their settlement is roughly located in the South Western corner of Ethiopia along the borders of Kenya and South Sudan. Their natural boundary is roughly between the lower bank of Omo and Kibish Rivers. The arbitrarily defined controversial territory of the tri-junction point connecting Kenya, South Sudan and Ethiopia, the Illemi Triangle, is also partly the Nyangatom territory. The Nyangatom District of Ethiopia, which is also home for two other tribes named Khoegu and

Murule, is an area that occupies 2652 km square and is located at 4.850 – 5.670 N and 35.750 – 36.230 E. As an administrative district in Ethiopia, Nyangatom *Woreda* shares boundaries with Bench Maji Zone and Salamago District in the North, Dassenech and Hamar Districts in the South and East respectively and Kenya and South Sudan in the West. Its administrative center, Gangaten, which lies on the western bank of Omo River, is 848 Km away from Addis Ababa in Southwestern direction (Asmlash 2015 and Gebre 2016).

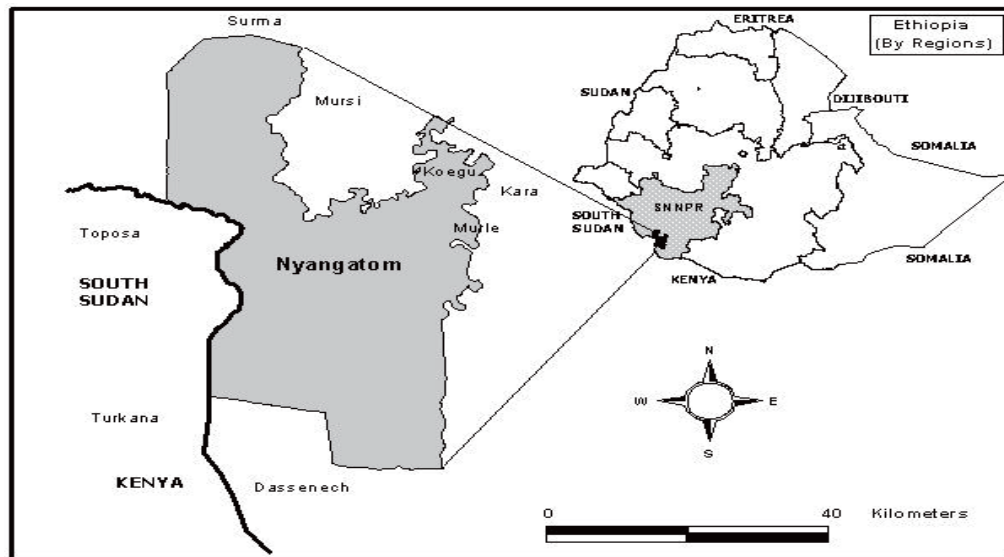


Fig. 1: Map of the Study area

3.2.2. Physical Setting and Rain Fall

In terms of physical setting the area is characterized by very vast plain land which is completely free from industrial pollution and effects of the civilized world until recent development interventions and introduction of mega sugar production projects by the Ethiopian government. Its unique physical and human features are aridity, low relief, and nomadic pastoralism. Because of the harsh climate and absence of running water except along the Omo and Kibish Rivers life in the area has always been at the stress of survival (Tornay, 1981).

Agro ecologically the district is characterized by low altitude climate (*kola* agro ecology) with an altitude that ranges between 300 - 450m above sea level. The mean annual temperature ranges between 33 and 42 degree c. Its rainfall pattern is bimodal type with two rainy seasons (*Belg* from March to May and *Meher* from August to October). The rainfall is erratic with the mean annual ranging between 350 – 500mm (Asmlash, 2015).

3.2.3. Climate and Vegetation

The lower Omo which lies with Lake Turkana in the depression of the East African Rift Valley represents a complex ecosystem characterized by low latitude on average 400 meters below sea level. The average temperature is high and with relatively low annual rain fall (350-500mm/annum) having very short wet season. Hydrographically, Omo is the only permanent river and with few seasonal rivers like the Kibish. In terms vegetation, the bank Omo is enclosed with riverine forest and the rest of the area is covered with dry forest with different trees and creepers, savannas with or without acacia, and thick thorny bushes, and almost barren areas not covered with any vegetation (Asmlash, 2015).

3.2.4. Settlement Pattern and Livelihood

The Nyangatom had two general two settlement patterns. These are the Omo area or *Nanam* and the Kibish area or *Nakua*. In the Omo area the livelihood is mainly cultivation agriculture: dry farming during the wet season, and flood cultivation on the land flooded by the river during the dry seasons. However, the flood cultivation is seriously threatened after the construction of a giant dam and an associated hydro-power plant (Gibe III) on the upper Omo River (Claudia, 2012). During the field work on June 2017 the *Nanam* communities had already lost the flood agriculture for two consecutive years and depend on food aid from the Ethiopian government. The riverine forest of the Omo is not suitable for pastoralism because of the prevalence of *tse tse* fly. Therefore, the Omo *Nanam* is a place of refuge for pastoralists who have lost their livestock due to different factors and who are forced to survive on the resources of the river and its forest (fishing, gathering and flood farming).

On the other hand the Kibish area (*Nakua*) which is largely plain land with few hills like Kuraze, Tebes and Trigor is the best place for pastoral life. In fact, the Nyangatom in this area also practice small scale rain based farming. During dry seasons the communities of this area leave their semi-permanent settlement of Kibish area with their women and elders and move deep in to the Illemi Triangle in search for pasture.

According to a study report by Asmlash from Jinka Agricultural Research Center (2015) animal resource in Nyangatom district is estimated about 415,292 cattle, 132,604 goats, 109,217 sheep, 11,218 donkeys and 5,474 chickens. Bee keeping and fishery are also practiced in the district.

The second most important source of livelihood is opportunistic crop production. Sorghum, maize and haricot bean are the major crops produced.

3.2.5. Demographic Characteristics

According to the data from the Finance and Economic Development Office of Nyangatom District, the total population of the district is 22,247 people including the Murule and Khoegu tribes, with the total of 1090 households. In fact out of this 19,357 (87%) belong to the Nyangatom tribe. The population density of the district is estimated to be 8 persons per sq. km. But this does not mean that these are the only Nyangatom, because significant portion of them are found in the in the Eastern Equatoria Province of South Sudan beyond the hills of Tepes and Nayta (Mburu, 2001:150).

3.2.6. Religion

The Nyangatom believe in *Akuj*, the sky God and *Ngamuroto*, the spirits of ancestors. *Ngamuroto* represent the traditional belief system. In 1972, the Swedish Philadelphia Church Mission (SPCM) has introduced Protestant Christianity to the area. The Mission has made important contributions in terms of providing primary education and healthcare services in two locations, Kibish and Kangaten. They also introduced irrigation agriculture along Omo River in Kangaten. However, it was only from the second half of the 1980s that the teaching of the Bible spread among the population. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is an emerging phenomenon during the field work for this study and there are few adherents of Islam in Kangaten. However, most of the followers of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity and Islam were outsiders who came to Nyangatom for business or job in the public service. But still today significant portion of the local people adhere to *Akuj* and *Ngamuroto* traditional beliefs and the followers of other religions still represented as minority (Gebre, 2016).

3.2.7. Language

Linguistically, the Nyangatom language belongs to Nilio-Sharan linguistic family sharing genetic affiliation with the languages of the *Aetker*³ in Uganda, Kenya and South Sudan. Within

³ *Ateker* refers to the ethnic cluster that includes the Karamoja, Jie , Dodos (Uganda), Turkana (Kenya), Toposa, Jiye (South Sudan) and Nyangatom (Ethiopia)

the Nilotic language family of the *Ateker* cluster is sub-classified as White Nile group (Tornay, 1979 and Matsuda, 1994).

3.2.8. The People

The Nyangatom sometimes referred as Bume by the neighboring communities and the previous (pre-1991) regimes of Ethiopia are one of the tribes in Lower Omo. However, this term Bume has got a derogative connotation, and the preference of the people is to be called Nyangatom. Etymologically the term was *Nyam-atom* which was first mentioned by a neighboring and cousin tribe, the Toposa, to refer ‘Elephant eaters’. However, they systematically modified it in a way that gives better meaning for their psychological makeup and adapted *Nyam-atom* to *Nyang-atom* which literary implies ‘Yellow guns’ to show that they are the first people in the region who had been armed with automatic rifle.

The Nyangatom, belong to the Nilotic people of the central and eastern Africa who share common ancestor called the *Ateker* (Muller, 2016, Elias, 2016, and Gebre, 2016). The *Ateker* ethnic cluster comprises of the Karamoja, Dodos and Jie of Uganda, and the Turkana of Kenya, and the Toposa and Jiye of South Sudan together with the Nyangatom of Ethiopia. Informants identified that these people have common features like similar myth of origin, mutually intelligible language, common belief system, similar social organizations, and similar music and dances.

The *Ateker* who were also called the Karamajong cluster were mobile pastoralists who wandered in the territories of the present states of Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and the Sudan for centuries in search for pasture and water for their cattle (Markakis, 1994)⁴. The time when this large scale mobility covering the central parts of eastern Africa had gradually declined is unknown, however, it is estimated that around 18th c, they begun to occupy the territories they reside today. It was during this time that the Nyangatom split away from the Karimojong in what is now called Karamoja in Uganda and moved to Kibish area. The Nyangatom were believed to have moved with their present neighbors and close affiliates the Toposa (Tornay 1981: 34 and Muller

⁴ This information was further strengthened by Mr. Lorogway who graduated from the Department Social Anthropology, Arba Minch University. He wrote his senior essay on Nyangatom Culture. He belongs to the Nyangatom of *Ngikapung* territorial section around the Tepes Mountain. During the field work he was one the experts in Culture, Tourism and Communication office of the district.

2008:4). Resulting from this, the Nyangatom still have a strong feeling of unity. Even today, when asked what makes a Nyangatom, they would often answer that it is those people who have moved together. *Koten-magos hills* of Northeastern Uganda, is an area which is believed to be the homeland of the Nyangatom and other *Ateker* groups like Toposa, Jiye, and Turkana (Mburu 2016 and Muller 2016). In the generational social organization of the Nyangatom the first people (generation) arrived to the Kibish area are named *Ngisekop* which implies ‘the beginners’ or ‘first comers’ according to the tradition.



Map. 2: The Distribution of the *Ateker* cluster in East Africa⁵

3.2.9. The Nyangatom’s Relation with their Neighbors

The Nyangatom are surrounded by pastoralist tribes in Ethiopia, Kenya and South Sudan. From the Ethiopian side their neighbors are the Surma, Mursi, Koegu, Murule, Kara and Dassench. Turkana of Kenya and Toposa of South Sudan are neighbors from outside (Gebre, 2016). Though relationships are dynamic by their very nature, today the Nyangatom had both peaceful and conflicting relations with their neighbors. They have peaceful relation with the Toposa, Koegu and Murule. The Murle are perceived as part of the Nyangatom, the Koegu are viewed as close affiliates. Gebre (2016:154) mentioned that ritualistic ethnic inclusion to have been

⁵ This map is taken from Muller-Dempf, Harald, (2009). *Ateker Generation-Set Systems Revisited –field facts and findings, and systematization*. Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Working Papers (No. 183). <http://www.eth.mpg.de>, e-mail: workingpaper@eth.mpg.de (pp. 2)

conducted in the past to make the two tribes close partners or part of the Nyangatom. With regard to the Toposa, the Nyangatom believe that they share a common ancestry with them. The oral history goes on to state that they out-migrated together from the Karamoja area due to an environmental crisis (Muller, 2008). When they reached to the surroundings of Mount Tepes they split into two and moved in different directions to exploit the available resources and started an independent existence. They consider one another as *amuro-katta* (cousins), an expression that emphasizes common ancestry and the notion of brotherhood (Tornay, 1981 and Gebre, 2016).

The Nyangatom have hostile relationships with the Turkana, the Dassanech, the Kara, the Mursi, and the Surma. According the Nyangatom tradition these neighbors are considered as *emoit-loakora* (fighting enemies). The concept of *emoit*, which means a stranger or an enemy, is not used to refer to the Murule, the Koegu, and the Toposa people (Gebre, 2016:147). The Turkana case is also different from the rest; since they belong to the *Atker* they share cultural and linguistic affiliation with the Nyangatom. Therefore, in the time of peace they are cousins and during conflict they become enemies. During the field work for this study from January-December 2017, for example, the boundary between the Nyangatom and the Turkana was closed along the Kibish area and they were in the state of *emoit*.

Historically the conflicting relation among pastoralists in the region was established upon the cultural institutions of raiding (Muller, 2008:3). Raiding was a system that served several functions such as: a strategy for coping with natural disasters, political domination of neighbors through the monopoly of animal wealth, rite of passage for young warriors, and a means of regulating the quality of livestock. It was controlled by poly-tribal councils of elders, which were destroyed by colonial intrusion in the nineteenth century. During pre-colonial rustling, raiders of Illemi used traditional weapons and guns they obtained from Ethiopian gunrunners and outlying trade centers such as Maji, where ammunition was as common as it was used as local currency (Abbink, 1996). Due to the lack of respectable control mechanisms, contemporary raiding has lost its traditional altruism as modern firearms, politicization, and commercialization usually drive it today.

Chapter Four

4. The Nyangatom Social Organization

4.1. Family and Kinship Among the Nyangatom

The Nyangatom have sophisticated kinship and family structures (Tornay, 1981: 149). The term *ngawi* refers to family; in fact it also refers to the settlement compound (home) and the families inhabiting it. Nyangatom family or *ngawi* can be defined as a polygamous and extended family headed by a senior elder who is considered as the owner of all the livestock on which he and his dependents are living. As a core and very important social unit the *ngawi* includes the joint houses of the senior head of the family (with his wives and children), the houses of married sons with their nuclear or polygamous families and other relatives of the family head.

4.2. The Clan System

The Nyangatom clan system is also complex and sophisticated. According to experts from the district's office of culture and tourism as an ethnic group the Nyangatom constitutes six different clans. Some of my informants mentioned that the number of the clans is seven including the *Ngingaric*. But documents from regional and zonal culture and tourism office state that the *Ngingaric* are Murle as a tribe not part of the Nyangatom. Tornay (1981:158) also in his description about the territorial sections the Nyangatom mentioned the *Ngingaric* as one territorial section of them. He also argued in his article titled *Omo Murule Enigma* that the Murule to have assimilated to the Nyangatom (1981: 35). Gebre (2016) also mentioned Murule to have ritually integrated to the Nyangatom in the past. However, today it is formally recognized that the Murule or the *Ngingaric* are separate ethnic group despite of the fact that the people are identical to the Nyangatom culturally and linguistically with the exception of their myth of origin that attaches them to the largest Murule segment in the South Sudan.

Another controversy with regard to the Nyangatom clan system is its relation with the territorial section. What official sources mention as a clan is described as a territorial section by anthropologists. Anthropologist like Tornay (1981) and Elias (2016) seems to argue that territorial sections which the people call *ngiteala* are constituent units of the Nyangatom society and clan is different from this one. Tornay went to the level of listing 20 clans (1981:153-154). However, one of my key informants, from culture and tourism office of the district mentioned that the territorial sections are the inhabiting areas of the clans of the Nyangatom. Each clan is

identified with particular territorial section. The clan system is patrilineal where blood relationship is counted from the father's side. For example during my field work in Lokorilam territorial section in Kebish area (Nov. 24/2017) the elders seating under a tree in a primary school compound, around eighteen in number, told me that all belong to the Ngisakol clan. In a certain village the number of members of one clan might be majority or it is only members of a particular clan are found in a territorial section.

No	The clan/ <i>Ngiteala</i>	Territorial Section	Remark
1	<i>Ngilingakol</i>	Kuraze	
2	<i>Ngisakol</i>	Lokorilam	
3	<i>Ngikapung</i>	Tepes	
4	<i>Ngitokoraman</i>	Epokor	
5	<i>Ngukumama</i>	Apeyowol	
6	<i>Ngibunei</i>	Edoket/Arogoi	

Table 1. The Clans and Territorial Sections of the Nyangatom⁶

4.3.The Basic Features of the Nyangatom Social Organization

There are two basic principles by which the Nyangatom are socially organized: generation and age. The generally accepted local term for “generation set” is *ekas* (pl. *ngikasa*), which refers to an age fellow and sons of a certain group of fathers. generation-set systems refers to the existence of a group of grand- fathers, a group of fathers and a group of sons, and perhaps also a group of grandsons (Muller, 1991:555). In this classificatory system every male person is a son, and he may also be a father and a grandfather. But, if there is a fixed group of men who can, as a group, be called the 'grandfathers', then all their sons are 'the fathers', and all the sons of the ' fathers' are the ' sons '. Generation-sets are groups of brothers, and each generation-set produces the next one, consecutive generation-sets being always in a father-son relationship.

The major principle in the generation system is the dissociation of adjacent generations which are boldly observed in the everyday life of the Nyangatom society. This could be best described by the proverb that says “birds with the same feather flock together”. Among the Nyangatom

⁶ Culture, Tourism and Communication Office of Nyangatom District

every individual seats, eats, moves, works, and performs rituals with his own generation. Two adjacent generations come together and discuss on matters only when it is necessary. This will be done with great honor and respect to the above generation. A first time visitor to Nyangatom might be confused with the seating arrangement and group formation the people. Members of every generation set seating under its own sheds or trees. Any guest coming to the Nyangatom will be directed to communicate with the oldest group and if wants to be other groups a senior elder will call members of the adjacent generation and tell them the mission of the guest.

On the other hand an “age set” *ajere* (pl. *ngijerea*) can be translated as “suckling group”, i.e. boys who have suckled their mothers’ breasts during the same time (on average three years). Age sets are sub groups within generation sets involved in common pastoral and military activities. In its original cultural meaning an age set refers to a military contingent or raiding militia. Several (around five) consecutive age sets are put together into one generation set. In short, the term age-set implies a group of people, male or female, who are of approximately the same age, have their own and distinct name, distinguishing features like special ornaments etc., and act as a corporate group. The same applies to generation-sets, except for the fact that the recruiting principle is not age but generation. As generation-sets are basically an ordering phenomenon of the male population, we would say that each man is a member of the generation-set following that of his father’s. An individual is per definition both a member of an age and a generation-set. Male Nyangatom are born into the generation-set below their fathers, and each generation-set consists of a number of consecutive age-sets.



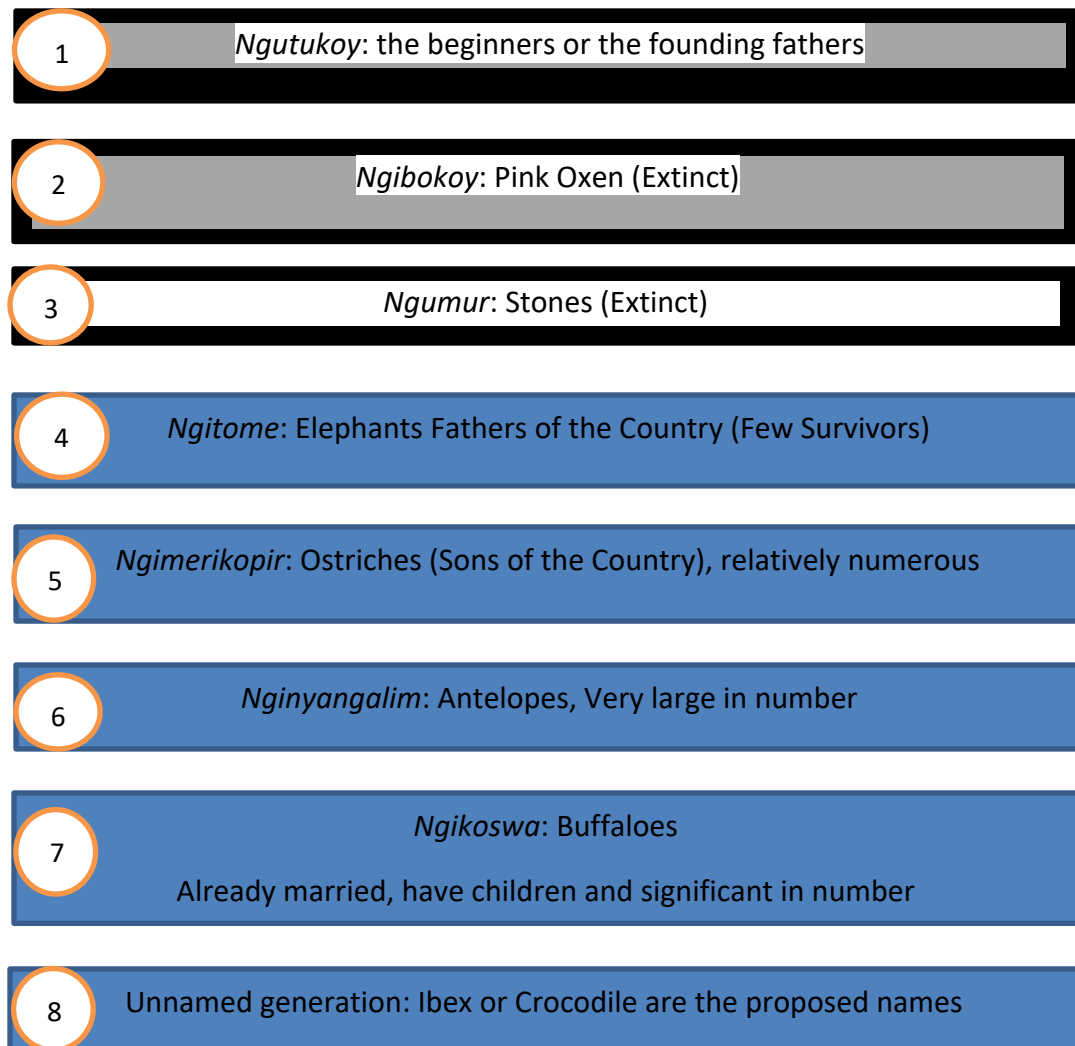
Nyangatom generation sets are named in non-recurrent names. There is no way that adjacent generation sets could have identical names. During the field work for this study from February to November 2017 there exists five generations out of which the fifth one is not yet named. There

were also three most senior generations totally disappeared. These are the *Ngutukoy*: the beginners or founding fathers of the Nyangatom (the people who have moved from the Coten Magos hills of North Eastern Uganda with the Toposa), the *Ngibokoy*: the pink oxen and the *Ngumur*: the stones.

According to the tradition, generations are named with unique names having totemic symbolization usually derived from wild animals, cattle colors, or the shapes of their horns. Among the Nyangatom each individual belongs to the generation immediately below his father's. Senior generations are always considered as social fathers of the community regardless of their biological fatherhood.

At any time, there will be two dominant generations in a numerical, political, and ritual sense (Tornay, 1981:161). There will be father-son relationship between these two generations and this relationship will be extended to the whole society. During the field work for this study (February to November 2017) the *Ngitome* (the Elephants) are fathers of the country. In 1976 also when Tornay was doing his field work, they were the fathers. By the time there were only 185 surviving men from *Ngitome*. Here the question of extinction may arise. Informants explained the question in two ways. The first one is the polygamy which gives opportunity for generations to survive for a longer period of time. Here we have to mention that Tornay (1981:165) identified eight survivors from the *Ngumur*: fathers of the *Ngitome* during his field work. In the same fashion the polygamy might have contributed for the survival of the *Ngitome* till today. The second factor is the ritualistic ways through which people are recruited to join a certain generation. One of our key informants indicated that the *Ngitome* had recruited some members in this way. However, today the survivors are very few. On the other hand, their sons the *Ngimorkopir* (the Ostriches) are relatively numerous all over the Nyangatom during the field work. They even tend to speak as though they are fathers of the country, but until November 2017 the handing over ceremony of the generational authority, the *Asapan*, is not yet conducted for a reason that will be discussed later.

Figure 1: The Generation Sets of the Nyangatom from the Beginning up to now



The principle of identification and dissociation in generation sets governs daily activities of Nyangatom individual. Sons of a given generation are entitled to be members of the next generation following their fathers. The Elephants are fathers, for example, their sons will be automatically members of Ostriches (sons). In this way the recruitment to generation sets will end up only when the living fathers stop bearing children. In fact, among the Nyangatom fatherhood is not just biological. The same is true for the Toposa (Muller, 2008). Therefore, every child born out of the wedlock, before marriage, will automatically be incorporated in to the girls' family and the girls' father becomes the father of the child.

The other source of social fatherhood is levirate marriage. If a man dies and his brother takes his wife, the children born are considered to be the offspring of the deceased man and will join the generation below him. The population of one generation is a result of the different recruitment mechanisms. With regard to the composition a certain generation comprises members ranging from elders, married adults, uninitiated youth and children. This situation in turn creates favorable situation for the emergence different age sets within the generation set.

The Nyangatom generation-set is not governed by fixed rules but reflects the social relations within the society, and these are never just simple, as anywhere else. There is harmony but also strife and stress, especially between older and younger men. Tension exists between members of different generation-sets but also within the same generation-set or even age-set, and these tensions shape the very layout of the system and at the same time the conflicts between old and young are channeled and neutralized by the relationship between the generations. Our field work had shown a strong relation between grandfathers and grandsons. Some the informants also mentioned to have taken their names from the names their grandfathers. Hence, the relationship is tense and strife between fathers and sons; it is harmonious between grandfathers and grandsons.

When the sons of a certain generation “X” are born, they are, as long as they are young, referred to as “sons of X”. When the sons of X become numerous enough and the oldest of them are youngsters, the elders will decide to give a name to this generation, and henceforth they will be known as the generation “Y”. Thus, a new generation-set has emerged. For an extended period of time, the new generation Y would not be sub-divided into age-sets, there would be just this young generation called Y. However, as Tornay (1981: 164) has already pointed out, there is always strife in such a group as the older ones would try to control the younger ones and also harass them, boss them around, and if the group is becoming too big, the young ones would then try to break away, forming a group of their own age set with their own name. This process of fission would continue throughout the generation, as long as members of this generation are born.

Another important feature of the Nyangatom social organization observed during our field work is its overlapping nature. Adjacent generations exhibit overlap in age. There exists similar trend

among the Toposa as it was described by Muller (2008:5). Marriage has two prominent features: late marriage⁷ and polygamy. The men marry late because the elders prefer to benefit from the cattle for their own additional marriage than allocating it to their sons as a dowry. In some cases fathers become considerably old at the birth of their babies. On one hand initial marriage is late and on the other hand a man marries wives even after the age 60. This is the main source age overlap among different sets of generations. This could be explained as follows:

If Lokoti produces children around the age of 50, and if his oldest son Nakora is able to have a son at the age of 40, and if his son Lorgoy is 20 years old when Lokoti produces a new son named Labore; thus Lorgoy is one generation below Labore though he is 20 years older than him. Lorgoy is supposed to respect and honor the child Labore according to the tradition.

If it happens according to this explanation frequently, there will be considerable overlap in the ages of generational sets of the Nyangatom. It is this overlap in age that makes the generational system of the *Ateker* complicated (Muller, 2008:6 and 2016). This makes the existence of older men in most of the generation sets. Though elder hood by itself provides better social status, the most senior elder in the upper generation holds extra prestige having the highest social and ritual status.

Another important feature the Nyangatom social organization is the respect and recognition for women. The girls of the Nyangatom form their own age-sets within their fathers generation set. before marriage. After marriage, however, the interest of woman is voiced through their husbands. They are incorporated into the generation and age-set of their husbands. On the eve of the occasion of her marriage ceremony, her former female age-set celebrates with her in a ritual event of transferring to her husband's group; they receive an ox slaughtered by the will be husband. Then onwards the married woman becomes member the generation-set of her husband, and her own age-set is said to lose importance. In general, the married women are less involved in the politics and they take part in it by being assimilated to their husband's generation and age-set (Elias, 2016).

⁷ The Nyangatom men after initiated around the age of 15 they will be kept as a "warrior groups" up the age of around 30. This shows relatively the Nyangatom men marry late.

Our field work has shown that women's age-sets are not as sophisticated and do not have the same relevance in terms of governance as those of men. However, female age-sets have not been well studied, and on an informal basis they may have much more significance than generally assumed, even after the marriage of their members. For example, shaping the behavior of men through their songs, praise and critique is very important central role of women in Nyangatom social organization. The women appreciate and recognize the men who perform their duties properly. And those men who fail to handle their duties well will be mocked and insulted, this is like a socially established system to shape the behavior of the men (Muller, 2008 and Elias, 2016).

Generally this study has identified the following common characteristic features of the current status of Nyangatom generation and age sets. These features are more or less similar to those characteristics identified by Muller in his description about the *Ateker* Generation Set Systems (2017). The features include:

- By principle every man is member of the generation-set immediately below his father's.
- Today there are five generation-sets: the retired elders (the *Ngitome*), the seniors (the *Ngimerkopir*), the juniors (the *Nginyangalim* and the *Ngikoswa*), who are not yet initiated through *Asapan* succession ceremony and the unnamed generation.
- Senior status is handed over at *Asapan*, when the seniors retire and the former juniors are collectively initiated and promoted to senior level. However, the handing over ceremony seems to have been interrupted.
- According to the Nyangatom tradition marriage is only allowed after *Asapan* initiation ceremony and now this is changing.
- Generation sets have unique names distinctively identifies them from other generations.
- Generation-sets are composed of age set groups.
- The basic feature of age-sets is its being coeval, i.e., people of approximately the same age is grouped into units succeeding each other in time and seniority.
- Nyangatom girls form their own age set before marriage within their fathers generation set and assimilate to their husband's generation and age set after marriage.

4.4. Key Components of Nyangatom Social Organization

Muller (2008:5) in his analytical description about generation-sets and social system engineering the *Ateker*⁸ described the generational system of governance as “gerontocracy” to mean a government by elders, an ideal variant form of democracy. The etymology of the term gerontocracy originates from the Greek language – *gerousia* meaning elder. Elder has the connotation of leadership, social status, merit, and wisdom in African perspective. In the context of the African customary law the term elder is rationally associated to wisdom meaning, a person with special attributes as a thinker or philosopher king in the Aristotelian concept (Murungi, 2013). Such wise elder does not necessarily make reference to old age or grey hair but amount of knowledge and wisdom one proves to have. The Nyangatom social organization has a core feature in its provision of special position to the elder. For the Nyangatom the elder is the wise man whose blessings and curses are believed to come. The basic principle here is respecting elder and valuing seniors. In this context this study has identified the following key components in the gerontocratic social organization of the Nyangatom. These are: the Generation set, the Age set, *Asapan*, *Ekmomor*, *Emugnan*, *Apologn* and *Emron*.

- I. **The Generation Set:** is a categorical father son relationship that divides the Nyangatom society in to groups containing a group of grand- fathers, a group of fathers and a group of sons, and a group of grandsons. The first relationship was established when the first group of the Nyangatom split away from the Toposa and came to lower Omo. In this generational category every male person has the opportunity to be a grandson, a son, a father and a grandfather. But, since the 'grandfathers' are there in the system, then all their sons are 'the fathers', and all the sons of the ' fathers' are the 'sons '. Therefore, generation-sets are groups of brothers, and each generation-set produces the next one, consecutive generation-sets being always in a father-son relationship.
- II. **The Age Set:** an age-set implies groups of people, male or female, who are of approximately the same age, have their own and distinct name, distinguishing features like special ornaments etc., and act as a corporate group. It is sub groups within generation sets involved in common pastoral and military activities (raiding).

⁸ As the Karamoja, Jie, Dodos, Turkana, Toposa, Jiye and Nyangatom

III. Asapan: is a succession ceremony where entire generation-sets are initiated and promoted to the highest rank in the Nyangatom society. At any one time, only one generation-set can be in this position. When they retire, their sons will be promoted and have *Asapan*. It is meant being promoted into the status of grown-up men, being allowed to marry and having all the ritual, social, and political power. It is an eagerly awaited by those men of the successor generation who were already old, some of them even had died already before achieving the highest status because of the age overlap, and they would exert pressure in order to make *Asapan* happen for them, thus being allowed to marry and set up families⁹. As the few remaining men of the “outgoing” generation did not want to lose their privileges, there was strife for quite a while until the remaining members of the older generation became too few and too weak to defend their position, retired, and give *Asapan* to their sons. When *Asapan* takes place, all members of the successor generation are initiated, be it old men or just newly-born babies. Everyone has either to be present or at least be represented by a symbol.

Since this complex power transfer had been made from the *Ngimor* (the stones) to *Ngitome* (Elephants) in 1960s¹⁰ the Nyangatom had never experienced any *Asapan*. This is attributed to the practice of human sacrifice in *Asapan* ritual. During our field work on June 2017 when we repeatedly asked about why *Asapan* is not taking place today the elders told us “we don’t need any one to die. *Asapan* requires somebody to die if we perform it in accordance with the tradition”. Tornay (1981:161) mentioned that a man will be touched in the ceremony, loses his senses and dies in the bush. According to Peter 2003: 197 also through the early 1990s, the elders belonged to the generation of the Elephants. Waiting, with increasing frustration, the transfer of generational power were the Ostriches. But the symbolic transfer of power could occur only through a sacrifice called *Asapan*. The elder generation must designate one of their members as the *Asapan* who, in turn, must sacrifice one head of cattle. That sacrifice is followed

⁹ Traditionally sons were not allowed to marry setup families before. This is not necessarily the case today and marriage has been done before *Asapan*.

¹⁰ During the field work in November 2017 one of the elders in Lokorilam mentioned that the handing over *Asapan* took place during the reign of Haile Selassie I (r. 1930-1974). Tornay who was in Nyangatom in the early years of 1970s (1973-1976) stated that no formal handing over ceremony was held (1981:165). Based on this it is estimated that the last *Asapan* had taken place in 1960s.

shortly by the madness and death of the chosen individual (the demise perhaps assured by the prescribed ritual consumption of certain herbs).

IV. *Ekmomor*: during the field work on November 2017 in Labore village one the key informants said “*Ekmomor* is what you call *Ba'al* (በዓል) in Amharic”. The Amharic *Ba'al* implies celebration or holyday. According to the Nyangatom tradition the celebration held every year in each territorial section. The celebration in one territorial section attracts participants from different territorial sections, including those in South Sudan and even some times cousins from among the Toposa¹¹. The ceremony is a great public event that involves men and women taking place for at least four days. The celebration has many activities including meat feast, group songs, and dance. However, the core element of *Ekmomor* or the very purpose of the celebration is the expression of honor and respect for the upper generation in the ladder to get the blessing of elders. The young men play the central role in *Ekmomor* serving the elders with fried meat. Elders on their side bless the generation under them. One the key informants said:

*“Ekmomor is annual celebration in which our children try to make their fathers happy by slaughtering many goats and oxen. And it is made to get the blessing of elders”*¹²

During the *Ekmomor* the Nyangatom men and women sing and dance separately in their respective generation set. War songs are chanted to praise those who have been brave in raid. While praised the men jump very high in the dance with their gun (Elias, 2016). Another very important point that has to be mentioned here is *Ekmomor* is not celebration and feast. Rather it is an opportunity for Nyangatom elders to discuss on social matters. Side by side with the celebration serious discussion will be made on issues related to the community.

¹¹ During the field work in November 2017 in Lokorilam village while discussing about participants of the *Ekmomor* an adult from the gathering said “ I am from the Toposa” and people there pointed to him saying “yes he is from the Toposa”. The field work was conducted two days after the *Ekmomor* of the year is finalized.

¹² Key informant Lutumuse on Novembr 16/2017 in Lokorilam, Kibish

- V. ***Emron***: according the Nyangatom tradition *Emron* is a person who is naturally gifted with administration, cursing or blessing. During the field work it is understood that *Emronship* has two dimensions: administrative and spiritual. The administrative *Emron* is the keble chairman of today. Government official at the lowest level government (*Kebele*) is named *Emron*. According the informants the administrator *Emron* is a person who knows the Nyangatom tradition very well, who have the skill to speak at public gathering and who can convince people, who is brave and who had performed prestigious thing in the past. On the other hand the spiritual *Emron* is the ritual expert and very important person for the whole Nyangatom. Because the Nyangatom believe that the spiritual *Emron* has special power to curse evil and bless people for raid and fertility. Weather forecast and healing are also believed to be other abilities of the spiritual *Emron*.
- VI. ***Emugnan***: is an initiation ritual through which the Nyangatom boys are transformed in to men. The red clay by which the initiated group decorate themselves (their hair) is also known as *Emugnan*. Therefore, *Emugnan* refers to both the decoration and the ritual. Usually those men initiated together tend to form an age set within their generation set. Elias (2016:80) mentioned that this ritual is declining because different factors. But during the field fork for this study we came across an adult who decorated himself with red clay and when we asked about the matter we were told that the man was not initiated in his right age and have passed through the ritual lately.



- VII. ***Apologn***: *Apologn* is an elder among elders. The criterion is age and it implies the senior all seniors. In every territorial section every senior generation sets have their

own shed under which they stay the day time. Among the elders the senior one is highly respected. During *Ekmomor* celebration or when the situation requires the blessing in any public meeting it is done by the *Apologn*. If any gift from outside or from junior generation is going to be given first it has to be touched and pass through the *Apologn*. Everybody says he is our senior.

4.5.Social Solidarity and Conflict Resolution among the Nyangatom

Our field work pointed out that, among the Nyangatom, social solidarity is an important trait foundationally established within the traditional raiding institution. It is expected during both the offensive and defensive actions against enemies. An attack on Nyangatom individual from neighbor tribes like the Turkana, Mursi or Dassench is perceived as an attack on the whole territorial section or an age set to which the victim belongs or even sometimes to the whole tribe. The loss of some animals belonging to one or few households due to raid would agitate the entire community for revenge.

Traditionally, unprovoked raiding and killing by enemies are not tolerated. Revenge actions on enemies may be delayed for strategic reasons, but when the time comes the age groups or the fighting forces of the territorial section will cooperate with each other and, even sometimes with similar groups of other sections. According to my informants when need arises the solidarity further goes to affiliate or partner tribes for common enemies. Such alliances are usually formed between the Nyangatom and the Toposa (Muller, 2008 and Gebre, 2016).

On the other hand, the Nyangatom are believed to belong to one family regardless of their pattern of settlement and territorial sections (Gebre, 2016). There is no way any social group may attack another group within them. Intra-Nyangatom raiding is unthinkable. However, informants indicated that, there are cases when individuals or families may be motivated to confiscate the livestock of other individuals or families due to some acknowledged grievances such as adultery, bride-capture, theft of property, and failure to settle debts. While people generally consider such acts as justified or understandable, the customary law does not allow individuals to take the law into their own hands. Hence, the peace-makers and senior members of

the top generation-set would interfere to resolve disputes through the customary mechanisms, which would involve the returning of confiscated animals to the rightful owners and the punishment of the original wrongdoers. The same principle applies to property-related problems involving members of other groups considered as the Nyangatom's close affiliates.

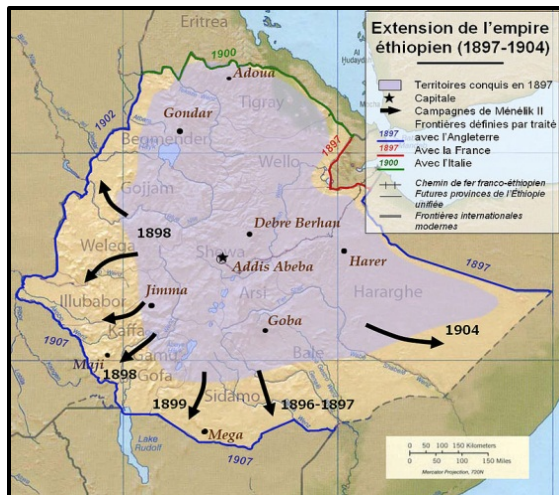
Traditionally, the killing of any person (human being) is believed to cause ritual impurity and the bloating of the killer's stomach. Despite the cultural prohibition of killing, there are cases when a Nyangatom's life was taken by a fellow Nyangatom accidentally, in self-defense, or in a premeditated act of violence. If the act was a premeditated offense, the enraged relatives of the deceased may take the life of the killer in revenge. Therefore, the killer is expected to hide in the bush or take refuge with the *Ngukumama* (the peace-makers) until the conflict is resolved and a cleansing ceremony performed. The pollution caused by the *akiar itoon niyaw*i (killing family members) is cleansed through an elaborate reconciliation and purification processes called *akikis akoit*. Apart from the cleansing rituals, homicide reconciliation involves the payment of blood indemnity to the relatives of the deceased. A comparable indemnity principle governs homicide that involves close friends of the Nyangatom while the killing of enemies, which is culturally acceptable, does not involve cleansing and blood compensation (Gebre, 2016).

Chapter Five

5. The Nyangatom in the Local Government Trends in Ethiopia

Ethiopia acquired its present shape and ethno-linguistic composition after the continued military expeditions conducted by Menelik II (r.1889-1913). Before incorporation to the Abyssinian dominion, many of the societies in the Horn of Africa had their own autonomous social organizations and systems of governance, though they were described stateless by Ethiopianists (the founding fathers of Ethiopian studies) (Asmarom 2006). Some of them had highly developed centralized and structured Kingdoms with hierarchical institutions of kingship. Others were organized on the basis of age (generation) set decentralized governance systems. There were also small chiefdoms which share characteristics of both the centralized and the

decentralized systems. The Nyangatom who came to Kibish area around the 18th c were conquered by the Abyssinian Empire in the last years of 1890s (Lamphear, 1982: 19). Early before the coming of the conquering army also individual hunters, slave raiders, fire arms dealers from Abyssinia explored the area. There are sources indicating that before incorporation to the Abyssinian empire the Nyangatom territory was connected to the Maji trade center where fire arms and slaves were the

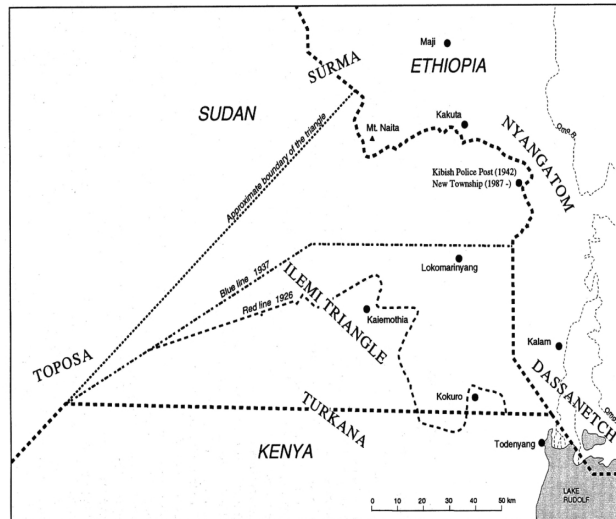


major commodities while ammunition was used as local currency. In fact the slave raids have continued until the Italian occupation of Ethiopia in 1936 (Muburu 2016:8). According to Amutabi (2010) between 1898 and 1900 several expeditions were sent to the area both by the British and Abyssinians, the Abyssinian side was led by Ras Wolde Giorgis (Abink 1996:29)¹³. Amutabi also added that the expedition further goes to the Illemi Triangle beyond Kibish River (2010:4). However, the incorporation was nominal since it was meant for creating a buffer zone to protect core areas from the advancement of western colonialists. In fact it is clear that until recent times (post 1991) effective state institutions were not introduced to such peripheral areas in south western Ethiopia. This is partly due to pastoral communities, like the Nyangatom are

¹³ Tribal Formation on the Ethiopian Fringe towards a History of the “Tishana”. University of Nijmegen, the Netherlands. John Abink.

mobile people, constantly moved in search of grazing land and water from place to place. This made the direct central control of these areas unachievable in addition to remoteness, inaccessibility and hostile climate of the area. The Imperial state in the first decades of 20th c was not capable to build infrastructure and run institutions in such peripheral areas (Zemelak 2011:5). There are no evidences about the establishment of *Gebar-neftegna* system¹⁴ (turning the local population to serf) and settlement sites (military garrisons) of the Abyssinians like the other parts newly incorporated territories of Southern Ethiopia. These were not observable in Nyangatom territory still today. The information we have about the administrative status of Nyangatom territory is very scant from conquest to 1936 Italian occupation. However, we can easily infer from historical maps of different sources that the narrow territory between Omo and Kibish

Rivers was part Maji province¹⁵. The exception here is the controversy over Lake Turkana and Illemi Triangle.



In 1902 technical representatives from both British East Africa and the Abyssinian Empire surveyed the border areas between them. However, in 1907 the Abyssinian Emperor Menelik laid claim to Lake Turkana and proposed a boundary with the British to run from the southern end of the lake eastward to the Indian Ocean. This claim also

included parts of the Elelemi triangle. But the claim was shifted northward when they signed a border treaty on December 1907. The treaty also provided grazing right and water during dry seasons for the Nyangatom to enter in to Ilemi considering pastoral transhumance of the communities in the region (Mubru, 2016).

¹⁴*Gebar-Neftegna* system was an institution of Feudalism where the land of the indigenous communities was appropriated by the Abyssinians and the people were reduced to tenancy and slavery.

¹⁵ See Map one at the back in the Appendices.

During the Italian occupation of Abyssinia (1936-1941) the Nyangatom territory was one the key areas where the Italians established military camp. They briefly claimed Elemi Triangle on the basis of the traditional transhumance of pastoralists (Nyangatom and Dassench) from the Ethiopian side to it. They armed the Nyangatom with automatic rifles and incorporated them into their army considering that they would help them to stop or prevent the Ethiopian or the British counter attacks against them. However, different sources affirmed that these rifles were used against the Turkana for historic cattle raid of 1939 which led to the death of several hundreds. As a result Britain conducted a punitive raid with the Kings African Rifles (KAR) supported by the Royal Air Force who dropped 250-pound bombs north of Ilemi in the main land of the Nyangatom (Mburu2016, Amutabi 2010, and Deng 2003).

After the evacuation of Italians from Ethiopia in 1941 Emperor Haile Selassie I (r.1930-1974) issued a decree No 1/1942 that defined the role and function of the ministry of interior. The decree explained that the reform was meant to modernize and standardize provincial and local administrations. Yet, the hidden motive of this reform was to centralize political powers. As part of social and political reforms stated the Emperor redrew provincial and local boundaries and introduced new regional tiers like *Tekelay Gizat* (province), *Awraja* (district), *Woreda* (sub-districts) and *Chika Shum* (village). According to the decree a governor general (*Enderasse*) of *Teklay Gizat* (province) was directly assigned by the emperor¹⁶. Governors of *Awraja* and *Woreda* were also appointed by the approval of the central government (Clapham 1969 and Zemelak 2011). Under *Woreda* administration the *Balabat* (the local chief) controls state affairs through *Cheka Shums*¹⁷.

Since the Nyangatom territory was shifted formally from Maji Province (*Gizat*) to Gamo Goffa Province (*Teklay Gizat*). The administrative center Gamo Goffa was the historic city of Gidole which is roughly about 300Kms from Lower Omo. Tornay (1981: 160) mentioned in his description about indigenous leaders of the people, the *Emuron*, the Abyssinian administration titled them *Balabat* and *Chekashum*. During his field work in 1960s the *Emuron* named Tikapil,

¹⁶ Article 3 of Decree No1/1942

¹⁷ As Abbink (2000) notes, the *balabbat* “were of lower rank, placed under the governor or district administrator and acted as liaison-men for their own society”. The main functions of a *balabbat* was to maintain security, assist the regional and local governors in collecting taxes and tributes, and mobilize the local people when their services were needed by the central government.

a wise man from Ibis territorial section was *Balabat* of the Nyangatom. Informants also mentioned that Lokuti was also one of the well-known *Emuron's* and *Balabats* of the Nyangatom. It was during this time that Nyangatom territorial sections categorized as the smallest administrative units and *Emurons* at this level titled *Chekashum*¹⁸.

After the down fall of the Imperial regime in 1974, the *Derg*¹⁹ government introduced its own changes on local government structures. At the provincial level the Amharic *Teklay Gizat* was renamed *Kifle Hager* but the geographical division remained as it is. Therefore, the Nyangatom remained under Gamo Gffa Kifle Hager whose administrative center shifted to Arba Minch since 1960²⁰. Their nearby sub-province (*Awraja*) was Geleb and Hamer Bako with its administrative center at Jinka and the district (*Woreda*) was Kuraz which includes Dassanch (Geleba) who reside north of Lake Turkana. The major change introduced by the *Derg* however was at the lowest level. That was the establishment of Peasant Associations (*Kebele* today) as the lowest administrative unit in order to realize its socialist ideological orientation (Zemelak 2011:8). However, these changes had not come up with meaningful change in the social organization of the Nyangatom. In fact nominal peasant associations were organized. But the efficiency these institutions was hampered by lack of attention to the existing social organization of the community and the isolation of the Nyangatom territory by the Omo river because of the failure of the *Derg* and previous regimes to build infrastructure.

After the 1987 promulgation of PDRE constitution²¹, however, another administrative rearrangement was made²². It was an attempt to respond to questions of cultural autonomy and self-determination highly intensified throughout the country. By this time the pastoralists, semi-pastoralists and agrarian communities in southern and lower Omo were lumped together to establish administrative region called South-Omo (*Yedebub Omo Astedader Akababi*) since

¹⁸ *Chekashum* refers to both the agent the Abyssinian administration below the *Balabat* and the lowest and the smallest administrative unit as what is called today *Kebele* in Ethiopia.

¹⁹ The military junta and socialist regime that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991

²⁰ The administrative center of Gamo Goffa was Chenchä in 1942, and then it was shifted to Gidole in 1947 when *Fitawrari Gersu Duki* was assigned as a governor general the province. Again in 1958 again shifted to Chenchä and finally Arba Minch was established in 1960

²¹ PDRE Constitution is the socialist constitution introduced by the *Derg* regime in 1987: Peoples, Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE)

²² See Map 3 in the appendices

1987. The Nyangatom were made part of it without due consideration to their cultural, geographical and infrastructural situation. However, while this process of new re-arrangement was undergoing the civil war in northern Ethiopia was highly intensified and the *Derg* government collapsed in 1991. During the transitional period (1991 - 1994), when *Debub Omo* (Omo) became one of the *Kilils* (*Kilil 10*)²³ of Ethiopia, the Nyangatom remained part of it. But after the promulgation of the FDRE constitution on August 1995, *Yedebub Omo Astedader* (Omo) was merged with the *Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State* as one of the nine federating units of Ethiopia. This regional state was a merger of five of the transitional period regions (*Kilil 7, 8, 9, 10, 11*)²⁴. Then onwards South Omo became one of the Zones in SNNPRS and Kuraz Woreda also remained as part of the Zone. But all these changes were nothing for the Nyangatom who on the fringe of Southwestern Ethiopia beyond the wild Omo River and west of the controversial Ilimi Triangle.

²³ During the transitional period (1991-1995) the regional states in Ethiopia are named with numbers. For example Gurage, Hadya and Kembata were Region-7, Sidama Region-8, North Omo (Wolayta) Region-9, Omo Region-10 and Keffa Region-11. These five Regional States were autonomous during the Transitional Period and amalgamated together to form Southern, Nations, nationalities and Peoples Regional State since 1995.

²⁴ Ibid

Chapter Six

6. Policy Implications and Suggestions

6.1. Indigenous Social Organizations and Governance at the Local Level

The relevance of indigenous social organizations to the socio-economic transformation of Africa is disputed in the post-colonial literature. This study does not subscribe to the school of thought that hold, the view that the traditional system is anachronistic, undemocratic, divisive and costly; and as such a hindrance to the development and transformation of the continent. It is sad that, while some scholars are quick to comment that indigenous systems were adapted to be used by both the colonial and post-colonial State, these scholars are unreceptive to the fact that these systems can be adaptive in providing their services to a democratic State as catalysts for development. Political and economic development would be more successful when rooted in widely shared institutions and cultural values which indigenous social organizations represent. These organizations constitute crucial resources that have the potential to promote grassroots governance and to facilitate access of rural communities to public services. The goal of modernization is to generate a rapid increase in social wealth and its driving force is economic development.

On the other hand studies affirmed that empowering and integrating indigenous social organizations in to governance have positive impact on socio-cultural, economic and political situations in Africa, particularly in rural areas (ECA 2007). In the continent, there is a quest for recognition of these organizations in order to reduce poverty and socio-cultural crises. The growing popularity of decentralization of power is also exerting its own pressure on the inclusion of indigenous social organization in to local governance structures. This shift from centralization to decentralization is because of the failure of the top-down approach to address the needs of the local population. Grand infrastructural projects like road construction and hydropower dams planned and implemented by the central governments obviously improve the overall performance of a state; but its capacity to benefit the poorest section of the society at the grass root level is minimal (Lutz and Linder 2004) Therefore, a decentralized bottom up approach has to be perceived as an alternative to address the needs of the society at this level. This approach

could also be taken as a response to the growing demand from local minorities for autonomy and self-governance.

However, the attempts to decentralization in Africa seem to be not successful in bringing over all socio-economic transformation. This is largely attributed to lack of providing the lower tier with genuine autonomy and the imposition of alien systems without systematic integration of indigenous social organizations to it. Usually, indigenous social organizations are neglected by the designers of political and fiscal structures of local governance. This is also reality in the post 1991 Ethiopia. The failure of decentralization here credited to some extent to the unwillingness the state to recognize indigenous social organizations as existing realities in different localities of the country or lack of awareness about the importance addressing societies contextually based on their unique social, political and economic value systems and world views.

In fact, the right of Nations, Nationalities and Peoples to preserve, promote and develop culture and the right to establish institutions of self-governance in their territories with appropriate representation both in the federal and regional councils is enshrined in the 1995 FDRE Constitution²⁵. The constitution also fully recognized all cultural practices which are not against its democratic and human right provisions²⁶. Nevertheless, it failed to clearly indicate the role and place indigenous social organizations in the process of nation building and democratization; though they are inherent parts of identity and culture to the ethno-linguistic groups (The Nations, Nationalities and Peoples) in Ethiopia.

In addition, both the Federal and Regional Constitutions failed to indicate the way minorities²⁷ could realize the right to self-governance without having their own Region, Zone or Special District (*Liu Woreda*)²⁸. In SNNPRS, for instance, *Zone* or *Liu Woreda* local government tiers are constitutionally designed with autonomy in order that the right of *Nations, Nationalities and Peoples* to self-governance enshrined in the Federal Constitution could be realized²⁹. Nevertheless, there are still minorities without their own *Zone* or *Liu Woreda* and in fact some of

²⁵ Art. 39 of FDRE 1995 Constitutions

²⁶ Art. 9 sub-article 1 of FDRE constitution

²⁷ Here it has to be noted that most of the minorities in Ethiopia are found in the Southern, Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State

²⁸ Special District is a district that is directly accountable to the Regional State while other districts are accountable to Zonal administration.

²⁹ Art 81 of the Revised Constitution of SNNPRS

them have *Woreda or Kebele*³⁰. But *Woreda or Kebele* are not administrative units meant to exercise nationality rights enshrined in the constitution.

Therefore, there should be an alternative mechanism of realizing nationality rights of minorities in Ethiopia. This could easily be realized through accommodating indigenous social organizations in to governance systems. Doing this will have many advantages; one, it will be a mechanism of self-governance for minorities without establishing *Zone or Liu Woreda*. Two, it is a matter of preserving, promoting, and developing culture according to the right enshrined both in the Federal and Regional Constitutions. Three, the systems will improve the performance of the state in the area of conflict management, community mobilization and participatory governance which the Western modeled system failed to realize in most cases.

In light of this, the Nyangatom are among the minorities whose constitutional nationality right to self-governance is not realized. Nyangatom Woreda is under South Omo Zonal Administration together with other fifteen nationality groups. According to the regional constitution none of them have autonomy and self-determination right. Because according to the regional constitution nationality rights are listed in the powers and functions of Zonal or Special Woreda councils³¹. But none of the sixteen groups in South Omo have Zone or Special Woreda³².

Therefore, systematically integrating indigenous social organization to the existing local structure could be taken as a mechanism for minorities to exercise self-determination and self-governance. Since this study is concerned with the social organization of the Nyangatom and its relevance to governance the researcher have developed a model on how to do this. This model was developed based on the eclectic approach that integrates the Western and indigenous (African) ideals of democracy and governance. Among the prominent advocates of integration among the African intelligentsia, Geyke asserted that indigenous systems could be natured and

³⁰ For example, Oyda woreda in Gamo Goffa belongs of Oyda nationality and Gato Keble in Derashe woreda (Sagen Area Peoples Zone) belongs to the Kusume nationality.

³¹ Art 81 of the Revised Constitution of Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State.

³² The sixteen groups that make South Omo Zone are Ari, Malle, Hamer, Dassenceh, Arbore, Nyangatom, Kwegu, Murule, Bena, Tsemay, Brile, Murcy, Bodi, Kara, Bacha, and

refined for the contemporary application (1997). This could be a means to find local solution for local problem through integration of indigenous institutions with the modern ones.

6.2.Integrating Nyangatom Social Organization to Local Governance

African proponents of integrating indigenous social organizations and local governance claim that African local governance should contain institutions of the modern system and the indigenous African (Fayemi 2009). They strongly argue that local governance in Africa must neither be a mere return to the pre-colonial traditional Africa, nor a replication of western system. Some elements of indigenous social organizations could be nurtured and refined for contemporary application (Geyke 1997 and Fayemi 2009). However, this perspective lacks clarity on how the integration could be achieved. It failed to properly indicate how the intertwining of the two systems to one another to produce a new form which is compatible to the contemporary African local governance could be done. Despite, considering the clarifications and refinement that has to be done with it, integration can be taken as the best alternative for democratization of contemporary situation. Africa should develop its own version of local governance that suits the realities of its societies and its diverse political culture. This study also finally would try to recommend integration of indigenous social organization with the existing local government institutions of the Nyangatom of South Western Ethiopia.

However, administrative functions of Nyangatom social organizations should be identified in a way that could be integrated to the existing local government institutions. Some elements obviously might not be compatible to the contemporary situation. But since African indigenous social organizations are flexible it can easily be modified and adapted to fit contemporary situation. But this has to be done with the consent of the people concerned. It is because of this flexible nature that African social organizations survived centuries of disregard and disempowerment since the scramble for Africa.

6.2.1. Integrating Nyangatom Social Organization to Local Governance

By integration we mean infusing some compatible elements of the Nyangatom social organization in to the existing structures of Woreda administration. Cultural values like the *Ekmomor* can be integrated like how the Oromo reinstituted *Gadda* and *Irrecha* and how the

Sidama celebrate *Fiche Chembalala*³³. *Ekmomor* has to be given attention by culture and tourism office of Nyangatom Woreda administrators and has to be celebrated officially like the tribes new year. The culture of making the blessing of senior elders (*Apologn*) at public gatherings and meeting has to be encouraged. Furthermore, the integration could be done at Kebele and Woreda level institutions of government.

A) Kebele /Sub-district Level Integration

According to the policy of decentralization prevailing in Ethiopia following the 1995 constitution, *Kebele* is the lowest level governance having legislative, executive and judiciary branches. Studies assert decentralization at this level has failed mainly because of lack of genuine power, resources and autonomy (Taye and Tegegn 2007). Therefore, integrating indigenous social organizations will contribute its part in improving the performance of decentralization.

The Nyangatom had traditional territorial sections that divide the Nyangatom in to six parts. These sections include Kuraze, Lokorilam, Tepes, Epokor, Apeyowol and Edoket/Arogoai. These sections also have attachment to the clan system. In most cases a certain territorial section is dominantly settled by one clan. For example, the Kuraze territorial section belongs to *Ngilingakol* clan. Thus, here the integration could be done by making these territorial sections the lowest administrative unit or *Kebele* directly.

In the legislative organ of the *Kebele*, the formation of *Kebele* council has to be represented by both by elected representatives and fathers of the country (the upper part of the generation set) from the particular section. The speaker could be elected from among the senior elders of fathers of the country and deputy speaker from the elected members of the council. This will offer the council with more legitimacy because political legitimacy depends on what the people concerned consider legitimate according to the existing tradition. In addition it avoids indigenous leaders from involving in partisan politics which may affect elections because they will have a permanent representation to promote their interest. It may also serve as alternative way of

³³ Irrecha is big thanks giving public festival of the Oromo that held on September every year and *Fich Chambalala* is Sidama New Year and public festival that held usually on August. The Oromo and the Sidama are Cushitic ethno-linguistic communities in Ethiopia having some elements of common culture.

representing the interest the local people in African context where ethnic (kinship or clan), age set or generation set consciousness pre dominates class consciousness.

At the executive branch of the Kebele the office of *Emron* of Nyangatom territorial section has to be reinstituted. The Nyangatom *Emron* can be taken as Chief *Kebele* Administrator and can work with technocrat secretary as *Kebele* office manager, experts of agriculture, education and health.

With regard to the Judiciary, the existing social court at the *Kebele* level can be more indigenized. The principle of legal pluralism should be applied here in using the customary social controlling mechanisms together with the modern law. Especially cases affecting the community as a whole have to be addressed in a traditional way withstanding the communal African political value. However, the right of individuals dissatisfied with the jurisdiction of elders has to be protected by the principle of the right to appeal to the higher ranking formal and cultural courts.

B) *Woreda* / District Level Integration

Woreda administration has also legislative, executive and judiciary branches. In terms of performance of decentralization has shown improvement relatively after the financial devolution of *Woreda* since 2006/2007 fiscal year (Taye and Tegegn 2007). Politically, however, the change is very minimal because of the hegemonic presence of EPRDF with its socialist principle of democratic centralism. This principle made the local tier agent of the central government breathing with lung of the nucleus the hegemonic party. This denied the autonomy federal and regional constitutions provided to *Woreda* administration. Thus, integrating indigenous social organizations to this structure will hopefully contribute in improving its exercise of autonomy and performance.

In the legislative council of *Woreda* integration could be done by providing proportional seat for each generation sets side by side with the elected representatives with equal vote. The meetings of the council has to be opened and finalized by the blessing of the most senior elders, the *Apologn*, side by side with the official opening and closing speeches of the speaker. This will strengthen the political legitimacy the council as the supreme political organ and manifestation

of the sovereignty of the people to self-determination. It will also be a platform for the practice of democracy to settle differences through discussion and counter checking each other. Elected representatives or party members can counter check one another or generations sets may also counter check one another in council according to democratic principle of dialogue and discussion to settle differences of interest.

In the executive branch of the *Woreda* the integration could be done by providing an opportunity for the wise men, the *Emron's*, to consult the chief administrator on the implementation of development projects, social service provision and justice administration.

With regard to the judiciary branch, however, the customary dispute resolution institution has to be properly empowered and allowed to function along with the formal court. Here there should be room for customary and regular laws according to the principle of legal pluralism. Such an approach is stated in the Regional Constitution in Art. 34/5 as follows:

This constitution shall not preclude the adjuration of disputes relating to personal and family laws in accordance with religious and customary laws, with the consent of the parties to the dispute. Particulars shall be determined by law³⁴.

Based on this constitutional provision, there should be freedom for individuals to settle their matters by their own choice between the customary or modern institutions of justice. There should be a regulatory body regulation to implement the principle of legal pluralism.

Generally, all the Regional, Zonal and Woreda level governments should work together for realization of the constitutional right the Nyangatom people. Attention should be given to the sustenance of their identity through empowering the key elements of their indigenous social organizations and cultural values by gradually adapting those elements which are not compatible to universal human right principles, constitutional democratic rights and to the principles of

³⁴ The Constitution of Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State of Ethiopia (Revised 2001) Art. 34/5

gender equality. Therefore, nurturing and refining the key elements of the Nyangatom social organization for contemporary application could be done by integrating them to the existing institutions of governance at the local level.

Hence, the backbone of the Nyangatom social organization, the age and the generation set needs serious attention. The Woreda administration in collaboration with Culture and Tourism Office should create favorable condition for the continuity of the age and generation set systems. Celebrations of the cultural festivals needs to be sponsored organized and led by the woreda government. This could be done like other ethnic groups in the region celebrate their cultural festivals. *Alaba Sera* celebration of the Alaba, *Yo Masqala* of Gamo and *Fich Chembalala* of Sidama can be taken as best practices. The *Asapan*, the *Emugnan* and the *Ekmomor* have to be seen in this context. However, the practice that is related to human sacrifice in the traditional *Asapan* that is leading to the stagnation the ritual that plays pivotal in the handing over ceremony of generational fatherhood has to be seen critically. Discussions have to be made with senior elders and the *Apologn's* from each territorial section to come up with solution from the culture itself. It is possible to make the sacrifice symbolic in the contemporary application or replace it with animal sacrifice.

Chapter Seven

Summary of Major Findings

- The Nyangatom, belong to the Nilotic people of the central and eastern Africa who share common ancestor called the *Ateker*. The *Ateker* ethnic cluster comprises of the Karamoja, Dodos and Jie of Uganda, and the Turkana of Kenya, and the Toposa and Jiye of South Sudan together with the Nyangatom of Ethiopia. These people have common features like similar myth of origin, mutually intelligible language, common belief system, similar social organizations, and similar music and dances.
- The Nyangatom social organizations have two basic principles. These are generation and age set. Generation-sets are an ordering phenomenon of the male population, where each man is a member of the generation-set following that of his father's. Age sets are sub groups within generation sets involved in common pastoral and military activities. Members of a certain age group are boys who have suckled their mothers' breast during the same time. An individual is per definition both a member of an age and a generation-set. Male Nyangatom are born into the generation-set below their fathers, and each generation-set consists of a number of consecutive age-sets.
- Generation set is a categorical father son relationship that divides the Nyangatom society in to groups containing a group of grand- fathers, a group of fathers and a group of sons, and a group of grandsons. The first historical father-son relationship was established when the first group of the Nyangatom split away from the Toposa and came to lower Omo area around 1850s.
- An age-set refers to groups of people, male or female, who are of approximately the same age, have their own and distinct name, distinguishing features like special ornaments etc., and act as a corporate group. It is sub groups within generation sets involved in common pastoral and military activities (raiding).
- Nyangatom social organization provides respect and recognition for women. The girls form their own age-sets within their fathers generation set. After marriage, however, the

interest of woman is voiced through their husband's social organization. The women are incorporated into the generation and age-set of their husbands.

- The Nyangatom consider themselves as members of one family regardless of their differences in terms of pattern of settlement and territorial sections. There is no way one Nyangatom group may attack another Nyangatom group. Intra-Nyangatom raiding is unthinkable. However, when conflict arises among individual members of the Nyangatom, the peace-makers and senior members of the top generation-set would interfere to resolve disputes through the customary mechanisms, which are followed by the punishment of the wrongdoers.
- The Nyangatom were incorporated to Ethiopian empire towards the last years of 19th c. However, because the physical factors like the Omo river and the very harsh climate in their location they remained without effective inclusion to the Ethiopian state system until the post 1991 period. Beginning from their incorporation to the Ethiopian dominion the Nyangatom social organization gradually lost their importance and today the prevailing institutions of governance in their district is elite based elected western form of local administration. However, most the Nyangatom society still have strong attachment to their indigenous social organizations.
- There are mechanisms or policy implications through which some aspects of Nyangatom social organization could be nurtured in order to be integrated in the existing system of local governance. In fact, some elements of the system, for example, the human sacrifice in Asapan generational authority transfer ritual, are not compatible with 21st c democratic and human right perspectives. Therefore, the appropriate platform has to be created for the practitioners of the culture to adapt aspects of their culture with changing circumstances in the dynamic world.

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Appendices



Map 1: The Administrative map of Ethiopia before 1941