

The place of children through the lens of generational and
gender relationships in *Awra Amba* community, northern
Ethiopia

A Master's Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the place of children through the lenses of generational and gender relationships in Awra Amba community, Northern Ethiopia. It discusses what children's life from gender and generational perspective look like in Awra Amba community. The study is based on the following research questions. What are the social values and roles of children in the community? What does gender relationship among children and between children and adults look like in Awra Amba community? What is "special" about children of Awra Amba Community? To document the place of children through answering these questions, the study employs qualitative research methods such as in-depth interview, focus group discussion observation, informal dialogue and home visit. These qualitative methods were used as the issue to be explored needed a complex and detailed understanding. In other words, the research project was qualitative in its nature because the researcher needed an intricate and thorough understanding of the issue. Children whose age ranges from 12-15 years and their parents (both mothers and fathers) whose age ranges from 32-40 and 48-72 respectively including the founder and the leader of the community, Zumra Nuru, were included in the study as participants (research subjects). The study is informed by social constructivism through viewing children's place and childhood among the Awura Amba community from discursive construction, structural construction, generational construction and children as social actors perspectives. The study observes children's place among the community from three angles: gender equality, social order and intergenerational relationships. It argues that children are active participants in activation and perpetuation of gender equity, social order and egalitarian intergenerational relationships. Such perspectives of children indicate that children are well aware of the collective values among the community and are exercising them as part of their everyday lives.

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Acronyms

AAESRO	Action Aids Ethiopia Semen Region Office
ADA	Amhara Development Association
ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
ANRSCTB	Amhara National Regional State Culture and Tourism Bureau
CSA	Central Statistical Agency
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
DERG	Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police, and Territorial Army that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1987
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
UNCRC	United Nation Convention on the Rights of a Child
UN	United Nation

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I briefly discuss the topic of the research project, the reasons that triggered me for choosing the topic and also the study area, aims of the research project, and the research questions.

1.1. The Research topic and reasons for choosing it

Studies show that little is known about Ethiopian children and childhood (Abebe, 2008, Poluha, 2007). This is most probably due to the fact that children, as earlier women, mainly have been conceptualized as dependents, and that their thoughts, ideas and acts were not expected to have an impact on the society at large. Neither was it thought that knowledge about children could inform the workings of the society in which they live (Poluha, 2007).

According to Abebe (2008), the limited research that had been carried out in Ethiopia focuses on children who are believed to have been suffering from particular social and economic disadvantages like HIV/AIDS, poverty and neglect. However, this study explores the place of children through the lenses of generational and gender relationships in Awra Amba community, Northern Ethiopia.

Sara James (1990), in her article “is there a ‘place’ for children in Geography?”, argues that the topic has been largely ignored because of the indisputable and intrinsic difficulties associated with the study of children and their ' natural ' and humanly created environments. According to Poluha, children need to be studied in their own right for adults to learn about how they think, what priorities they make and what they consider important. However, children should also be studied because they are social beings, their living conditions can teach us about

the dominant ideology, norms and economy that prevail in the society in which they live (Poluha, 2007).

I had many reasons for choosing this topic. The first and the most important reason was that this community is unique among other communities in Ethiopia in promoting and ensuring gender equality and working towards alleviating poverty. In Ethiopia, for years and still now, patriarchal system has been deep rooted in almost all societies, both in urban centres and in rural areas.

The system encourages male dominance in making important decisions for and on behalf of children and women. The interest of children and women is not considered and their voices are also not heard. What the adult male says, no matter whether he is right or wrong, should be done. But, this is not the case in Awra Amba community, where I researched for this master's thesis project.

A person, whom I call as “unschooled philosopher”, having a brave heart that always sought justice, and challenged injustices and inequalities, emerged and created a community of his own vision which is free of violence, free of work division, free of institutionalized religion, free of gender inequalities and patriarchy. “He can't read or write, but Zumra Nuru created a society that would have made Karl Marx proud”, says (Halpern, 2007:1).

I always wondered how this community could emerge in that remote and largely isolated area where there were not basic facilities and infrastructures like road, electricity, television, telephone, and others. Not only this but also the community is surrounded by a very conservative and fanatic religious (Orthodox Christians and Muslims) Amhara society.

The Amhara society strongly believes in male dominance neglecting and disempowering women and children. The emergence of the Awra Amba community in this highly conservative, religious, patriarchal and authoritarian society/region is something incredible and beyond imagination for me. These and other reasons really made me to decide to make this study in this uniquely and/or extra ordinarily egalitarian community which Joumard (2010:1) refers to as “an Ethiopian utopia”.

It had been my dream to visit and study this community since I was undergraduate student. But now my dream came true and I was so excited to get to know this community and study the new form of child-adult relationships that has taken shaped since 1972.

1.2. Aims of the research project

The research explores the place of children through the lens of generational and gender relationships between children and adults in Awra Amba community, Northern Ethiopia. More specifically, the aims of the project are as follows:

1. To explore children’s life from gender and generational perspective in Awra Amba community
2. To explore the social values and roles of children in the community
3. To explore gender relationship among children and between children and adults in the community
4. To find out what is “special” about children of Awra Amba community
5. To document the sites of gender relations in everyday life in Awra Amba community

1.3. Research questions

1. What does children's life from gender and generational perspective look like in Awra Amba community?
2. What are the social values and roles of children in the community?
3. What does gender relationship among children and between children and adults look like in Awra Amba community?
4. What is "special" about children of Awra Amba Community?

1.4. Organization of the thesis

This thesis is organized into seven different chapters including the previously discussed introductory chapter, chapter one in which topic of the study, reason for choosing the topic, aims of the study and the research questions were stated. Afterwards, the paper presents six chapters. Chapter two discusses location and detailed background information of the study area. Methodological approaches such as nature of the study, the study design, access and challenges, how rapport was established, the study participants, inclusion criteria, sample size, sampling method, tools used, how the field was left, the data analysis plan, and ethics are discussed in chapter three. Chapter four presents the previously conducted researches on Ethiopian childhood, and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks used in the study. In chapter five, children and their egalitarian social relationships in their community is discussed. Chapter six elaborates on gender equality among children and their parents from different perspectives. Finally, chapter seven concludes the paper and indicates some identified gaps.

CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF THE STUDY AREA

In this chapter, I discuss background information of the study area. The background information is combinations of primary source of data which was collected by interviewing the founder of the community, Zumra Nuru, secondary data/ a review of archive materials, a documentary film which was prepared by the Amhara National Regional State Culture and Tourism Bureau (ANRSCTB) with the support of Action Aids Ethiopia Semen Region Office (AAESRO), and the review of literatures.

“Ethiopia is the cradle of the human being. It has a rich cultural heritage back 3000 years. It is the home to many nations and nationalities [80+], a country which has a proud history [free of colonization], a country which has 13 months of sunshine” says the documentary film. The film adds that the country is the heart of several animal species, breathtaking mountains, national parks, valleys, forests, hot springs and falls.

Currently, Ethiopia has nine National Regional States. **Amhara** National Regional State is one of the nine ethnic divisions (*kililoch*) of Ethiopia, containing the homeland of the Amhara people. Previously known as **Region 3**, its capital is Bahir Dar. Located here is Ethiopia's largest inland body of water, Lake Tana, which is the source of the Blue Nile River. The region also has the Semien Mountains National Park, which includes the highest point in Ethiopia, Ras Dashan (Wikipedia, nd).

According to Amhara Development Association (ADA, nd), the Amhara Regional State is located 9°-14° N and 36°-40°E in Ethiopia's Northwest. The region is divided into three major agricultural climatic zones: highland (above 2,300 meters above sea level), semi-highland (1,500 to 2,300 meters above sea level) and lowland (below 1,500 meters above sea level) accounting

20%, 44% and 28% respectively. This varied ecology lends itself well to diversified agriculture (ibid).

Based on the 2007 Census conducted by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA), the Amhara Region has a population of 17,221,976 out of which 8,641,580 were men and 8,580,396 women; urban inhabitants number 2,112,595 or 12.27% of the population. With an estimated area of 159,173.66 square kilometers, this region has an estimated density of 108.2 people per square kilometer. For the entire Region 3, 983,768 households were counted, which results in an average for the Region of 4.3 persons to a household, with urban households having on average 3.3 and rural households 4.5 people (CSA, 2007).

As stated by Amhara Development Association (ADA, nd), the region's topography includes plains, gorges, plateaus, hills and mountains and its altitude ranges from a low of 500 meters to a high of 4,620 meters found at the peak of Ras Dashen. The Ras Dashen Mountain, which is found in North Gondar administrative zone, is Ethiopia's highest mountain and Africa's fourth highest mountain (ibid).

The Amhara Regional State shares common borders with the state of Tigray in the north, Afar in the east, Oromiya in the south, Benishangul/Gumuz in the south west, and the Republic of Sudan in the west (CSA, 2007). Regarding ethnic composition, the majority of the population (91.5 %) is Amhara, whose mother language is Amharic at 93 %, and which is Ethiopian Orthodox at (82.5 %) and Muslim at (17.2 %). In addition, the ethnic composition includes Oromo (3%), Agew/Awi (2.7%), Kimant (1.2%), and Agew/Kamyr (1%), (ibid).

2.1. Major Economic Activities

About 85% of the people are engaged in agriculture. The State is one of the major Teff (staple food) producing areas in the country. Barely, wheat, oil seeds, sorghum, maize, wheat, oats, beans and peas are major crops produced in large quantities. Cash crops such as cotton, sesame, sunflower, and sugarcane grow in the vast and virgin tract of the region's lowlands. The water resources from Lake Tana and all the rivers found in the region provide immense potential for irrigation development. About 450,000 hectares of arable land is irrigable and suitable, especially for horticultural development (http://www.ethemb.se/Regional%20States/Amhara_regional_state.htm)

2.2. Rivers and Lakes

The State of Amhara is divided mainly by three river basins, namely the Abbay, Tekezze and Awash drainage basins. The Blue Nile (Abbay) river is the largest of all covering approximately 172,254 Km². Its total length to its junction with the White Nile in Khartoum is 1,450 Km, of which 800 km is within Ethiopia. The drainage-basin of the Tekeze River is about 88,800 km². In addition, Anghereb, Millie, Kessem and Jema are among the major national rivers. Tana, the largest lake in Ethiopia is located at center of the region. It covers an area of 3,6000 km². Besides, other crater lakes like Zengeni, Gudena Yetilba, Ardibo (75km²) and Logia (35 km²) are small lakes that are found in the region. The rivers and lakes of the region have immense potential for hydroelectric power generation, irrigation and fishery development (http://www.ethemb.se/Regional%20States/Amhara_regional_state.htm)

2.3. Livestock, Fauna and Minerals

The estimated livestock population of the region is 9.1 million cattle, 8.4 million sheep and goats, 1.6 million equines, and 8.5 million poultry. About 40% of the livestock populations of the country are found in this region. The huge livestock potential of this region gives ample opportunity for meat and milk production, food processing as well as leather and wool production. Walia ibex, Semien fox, Gelada-baboon, Grey Duiker, Klipspringer, Hyenas and Corcodile are among the twenty-one species (three endemic) that are found in the region, especially at the Semien mountain national park. Wild fowls, Francolins, Pelicans, Cranes, Ibises, and Stocks are among the birds that are found in the region. The State of Amhara has mineral resources such as coal, shell, limestone, lignite, gypsum, gemstone, silica, sulfur and bentonite. Hot springs and mineral water are also found in the region (http://www.ethemb.se/Regional%20States/Amhara_regional_state.htm)

2.4. Tourism and Heritage

The 12th century Rock-Hewn churches of Lalibela, and the palaces in Gondar are the world known heritages of the country. The traditional mural paintings and hand craft, the preserved corpse of the royalty found in the ancient monasteries in Lake Tana, as well as the Semien mountains national park, which shelters the endemic Walia ibex are spectacular tourist attractions. Three tourist attractions found in the region are registered in the UNESCO list of world heritages. Besides these known heritages, the Blue Nile Falls, the caves and unique stones in northern Showa, and the Merto Le Mariam church are special tourist attractions (http://www.ethemb.se/Regional%20States/Amhara_regional_state.htm)

The Amhara region is divided into eleven administrative zones (equivalent to provinces), including the South Gondar zone. The zones themselves divided into 105 *woredas* (equivalent to districts). The South Gondar zone (Debub Gondar) is located along the Tana Lake, on the eastern shore. Its capital city is Debre Tabor. It is divided into 9 *woredas*, including Fogera *woreda*. The Fogera *woreda* or district covers an area of 1174 km², and is made with 76 % plains, 11 % hills and 13 % undulated lands (Joumard, 2012). According to the 2007 census (CSA, 2007), this *woreda* had 228 000 inhabitants, whose 89 % were living in rural areas and are farmers; they were Orthodox at 95.8 % and Muslim at 3.6 %.

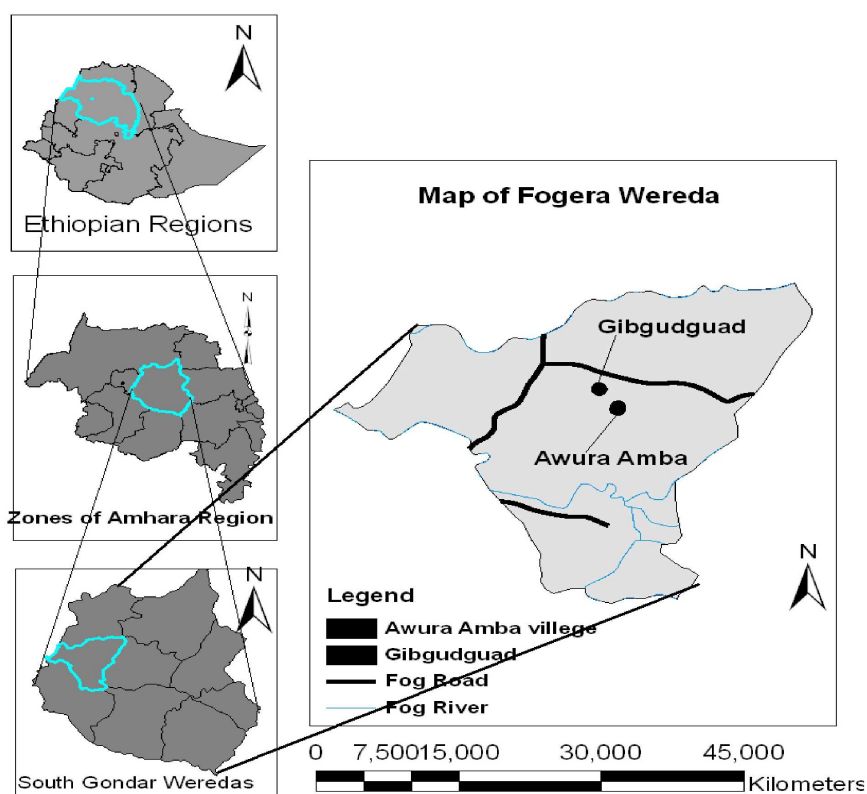


Figure 1: Map of the study area as developed by Getu Demek Alene (Alene, 2011)

According to (Wereda Rural Development Office and ORDA (nd), unpublished documents, cited by Joumard (2012: 28), the population growth was 3 % a year between 1994 and 2005, and 92 % of the people obtained their livelihood from mixed farming where 29 % of the inhabitants had no oxen, which is a means of production and an indicator of wealth status.

The average land holding size of household is estimated to be 2.1 ha, where 1.4 ha is for cropland and 0.7 ha is for grazing. Crops provide 65 % of the annual household income, the livestock 35 %, 0,5 % being obtained from the sale of trees, wood and crop residue. The small town of Wereta is the capital city of this *woreda* (ibid).

The 668 hectare sub-watershed of the Fogera wereda where Awra Amba is located has an average elevation of 2050 m (1900-2200 m) and is occupied by crops at 88 %, by grass (22 ha) and forest at 3 % each, and by homesteads at 6 %. The major crops that grow in the area are *tef*, millet, *nuge*, maize, beans and peas (ORDA, nd, cited Atenafu 2005 as cited in Joumard, 2012:29).

One of the *kebeles* of the Fogera *woreda* is Woji-Arba-Amba which administers Awra Amba as well as the villages of Maksegn, Dej Mesk, and Jib Gudguad. This *kebele* had 8 908 inhabitants in 2007 (CSA, 2007). Accordingly, the Awra Amba community resides in the north-western part of Ethiopia. According to the current administrative division in Ethiopia, this community is found in the Amhara Regional State, South Gonder Zone, Fogera Woreda, Woji-Arba-Amba Kebele. Joumard (2012: 7) expresses the community and the location as “The Ethiopian village of Awra Amba is a well-established community with a truly extraordinary life style, especially in terms of equality between men and women, community spirit, absence of [institutionalized] religion, honesty, hard work, and democracy. A ferment for emancipation”.

It is a cohesive community with unique values and social orders. The community was found and built in 1972 by an individual person known as Zumra Nuru (as can be seen in picture 1 below) who has been the educator and leader of the community and nationally recognized for establishing a model community in terms of gender equality and concern for education and transformation. “I regard it as the model for the world community on how gender issues should be treated. I have come across nothing else like it anywhere in Africa, and indeed the world. I am using it to inspire the work of my office here on gender mainstreaming and empowerment of women”, said EU Ambassador to Ethiopia, Tim Clarke, in The Christian Science Monitor report (Orenstein, 2010:2) when he was talking about Awra Amba.



Figure 2: Zumra Nuru, Founder and leader of the Awra Amba Community.

“Today the village is credited with being an extraordinary initiative within a traditional and conservative society, with triggering amazing change in the Amhara region, and as being a good example for other Ethiopian communities and even beyond Ethiopia because of its gender equality, its work ethic, and its social security system" (Halpern, 2007:2).

According to the information obtained from members of the community, the social and cultural lives of the Awra Amba community is founded on five major values. These are:

1. Respecting the right to the equality of women.
2. Respecting children's rights.
3. Helping people who are unable to work due to old age and health problems.
4. Avoiding bad speech and bad deeds, such as theft, lying, insulting, cursing, quarrelling, killing, conflict, etc. Instead improving practices of cooperation, peace, love, and good deeds in general.
5. Accepting all human beings as brothers and sisters, regardless of their differences.

These are pillars on which the interpersonal and intergenerational relationships among the community are built. Members of the community share collective social responsibilities and these responsibilities are divided among social groups known as committee (in Amharic). Different social groups are responsible for different social activities.

There are social groups for development plans, receiving guests, keeping orders, the lost and found property handling, caring for the weak people, identifying and solving social disorders, security, education and hygiene. Joumard (2012:7) states that “Awra Amba is a community built on humanist values, which are implemented through its life style.” It is a secular community with belief in respect for humanity. Members of the community think that somebody who does good, thinks good, avoids bad, thinks for others in the way she/he thinks for her/himself, She/ he is

congruent with the creator. They do not call themselves as Christian and/or Islam but as human kinds.

The community is located about 67 kilometers in the north-eastern part of Bahir Dar [the region's capital city] and 631 kilometers from Addis Ababa (cited from the documentary film). To go to Awra Amba, it is mandatory to leave the Bahar Dar - Gondar road and around one kilometre after Woreta, it is about eight to ten kilometres by car over a road sealed in 2010 in the direction of Debre Tabor and then a 2-kilometres track to the South, paved by Awra Amba community (Atenafu, 2005 as cited in Joumard, 2012: 29).

During my fieldwork period, the 2 kilometers road that takes you to the community was under renewal/reconstruction. As far as population is considered, the community consists of 141 households of which 93 is male headed and 48 is female headed. The total population is 463. Out of which, 230 are males and 233 are females (this information was obtained from Gebeyehu, the local's finance head during the fieldwork). There was no separate statistical data for children which show their proportion. Below is the table showing the community's population distributions.

Table 1: Population distributions of Awra Amba Community.

Age	Male	Female	Total
0-7	34	41	75
8-14	55	41	96
15-34	81	84	165
35-44	21	28	49
45-64	27	25	52
65+	12	14	26
Total	230	233	463

A visionary and difficult start (Joumard, 20110) took place when the founder of the community, Zumra Nuru, was a kid. “My mother told me that I was able to walk when I was six months old. I used to hear my mother telling others that I asked questions about religion when I was two and about social life after observing inequalities and unfairness among people when I was four years old”, says Zumra (see also Habtamu, 2009). Zumra said that both his parents were farmers. They both spent the whole day in the farm but when they came back home, it was time for his father to rest but never for his mother.

After his mother had been through the same tiring day as his father, she had to do everything at home. She was expected to cook, clean the house, wash his father’s feet and serve the traditional meal. Zumra, speaking about his mother workload says “even if she worked hard day and night she was not able to finish the house work given to her. If she had too many house tasks or did not finish them on time, my father said to her: ‘What are you doing sitting here?’ She was assaulted, insulted, cursed at and sometimes beaten. When I observed this situation, I couldn’t tolerate about what was going on. Did my mother have more energy than everyone else? I asked myself”. He found it unfair that while his mother helped his father on the farm, his father never helped his mother in the home. He swore to himself that he would change things when he grew up (France24, 2009).

Zumra disclosed that his family was of Muslim origin. One day he visited his Christian neighbors and ate meat from their home. His mother, when she knew that he was eating Christian’s meat, got angry and snatched the meat that he was eating from his hand and threw it away telling him that they couldn't eat meat slaughtered by Christians. He asked his mother if the meat they eat was not from the same animal or if Christians were not human beings like them (Habtamu, 2009 & Joumard, 2010). A now 66 years old Zumra Nuru was born on August 21,

1946 in Simada and he grew up as a farmer's son in the vicinity of Wogeda, in Amhara region, which is not far from the present location of Awra Amba community.

Zumra never went to school because he had to work in the fields instead of going to school. As a result, he is illiterate except later in life he learned to sign and write a few words, but is still unable to read a newspaper or a book (Habtamu, 2009, Joumard, 2010). As I mentioned earlier, Zumra started his queries from the age of four wondering about the unfairness of the gender inequality, the maltreatment of the elderly, labour exploitation, cruel punishment of children, and dishonest dealings among people.

In a very religious, traditional and patriarchal society, he was ostracized from childhood by his family and his neighbors, who considered him to be mentally ill, not only because of his support of equality between men and women but also because of his opposition to institutionalized religion (Habtamu, 2009, Joumard, 2010).

Zumra said he went out from his parent's house as a result of his non-ending questions about justice and equality and to find people who can accept his ideas. Unlike his friends who attended school, Zumra started his continuous five year journey within the Amhara region (in Gondar, Gojam and Wollo) in search of answers to his questions when he was 13 years old (Habtamu, 2009, France 24, 2009 & Andualem, 2007 as cited in Joumard, 2010:1). "I travelled to find people who would accept my ideas," says Zumra (ibid). As he told me during the in-depth interview I made with him, he returned to his village when he was 18 years old. He told his parents that he wanted to marry. This time his parents, who previously labelled him as a 'mad', thought that he was recovered from his illnesses and felt happy for him. Then, they immediately arranged a marriage for him and he got married the same year he returned back (see also Habtamu, 2009, France 24, 2009 & Joumard, 2010). In his 20s he became a wandering preacher

of his own ideals in the neighbouring villages (ibid).

Zumra dreamed of setting up this unique community in 1972 (Haile-Michael, 2006 cited in Joumard 2010). He then convinced a small group of men and women of 66 individuals. Eventually, after some defections, 19 families had established a community on about fifty hectares, none of whom were able to read or write (Joumard, 2010).

The people from the neighbouring villages were outraged by the fact that the men, women and children of Awra Amba had the same rights, and by the absence of institutionalized religion in the community. The Derg regime tried vainly to integrate the community in its system. The community began to recognize that it would not be easy to turn Zumra's childhood dream into reality. In 1986, under the pressure of neighbours, their leader was arrested and spent six months in jail without charge and without trial (Joumard, 2012).

In the final days of the Derg regime in 1988, when they heard that people from the nearby villages were planning to massacre Zumra and all of his followers, everyone in Awra Amba left their homes in the middle of the night and fled to Bonga, a quiet town near Jimma (south-west of Addis Ababa), to save their lives (Andualem, 2006 in Joumard 2010). They wandered for several years in the south of the country, where hunger and illness killed off about thirty of their people. In 1993/94, after the change of government in 1991, the remaining members came back to Awra Amba, only to find that all the fertile land they used to own had been taken over by those powerful people who were opposed to their way of life. They legally applied to the regional government to get their land back. They finally succeeded by contacting the local media, not for bad but to be recognised by others.

However, they did not fully regain the land area they used to own. Only 17.5 hectares out of 50 hectares were given back to them while the rest is still being owned by the neighbourhood community. Joumard (2010) also confirms to this account saying that they have managed to get back only 17.5 hectares of land out of the original fifty which is not enough to feed their growing community.

Unlike the neighbouring communities and other societies in Ethiopia where patriarchal system is still practiced, gender equality is ensured in Awra Amba community. In the small village community of Awra Amba, women and men have the same rights (France 24, 2009). In Awra Amba, says Joumard (2010), children and women are respected and equal to male adults. Gender and age has no place in the community as far as division of work is concerned.

According to Zumra, work should not be assigned and done based on sex but in the community it is believed that work is assigned based on individual's abilities and preferences. Zumra said there was no as such gendered work as men's or women's. He further explained that if he did a man's task it is his father's work and in the same token if he did a woman's task he believed he did his mother's work. Accordingly, in Awra Amaba community, men do women's work and women do men's work as well (see also Calvin, 2009, France 24, 2009 & Andualem, 2007 as cited in Joumard, 2010).

Awra Amba is known as a community where men care for children, cook and spin, and where women plough and weave. Men and women perform all these tasks side by side, while in other Ethiopia societies, these occupations are assigned to the other sex (Joumard 2010). According to Zumra, the only thing men cannot involve in doing is pregnancy/ giving birth to a baby and breastfeeding. Except these two things, he believes that all other things can be done by both sexes including bringing-up and taking care of a baby. There are no social meanings the

community attach to the work they perform and also no valuation around it as far as gender and work is concerned. “In Awra Amba, equality is not only in terms of work but it is also in sharing equal authority at home by both sexes, equality in decision making and equality in property ownership”, says Zumra’s wife, Enani (see also Joumard, 2010).

Early, forced, and arranged marriages are not accepted in the community. Individuals have freedom to choose their love mates. Relationships and marriage is based on the two partners consent. According to the norm of the community, girls are not allowed to marry before 19 years old and boys not before 20. When asked why, Zumra emphasised on the importance of maturity both for girls and for boys so that they would be responsible enough when they get married. He also mentioned that getting married at later age (at least 19 and 20 respectively), would lower the possibility of divorce (see also Joumard, 2010).

It is possible to apply for a divorce to a compliant hearing committee when the two partners can no longer agree to stay together. The case is first forwarded and seen by the complaints hearing committee, which is assigned to deal with the disputes between members. The committee tries to solve the problem and reconcile if possible to keep the marriage from divorce. Divorce comes at last and partners share properties equally when they get divorced and no hostility happens between them, rather they turn to be good friends. One of the study participants told me that he got divorced with his ex-wife and now they are in a good friendship. He said he visited her and so did she. This is not common in the rest of the country.

Most of the time, in other Ethiopian communities, once a couple divorced, there exists hostility and even sometimes killings between the divorced partners. The sharing of resources is also not fair as it is in Awra Amba community. A lady who lives in Awra Amba community justified that being a member of the community is being respected within the family and treated

well equally. She said that she was able to claim her rights and she knew that if she was no longer happy in her marriage, she could divorce and get equal percentage of their properties (France 24, 2009). However, divorce must be justified to be allowed by the community. The acceptable reasons are among others sexual incompatibility, sterility, laziness, existence of repeated disagreements, and violating rights of the partner (Joumard, 2012).

2.4. Education

As discussed by Joumard (2012:63), education is considered to be central in development of children. Continuous acquisition of knowledge about the value system of the community and practical skills of life from home (from the community as well as from school is considered to be a way of expanding and sustaining the ideals and visions of the community. Regarding children's education, Joumard (2012) states:

For the young children who do not go to school and for school children when not at school, this education is provided by older students and adults from the village, especially through a kindergarten and a library with many technical books. All the children who are old enough are going to school. They are very active in social and ethic activities at school, very good in group discussions, very studious and very open. The teachers find them more hardworking, more ethical and more cooperative than the children from neighboring villages. When the children go to school, which is located approximately 5-10 minutes on walk from the village, or come back, they make queue with the younger in front, in order to be protected by the older.

According to Joumard (2012), the concern for child education is high and the educational participation of the children of Awra Amba community is far higher than the children of the other communities in the region. The study emphasizes that children have three forms of social responsibility. These are going to school, playing, and contributing to community work. Their

participation in household activities is as important as their school and play. Children also contribute to the household economy by participating in income generating activities. For instance, at home, they make thread into a usable form (as it can be seen on the picture 2 below) and sell it to the community's weaving enterprise. Thus, all children work (according to their capacities and preferences), play and attend school.



Figure 3: Children working at household sphere for income generation.

2.5. Economic Activities

Ethiopians are familiar with collective and cooperative work, in agriculture (*Debo, Wenfel*), trade, army, as well as for many social events (*Idir, Equb*). In addition, in the recent past, the cooperatives were encouraged by the government for improving the economy of the communities (Yassin, 2008). However, according to Joumard (2012), the Awra Amba community's cooperative has not been created at the initiative of an external authority, but at the

initiative of the cooperative members themselves. The economy of Awra Amba is partially an agricultural economy, following the alternately dry and wet seasons: the agricultural work is more important during the wet season, the cooperative taking over during the dry season mainly through weaving (ibid).

As they cannot live on agriculture alone, given the poverty and the scarcity of the soil, they have diversified into weaving, milling and trade. The cooperative owned in 2010 a weaving workshop, mills, shops and an Isuzu truck (Joumard, 2010). A first mill was donated in 2002 by the regional government through the Amhara Development Association, and since then the cooperative has continued to develop this activity. In 2010, it owned six electric mills for *tef*, maize and sorghum from the village and from neighboring farmers (ibid). Three new mills were added at the beginning of 2012, one for *tef*, the second for maize and the last for husking rice (Crespo, 2012 as cited in Joumard, 2012: 46). The community owns also a breezeblock spinning and weaving workshop with corrugated iron roof (ibid).

The cooperative acquires also eight steel looms and six wood looms. All these looms are operated by hand. The cooperative would like to have electric machines, which are less tiring (Joumard, 2010). The cooperative produces shirts, dresses, skirts, tablecloths, scarves, hats, towels, blankets and other garments (Mamo, 2006 as cited in Joumard, 2012:46), sold on site, in their shops of Wereta and Alem Ber, and on markets. The main customers of the cooperative products are the merchants, visitors, farmers and weavers from the neighboring *kebeles* (Yassin, 2008 in Joumard 2012:46).

The cooperative owns also shops that are located in the village and in the nearby neighboring towns of Wereta and Alem Ber. The shops of the village serve not only the residents of Awra Amba but also other neighboring communities. There is also a multi-service giving

canteen in the village. The canteen is found at the heart of the village where people meet, chat and discuss about every day things as well as big philosophical matters (Tervo, 2009 in Joumard, 2012:46). In the canteen, coffee and alcohols which are considered addictive and a threat to mental well-being is not served to the members of the community, but a lot of tea, milk, mineral waters, meals and soft drinks (ibid). Coffee can be served on request for people who want but members of the community don't drink it. However, alcohols are never served. The Isuzu truck, recently purchased, is used for the supply of raw cotton in Addis Ababa, for the transport of finished products, and for the neighboring villages against payment (Crespo, 2011 in Joumard, 2012).

Finally, the cooperative has a guesthouse (a simple but clean rooms) equipped with bathrooms at a fair, probably cheaper price which is 30 Ethiopian Birr (about 10 kroner) per day. I myself stayed in the guesthouse during the fieldwork.



Figure 4: Guesthouse/hostel of the Awra Amba community.

Other activities such as beekeeping, the production of energy saving stoves and other household utensils, using local materials and local technology are the cooperative's means of income generation (Mekonnen, 2009 in Joumard, 2012:47). However; weaving is the main source of income for the cooperative. Weaving of traditional clothes known as *shemma* is also practiced by all with a family loom and provides a significant source of income during the dry season (Crespo, 2011 in Joumard, 2012:47). There are also possibilities for families to weave raise hens, and produce honey as an alternative income generating activities at private level.

The other source of income for the community is the entrance fee (6 Ethiopian Birr equivalent to 2 Kroner for adults and 3 Birr [1Kroner] for students as of 2012) collected from visitors. The Awra Amba community is one of the places identified and registered as tourist destinations by ministry of culture and tourism. During my stay in the community, I was able to observe lots of different groups of visitors (women, farmers, students, foreigners, religious people and others) coming to the community for a visit. It was common for me to see many full buses and automobiles coming everyday to the area. All staffs of save the children Norway, Gondar branch was one among several other visitors to come to the community.

My impression here was that, unlike all the places across the regions, the entrance fee is the same for all visitors. In other tourist destinations, there is variation in entrance fee between the locals and the foreigners. The foreigners often time pay more (probably 10 times) than the insiders. I can use my own practical example here for justification. I spent two nights and a day in Gondar (one of the ancient and historical cities in Ethiopia) before I went to Awra Amba. While I was going to Gondar, I got to know a woman onboard who came for a visit from Taiwan (she also visited Awra Amba later after a week or so). The next Morning, we went together to visit the Gondar castle. There, I paid 10 Ethiopian Birr (about 3 kroner) for the entrance but she

paid 100 Ethiopian Birr (about 33 Kroner) which was about 10 times the money I paid. There are reasons for this which I do not accept. Hence, I do not discuss that.

However, in Awra Amba community, everyone pays the same entrance fee regardless of its age, sex, color, religion or whatever. I was astonished and asked Zumra, the founder of the community, to chat me a little bit about this. He said that the issue had a lot of disputes and it was not easy to settle it. As he informed me, he was called to the ministry of culture and tourism bureau to discuss the issue. The minister and his colleagues tried to convince him to raise the price of entrance on foreigners. But Zumra disclosed that he argued with them justifying that it would contradict with the values he had for all human beings if he accepted what they said. According to him, black or white, foreigner or insider, men or women, religious or atheist, all are human beings, equal natures, and brothers and sisters. “So, no need to make variation”, he says. Finally, he informed them either to agree with him or he would cancel its registration as a tourist destination otherwise.

Later, Zumra was able to convince them and everyone kept paying equal price for entrance when visiting the community. This indeed justifies the true respect, honesty, fraternity and equality he has for all nations. The money that is collected from entrance fee is used for caring and supporting the elderly people who cannot work either because of sicknesses or senility, has no one to take of them. The community provides them food, shelter, clothes and all the necessary things in line with its capacities.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I discuss the nature of the study, the study design, the challenges faced during the fieldwork especially in getting access to the study participants, how rapport was established, the study participants, inclusion criteria, samples and sampling techniques, methods and techniques used for the data collection, the data analysis plan, ethical considerations and how the fieldwork was left.

3.1. Nature of the study

The research project was qualitative in its nature because the issue needed to be explored and the researcher needed a complex, detailed understanding of the issue. Many studies had been undertaken in Awra Amba community. However, none of them focused on children. To mention some of these previously conducted studies in the area, Hamper, 2007 (In Ethiopia, one man's model for a just society), Gelaw, A., Kagne, H. & Yadeta, G.F., 2009, (reproductive health leadership models from developing countries), Habtamu, E., 2009, (Zumra Nuru: His Awra Amba Community and His Quest for Utopia), Joumard, 2010 (Awra Amba, the Ethiopian utopia), Kebede, T., 2010 (Awra Amba, Zumra's dream land), and Alene, G.D., 2011 (community self-help development). This shows a complete neglect of children's perspectives. Therefore, this study explored the issue since little was known (if at all, orally) regarding children in the community.

3.2. Study design

The study employed an exploratory case study research design. Kreuger and Neuman (2006), says that exploratory studies are used in situations where little is known or written about a certain issue. According to them, exploratory research answers "what" questions whose aims

are to become familiar with basic facts, setting, and concerns about an issue. They further states that exploratory study also helps generate new concepts. Therefore, that was why I employed exploratory case study design to get an understanding of child-adult relationship in the community.

3.3. Access and challenges

According to Ennew et al (2009), it is not always easy to make contact with children to find out about their lives and opinions. They further discuss that parents and teachers may refuse access to children for different reasons. Prior to going to the fieldwork, I did not think I would face any problem regarding access. I was pretty much sure that everything would be okay from what I read and heard about the community. I never expected the “no” word would be waiting for me in the fieldwork prior to my departure. I arrived there after travelling 663 kilometers including the 2 kilometers of walk. I took a minibus that goes to a neighboring community *wej Arba Amba* from the nearby town called *wereta* and got off after 10 kilometers of journey.

The reason for coming this far to research was my own keen interest. The earlier reputation I had about this community impressed me and forced me to undertake my study with them. Things I heard about the community made me eager to go there. As a result, I did not hesitate to take the risks of being unfamiliar to a place where I never went before. As I was new to the area, I talked to an old man who was sitting beside me in the minibus in order to get some information about the community and to show me where I should get off as well. He was willing to help me and we kept on talking.

I paid the minibus’s fare for him and for myself. He was so happy that I paid the fare for him and he was more willing to help me. He promised to take me to the fieldwork place even

though he lived in another nearby village. We got off the minibus when we arrived at the route that took us to Awra Amba. Unfortunately, the two kilometers road was under construction. The season was rainy and the road was so wet and muddy. I stopped for a while, observed the surrounding and I realized that I should change my flat shoes. I wore the boots I intentionally bought for the fieldwork and started walking chatting with the man. The road was really sticky and slippery. Thanks to that old man, he carried my luggage and I kept walking with my backpack.

Finally, we arrived there after 45 minutes of walk. As we were entering the community, I met someone and asked him to guide me. He took us to a guest welcoming cottage and told us to be seated there until he found someone who was responsible to talk to me. Meanwhile, I invited the old man who accompanied me a coffee with many thanks from the community's café and restaurant. He left for his village after a while. Then, a woman, who was one of the members of guest welcoming committee, came and met me. I explained to her why I was there and presented a letter of support which I secured from NOSEB. She received the letter and she took me to their hostel so that I would drop my stuffs there and rest until she presented the letter to the other members, discussed on it and made a reply.

After a while, another guest welcoming committee member, whom I later knew that she was the wife of the founder, came with the previous woman and got to know me. They together informed me that they read the letter and I would meet the founder, Zumra Nuru to discuss the issue with him next time in their presence.

The next day, I was called to show up in their meeting hall to discuss the issue. I happily went there, got to know Zumra. I started telling them who I was and why I was there. I explained

the topic of the study, the purpose and its objectives. I also talked about the ethical considerations of the study. Then, it was Zumra's turn to talk after I finished the explanations. I was actually eager to listen to his speech as it was my first time to meet him in person. I was also expecting him to accept my request happily and to tell me "go-ahead, we are happy that you are here, and the gate is open for you" kind of messages. But I could not believe my ears when I heard him saying "your idea was good but now we stopped allowing people to research on us. Therefore, we are not willing to let you conduct your study." That was a very hard moment to believe and many questions like (what? really? seriously?) started overwhelming my mind.

I was really shocked when I heard this devastating response and I was almost about to cry. I asked him why, getting confused on one hand and being impressed on the other hand because I never imagined it would happen according to my earlier expectations. He replied "well, we appreciate people's success researching on us but we never want to lose our identity as a result of misuse and misinterpretation of the data we provide them. This community has been established by many difficulties. We scarified lives to reach here. We want to keep it growing and expanding. However, some researchers reported what we did not tell them and such deeds spoils what we stand for and that is why we are now refusing not to let anyone research about us." The other two women also confirmed to his speech paraphrasing what had already been said.

I was disturbed and I needed minutes of silence. I tried to concentrate and started to negotiate. Gueillemin & Gillam, (2004), as cited in Skovdal & Abebe, (2012: 78), states that ethical research involves negotiations over institutional and procedural ethics requirements. Accordingly, I said to them that what they mentioned and their concern were all right and what the previous researchers did was totally unethical if they had done as they said so. I added that

not all researchers are the same doing unethical research. It is difficult to generalize for all researchers taking one or two unethical researchers. I also confirmed that I would not report what they did not tell me. He laughed and replied “everybody says the same thing when they come. It is hard to believe this. Our intension is rescuing the community to sustain its values and norms and avoiding creating wrong perceptions about it by the so called ‘researchers’ who tell others in their writings what we do not tell them.” I asked him to tell me what exactly the previous researchers did that defamed the community’s reputation. I was told that the previous researchers reported wrong information regarding religion and funeral.

The Awra Amba community members believe that there is one creator or super natural, be it God or Allah. But they never want to label themselves as either Christian or Muslim. Their justification for this is that there should not be a boundary among human beings taking one side because all are created by the creator with no difference and discrimination. "I began thinking about these issues of religion. Later I thought why not make one family? There is one God. So why not unite? Honesty and love for fellow human beings is our religion", says Zumra (Hamper, 2007:1).

That is why they do not have either a church or a mosque (an institutionalized religion) because they believe that they themselves are the temples of the creator of the universe if they do the right things/good deeds. “Not surprising, there is no picturesque church or mosque decorating the village and religious observance is shunned” (Hamper, 2007:1).But, this concept was misunderstood by many of the previous researchers and reported as absence of/no religion.

Members of the Awra Amba community disprove the claim that others confer to them as “absence of religion”. They argue that the way they practice religion may differ from others. But

they claim they have their own “strict and practical religion”. The following statements justifies this,

We believe that we have the first and the original belief /religion/. Belief /religion/ should be expressed by practical good deeds. We also believe that we human beings are the temples or mosques of the creator created by Him. The community shouldn't be considered as non religious. Since we have our own religion which is manifested by believing as the creator is letting us inhale cold air and exhale warm air being within us; not within a building we construct.

Zumra Says, “When I became adult, people said to me that my ideas and practices were good but they asked me why I didn't have a church or a mosque. Building a church or a mosque was not the problem, I said to them. I asked them where the Creator was found. They replied that He could be found everywhere. So I answered, that means He doesn't have a housing problem. On the other hand I asked them where Allah was found. They replied that he was found everywhere. We all agreed with this idea”.

He further says that he couldn't understand why he should build a house in one particular place, where he could go inside to meet the Creator if He was to be found everywhere.

I said to them your mind might allow you to do this. But the Creator controls me. I asked them whether they think that we have the ability to control the Creator by ordering Him to get in and out of there. Are we not still his creations that He built us? Why could we not be his church or his mosque? That we call 'church' or mosque' is what we built. Aren't we His creations with our eyes, ears, thinking minds, hands, legs and the ability to speak?

According to him, both the Creator and humans can be found everywhere. “I enquired whether He kept us alive by getting rid of warm air and supplying fresh air living with us or living in the house that we built”, says Zumra.

For the Awra Amba community belief /religion/ means thinking peacefully and creating peace. The community lives by creating peace, helping people in need, loving other people like him/herself, doing to others what he/she likes to do to him/herself, and avoiding doing bad deeds to others. Their belief consists of the aforementioned points. Zumra gives home work for those who say the Awra Amba community has no belief/religion. The home work is presented as follows:

What is the Awra Amba community doing, saying and thinking?

What are those people, who consider themselves having faith, doing, saying and thinking?

What is needed in the present times?

Regarding the funeral, earlier researchers reported that it is undertaken by two people which were out of the reality of the community’s moral values. These were the two examples they mentioned among many other misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the earlier researchers who researched about the community.

I spent much time to convince them but they kept on refusing. Finally, I just gave up and asked Zumra to do me a favor. “Could you please write me a letter of refusal mentioning all the reasons you stated above so that I would show it to my supervisor? Otherwise he would not trust me unless I do so”, I asked him. He kept silent for a while and said “the fact that you came from a far place, we allowed you to do your job. It is up-to you either to kill or to save us.” I responded to him that I would not be staying there unless they gave me permission happily, not

just for the sake of the distance I traveled because I went there by interest and I wanted to stay when they are interested too. They asked me how long I was going to stay there and I told them the time allowed for the project. They wanted me to stay there at least from three to six months so that I would show them my work progress and they made sure that I did not distort the information they provided me. I assured them that staying there the period of time they proposed was impossible as per the schedule of my school. When they knew that I was not staying longer than the time frame allocated for the study, they set a precondition.

The precondition was to send draft of the thesis before it gets published for the final submission so that they would read it through and comment on it if there existed misinterpretations which did not represent the community. We debated on the issue of sending the draft of the thesis. I explained that my work is more of with children. I told them children's perception is different from adults. So, it would be problematic if mismatch of interest/expectation existed. But they kept on saying, "we know well our children. They live up to the values, norms and standards of the community." Then, I said okay, I would send it. Finally, we reached on consensus and the gate was opened for me to conduct the study.

The challenge of getting access to enter the fieldwork led me to a negotiation. The negotiation resulted in participatory research approach leading the researcher and the researched to reflexivity on the processes of the study and later on the findings. Skovdal & Abebe (2012), discuss that socio-ethical research is best achieved through reflexivity and continuous dialogue between all the participants in the research including children. As per our agreement to send the draft of the thesis before the final submission, I sent it to them. They went through the paper and sent me 26 different comments on concerns they thought I should make corrections. Most of the comments were regarding the background information and few of them were on the information

mentioned in the methodology. Accordingly, I accepted and corrected the mistakes and misunderstandings I made during the write-up process and sent it back to them. They read it again and confirmed everything was corrected as they liked it to be. They also thanked me for my willingness to accept and correct their concerns. Their feedback is read as follow:

We have gone through the edited thesis. We appreciate your quick reply and your willingness to accept our comments. This shows us your commitment. You did a great job.

3.4. Establishing rapport

Ennew *et al* (2009) discuss that establishing trust takes time, sometimes weeks or months, before starting the actual work to make children feel comfortable in sharing information about themselves freely. They suggest that research plans must allow sufficient time for researchers to build relationship with children. According to them, children are unlikely to tell much about their lives, especially to a stranger (*ibid*).

After the gate was opened and access was allowed, everything went well because children were respectful of the decisions that adults, in this case, the leader make. I was able to easily establish a good rapport with the study participants. Right after getting consent from Zumra, who is the founder of the community, to conduct the study, we kept on chatting on different issues. I opened the conversation saying “I heard that you got an honorary doctorate from Jimma University right?” He replied, “yes, it is true.” I said, “that is great! Jimma is my birthplace.” He said, “really?” I confirmed to him. He said, “Why didn’t you tell us this before so that we can easily know you, where you are from”. I smiled and wanted to hear more from him. He kept on talking about Jimma. He told me that Jimma was grateful to them two times. One was

during their persecution as a result of the rejection of their egalitarianism ideology by the neighboring communities. He told me that the neighborhood communities did not accept his thinking about gender equality, absence of work division, absence of violence, absence of the locally known religion and religious institutions and started to defame him and his fellows by linking things with politics considering them as an opponent of the then governing party, DERG. As a result, they were forced to escape otherwise they would have been murdered. During this time, they fled to Jimma and stayed in the place called *Bonga* for five years.

The second thing he mentioned was that Jimma University awarded him an honorary doctorate in human literacy, giving credits and recognition to the extraordinary contribution he made for the community. On the awarded diploma dated June 12, 2010, it was mentioned that Zumra started fighting the long existed backward tradition and thinking in the surrounding and transformed the lives of the Awra Amba community. It was also stated that by promoting equality for women, improving the work culture, ensuring children's rights and interests, and achieving environmental protection and energy saving, he created a community that has been the island of peace, hardworking and loving not only in the country but also in the continent. He said, "there are many universities in the country. Some of them are even found in the nearby. But none of them has given us recognition. But Jimma University, which is even located further west, honored us for the second time." He was so emotional when he was speaking about this. Finally he said, "now we trust you because the people of Jimma is our rescuer and the fact that you are from there." From that day, everything went smoothly. They provided me a room where I interviewed the participants. We turned to be good friends afterwards.

Concerning the rapport with the children, after knowing whom I would work with, I started meeting them personally and in group prior to the actual work. In these times, I discussed

with them about myself, my childhood, and other things. They were asking me different questions about my education, family, Norway and the like. In the evening we used to play together. One day, I gathered them and taught them a game/play called “*ha hu he*” and they liked it. I also used to ask them to teach me theirs. In doing so, I established a good rapport and made a balance of the power relationship as well.

3.5. The study participants

I researched with minor children whose age ranges from 12-15. My reason here was that in my opinion, children of this age group could express themselves well verbally. Children of this age could also engage in different household, school, social and spiritual activities and this would enable me to explore diverse interactions as a result. I also involved parents (both mothers and father) whose age ranges from 32-40 and 48-72 respectively including the founder and the leader of the community, Zumra Nuru, as a study participant. Brief demographic /background information of the study participants is summarized in a table below.

Table 2: Brief demographic information of the study participants.

	sex	Number	Age range	Education	Total participants
Children	Boys	3	13-14	5 th – 8 th grade	12
	Girls	3	12-15	4 th -8 th grade	
Parents	Fathers	3	48-72	Adult learning – 7th grade	
	Mothers	3	32-40	Adult learning	

3.6. Eligibility/inclusion criteria

1. He/she must be permanent resident in the community
2. He/she must be willing to participate
3. Both sexes with equal proportion

3.7. Sample size

Different literatures suggest that qualitative research approach employs smaller samples. Grinnell (2001) says, a qualitative study is aimed at an in depth understanding of a few cases, rather than a general understanding of many cases, or people. In other words, the number of research participant in qualitative study is much smaller than in a quantitative one.

McCracken (1998), when he speaks about the size of respondents in qualitative study, he says “less is more”. He further says, it is more important to work longer, and with greater care, with a few people than more superficially with many of them. Accordingly, I researched with a total of 12 participants, of which 6 were children of both sexes (three girls and three boys) and 6 parents (three mothers and three fathers), and few indirect participants with whom I made informal dialogues.

3.8. Sampling methods

I used purposive sampling method. This was because, in purposive sampling, also known as judgmental or theoretical sampling, we use our own judgment in selecting a sample. The basis for selecting such a sample is that it can yield considerable data particularly when used with qualitative research design (Grinnell, 2001).

3.9. Methods used for data collection

Ennew et al (2009), defines methodology as the theory of research practices according to how the subject of research is viewed. They further discuss that research methodology explains the reasons for using certain methods and the principles for using them. Research methods are the ways researchers and research participants communicate, or by which a researcher observes individual and group behavior (ibid). In this study, an in-depth interview was used with the respondents to enable the researcher to get a greater insight and more in-depth understanding of the topic. In addition, focus group discussion, participant observation, informal dialogue, and home visit were used to generate data. According to Grinell (2001), a case study routinely uses multiple data sources and data collection methods in order to attain an in depth understanding of the case being studied. Ennew *et al* (2009: 1.21, 1.23) also suggest to employ multiple methods of data collection. They further state that scientific social research use more than one method to collect information, and then cross-check between the data collected using different methods,...good social research needs more than three methods (ibid). Tape recordings for voice/verbal communications, and writing up notes for non verbal communications were applied at time of data collection.

3.9.1. In-depth interview

In-depth interview is a useful qualitative data collection technique that can be used for a variety of purposes. It is most appropriate for situations in which you want to ask open-ended questions that elicit depth of information from relatively few people (Diehl et al, 2011). According to Diehl et al, (2011), in-depth interview is a valuable tool to guide our work when we want to gather richer data. There really is no substitute for face-to-face communication, and in-

depth interviews provide the structure to ensure that these conversations are both well-organized and well-suited to our purpose (ibid).

In this study, I did an in-depth interview with the study participants using a semi-structured interview guide questions. The questions were developed from the objectives and/or research questions of the study. Demographic information (sex, age, education etc), childhood memories (for parents), about play, work and school, gender and generational relationships, roles standards, values and norms, distinguishing features of the community from other neighboring communities were some of the interview guides. I used open-ended questions in order to explore an in-depth understanding of the topic of the study because I had a chance to raise another questions based on what they said. The children were comfortable and confident enough to respond to the questions raised. They asked for more clarification when they got it difficult before they answered. All of them were well conversant and they gave a detailed and relevant answers for the questions they were asked. When they narrated each story, they linked it with the values, standards, ethics, norms and expectations of the community. Often times they said “as a child of Awra Amba community, we do this and that and we don’t do this and that”. The interview took place in the meeting hall/auditorium which they literally call it as “museum”. The interview took on average 40 minutes.

3.9.2. Focus group discussion

Ennew et al (2009) state that focus-group discussion is a method of data collection on a particular topic involving a carefully planned discussion among a small group led by trained facilitator or moderator. They add that the members of the focus group usually share common characteristics, such as the same age and sex, or the same socio-economic background (ibid). I

did four focus-group discussions (with girls, boys, mothers and fathers) to strengthen the data generation and for triangulation. It really helped me to deepen my insight about the topic and I was able to explore new information which was overlooked by the in-depth interview. Questions which were raised for discussion here was about children's "becoming" or "being", single (childhood) or multiple (childhoods), universality of the childhood or contextual childhood that accounts for changes in times and places and other discussion points which enabled me to reaffirm the gender equality and children's being viewed as social actors and perpetrators.

One challenge I faced in using this method was that, some participants asked me to let them listen to their recorded discussions in the end of the session. As it was unethical to say no to their requests, even though it was time consuming, I had to play the tape for them and wait until it ended. Some smiled at their own conversations and others laughed. It was actually fun for the children to hear back their own voices recorded and that they were excited.



Figure 5: Children listening to their recorded discussions after the FGD.

3.9.3. Observation

Mason (2002) describes observation as the term that refers to methods of generating data which entail the researcher immersing herself or himself in a research setting so that they can experience and observe at first hand a range of dimensions in and of that setting. Mason, when she speaks about what could be observed, she states these might include social actions, behavior, interactions, relationships, events, as well as spatial, locational and temporal dimensions.

According to Ennew et al (2009), observation is the basis of all good research. They further discuss that observation is vital for understanding the context of data, as well as for writing an interesting and believable research report. During my stay in the fieldwork, I employed this method of data collection in the research process. I tried to observe children in different settings such as family, preschool, work and play. In doing so, I was able to generate important data about their daily lives, the social interactions and their surroundings.

In the family setting, I observed that children had equal places with their parents. They had the right to ask questions, to provide advices to the parents, plan activities for themselves, discuss on the matters which was not clear for them.

In the preschool setting (because the primary and secondary school was closed for summer vacation), I observed children of age 3-6 attending the class in the morning and in the afternoon. Every parent sends his children to the nearby preschool so that children learn language (communication), alphabets, numbers, values, ethics and norms.

In the work setting, I observed many children including the research participants carrying out different activities (both household and communal activities) according to their capacity. They clean, cook, fetch water, thread, spin, weave, sell and buy, look after animals, and deliver

messages. One thing that should be stressed here regarding work is that, children of the Awra Amba community plan daily and weekly activities for themselves based on their ability and interest. There is no pressure put on them from their parents to do something out of their age and willingness.

When it comes to play, unlike many other children I know in different Ethiopian communities, children of the Awra Amba community undertake their play activities in group. The group is heterogeneous. Girls and boys all play together. There is no gendered play among children of the Awra Amba community. But in other communities, girls and boys rarely play together. Most of the time girls play only with girls and the same for boys. In this case, the play is also gendered. But in Awra Amba, this does not exist.

3.9.4. Informal dialogue

During my stay in the fieldwork, I did informal conversations with study participants and many other non-study participants both with local members of the community and with the outsiders. This enabled me to gather information which can be used for comparism and cross-checking purpose later on in the analysis process. The topics of discussions were two broader questions such as “what is special about Awra Amba?”, “are children of Awra Amba different from children of other neighboring communities?” Under these two questions, there were many guiding questions based the responses obtained. Responses like equality, fraternity, honesty, hardworking, peacefulness and modernity were collected for the first questions with many details. I was much interested in hearing the responses of the outsiders who were there for different reasons. One youth responded that the Awra Amba community was unique in many aspects. He presented his answer as follow:

This community is very unique. They are hard-working. They do not quarrel. When differences happen, they solve it through discussions instead of using forces. The reason why I come here is that I feel safe whenever I spend my leisure time in here. I do not see people bullying or fighting each other. If I were in my community, I would have gone to groceries with my friends and end up in fighting each other. But here, I can simply buy tea, coffee or soft drinks and enjoy myself watching Television.

He added that the children were honest and so humbles. He disclosed a case he knew about honesty. He said that once children, while playing, found a note of 50 Ethiopian Birr. According to him, the money was given to the committee which takes care of the lost and found properties. The committee kept the money until they found the person who lost it. Finally, they gave it back to the owner of the money. He concluded that if it were in his community, the lost and found money would never go back to the owner. He said that people (of the community he belongs to) just grabbed the lost and found money and use it right away without bothering about giving it back. It was very interesting to listen to this fascinating testimony of the young man about the community he was not belonging to.

Regarding the second question, it is important to present the response I obtained from another outsider young boy. I asked him if children of Awra Amba were different from children of his community. He responded,

Yes, children of the Awra Amba community are different from children of my community. For instance, children of my community spend most of their lives looking after cattle. They are also forced to carryout activities which are beyond their abilities. They rarely go to school and they have lesser time for studies. Corporal punishment applies when

they fail to accomplish even things that exceed their potentials. But in Awra Amba, children are encouraged to go to school and spend most of their times studying. They do only things they are able to do. Their parents don not punish them.

3.9.5. Home visit

I used this method because I wanted to observe children in the family setting carrying out different activities. During the home visit, I observed the interaction between the children and their parents, what children do at home like weaving, making a thread ready for the weaving which they call it locally “*makelem*”, and different household chores. I also attended the ‘family discussion sessions’ which takes place once in two weeks at evening. The family discussion is held once every couple of weeks. Participants are the closest neighbors/household members. I attended the family meeting that took place at Zumra’s house. I was told that about 4-5 households and their members participated in the family discussion session. The objective of the meeting and the discussion session is to assess and evaluate themselves, the activities they planned to undertake two weeks ago and to discuss the plan they have for the next two weeks. Children (girls and boys), parents, grandparents, relatives (women and men), they participate all together in the discussion session.

The discussion is undertaken by a facilitator. The facilitating process rotates among all members/participants on every discussion session. The job of the facilitator is inviting members to make their speech about their personalities, success/failure of the plans they did two weeks ago and their next plans for two weeks. He also presents his own speech about himself at last. Members/participants seat in a half circled pattern. The facilitator first salutes and welcomes the participants. Then, he starts inviting individuals to talk turn by turn either from left to right or

right to left at his convenience. When an individual speaks, others listen attentively. The person on the speech presents his previous plans, his successes and failures and the plan he has for the coming two weeks. He finishes his speech by saying “I shall welcome critics and advices on my weak parts”. At the end of every speech, the facilitator invites other participants to give constructive critics and advices to the weaknesses of the individual. Accordingly, participants raise their hands and give their critics and advices.

Fortunately, on the very first family discussion session I attended, the facilitator was a 13 years old 5th grader boy who was one of my research participants. It was fascinating for me to see children seating equally with their parents, grandparents, siblings, relatives, neighbors and friends to listen, talk and to be listened to. This is absolutely different in another community. Children are told to leave when adults talk. They are not listened to and they are voiceless. I generated a wonderful data through this method which justified these children as “beings, social actors and perpetuators”. The methodological importance of this method was that, it enabled me to practically see what I was told orally during the interview sessions regarding gender equality, children’s autonomy and their participations in family matters.

3.10. Data analysis plan

First, interview and focus group discussion data was transcribed verbatim. The transcribed document was translated to English by the researcher. Next, data generated through observation, informal dialogue, home visit, field notes and written notes taken during the interviews regarding nonverbal communication were integrated into the transcripts. Then, the researcher coded the data, sorted it into categories and formed themes. Then, the content of the data was systematically coded line by line by the researcher. The codes was sorted and grouped

into emerging themes. Finally, the themes were summarized using quotations, stories and narrations.

3.11. Ethical considerations

“Ethical research is predicated on the principle that participants will suffer no harm as a result of the research process or its outcome. At best, it is hoped that the findings will give something back to the participants that will help them in their situations” (Young & Barrett, 2001 cited in Skovdal & Abebe, 2012: 78). After explaining what the study was all about and informing them it would be used for academic purpose, I sought oral consent from parents/legal guardians and oral assent from children. After I obtained their good will, I established a good rapport with parents and the children. The power relationship between me/the researcher and the study participants were friendly. According to Abebe (2009), ethical research negotiates unequal power relations between children and adults. Accordingly, I negotiated unequal power relations by taking the least adult role by being atypical adult (Corsaro, 1996) taking the role of incompetent adult who is willing to be bossed by children. Corsaro also argues that by being atypical adult, researchers can learn about what is considered ‘childlike’ and can win children’s acceptance. I ensured to the participants that participation was voluntary with no harm to them and they could withdraw from participation at any point if they felt uncomfortable. I also ensured that participants’ identity would be protected by providing either anonymity or confidentiality. Participants were not requested to write their names so that I/the researcher could not identify them in the research effort. If at all I have the chance to identify the participants’ responses, I would keep it confidential without disclosing the information obtained.

3.11.1. Informed consent

“Informed consent implies that research participants are given the necessary information to weigh up the risks and benefits involved in their participation” (Williamson, Kent, & Ashcroft, 2005 cited in Skovdal & Abebe, 2012: 82-83) so that they can make an informed decision on their participation. This means that participants have consented to take part in research after being informed of and understanding the aims, methods and processes, and topics of the research and what the data will be used for, as well as making clear that they can withdraw from the research at any time (Ennew et al., 2009).

Accordingly, I sought a repeated and ongoing oral consent from parents and assent from children during the research processes. Every time I met the participants, I explained the topic, the purpose and the objectives of the study. I also made sure that whatever I discuss with them remained confidential between them and me, and the participation was voluntarily and they could stop participating in the research at anytime if they felt uncomfortable. The reason for not using written consent was that, according to Abebe (2009), securing written consent in Ethiopia proved to be difficult because people are reluctant to sign documents considering it as entering into a law which is legally binding.

3.11.2. Reciprocity

Reciprocity is one of the ethical principles in research that may create dilemma for the researcher. Different scholars have different opinions regarding reciprocity. There are two extremes of debate on the issue of reciprocity. Abebe (2009) brought the two arguments into his article regarding reciprocity. One is the recommendation of not to give anything be it in kind or monetary payment to research participants since paying children is considered as creating

division and perpetuates power differentials (Abebe 2009 cited Mikkelsen 1995, Ennew and Plateau 2004: 461).

According to Aptekar and Heinonen, 2003 cited in Abebe 2009: 461), in the same token, they strengthen the ideas of Mikkelsen 1995, Ennew and Plateau 2004 saying that reciprocating children either with food or money is viewed as buying information which may end up in generating unreliable data. On the other hand, the view of not reciprocating children found to be problematic because there is another argument that emphasizes research should be a two way street in which both the research participants and the researcher benefit (Lan and Joes 2003: cited in Abebe 2009:461).

During the gate opening process, one thing I was asked to do was paying the participants especially those working parents. According to Nyambedha (2008 cited in Skovdal & Abebe 2012: 89), research participants have higher expectations of benefiting from their participation in the study than most researchers can live up to. The guest welcoming committee, fortunately three of them and their children were the study participants and they asked me to reciprocate the other participating parents but not them because they considered it is their job to help out and cooperate with guests.

The reason why they proposed the reciprocity issue was that other researcher who did research there paved the way by paying their study participants. Regarding this, Skovdal and Abebe (2012) pointed out that researchers who can provide financial or material incentives may create problems for other researchers who do not have sufficient funds to pay participants and can raise expectations.

I explained to them that I could not afford to pay the participants. They understood me and I did not give out money. However, in the end of the fieldwork, I bought the children six 50 sheet exercise books and two pens for each of them. Children were so happy and comfortable with the material incentives provided to them. On the same day, after a while of the material incentives provided to the children of the study participant, two of them (a boy and a girl), came to my hostel with a big notebook and two pens. I asked what I could help them. They stared at each other and smiled. Then, they told me the notebook and the pens were their gifts for me. I smiled and received their gifts thankfully. I asked them if they could write their names and put their signatures on the notebook so that I would remember them. They did it happily. What a surprise!

3.12. Leaving the fieldwork

After making sure that everything went as per the schedule of the fieldwork, I announced my departure one day earlier. It was not that easy to leave the fieldwork due to the well established relationship with the study participants and with the whole community as well. Some of them even wanted me to stay more. However, I told them I would have loved if I could and that I had to leave. When they knew that I insisted, the children who were involved in the study got together and discussed what they could do. Finally they decided to make a farewell for me. I did not know that they were planning such thing and it was a surprise for me when a child came and took me to one of the participant child's house.

When I got there, I found the house decorated by the child with grasses and flowers for the farewell. Here came the second surprise. I was so amazed and felt happy. They offered me cookies and biscuits they bought for the ceremony. I felt that I should buy soft drinks for us. I

asked two children to go to the community's cafe and restaurant to bring us the drinks. They argued that they didn't want it because they felt it would cost me to pay extra money out of plan. However, I convinced them and we reached on consensus. In the end, they gave me something wrapped with paper. When I opened it, I found a very nice scarf which was made by the community. Sweet of them! After the ceremony, we went out and we had a photo time as well.

Finally, I expressed my heartily felt gratitude for their willingness and cooperation to participate in the research, and for all the great jobs they did. The next morning, I had to wake up earlier to say bye. I met as many people as I could and said to them thank you for making my stay enjoyable, I hope I would see you again sometime, bye for now. During my departure, I had to walk down the two kilometers again to take a minibus that comes from the nearby community and goes to the nearby town where I could take another minibus to Bahir Dar, the capital of the region. All the children showed-up. I tried to hug and say bye each of them but they replied that they would be accompanying me to the main road. I kind of refused to accept their request but later on I agreed when they insisted. They carried my baggage and even my backpack and accompanied me.

CHAPTER FOUR: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that are relevant to the topic of the study. I first begin my discussion by reviewing the previous researches and publications that focus on the Ethiopian childhoods. Then, I discuss the place of children and the expected relationships between children and adults in a society. Finally, I discuss the social construction of childhood from discursive, structural, generational and actor oriented perspectives.

4.1. Childhood Studies in Ethiopia

Research and publication in Ethiopian childhoods is at its early stage of development. It seems that in almost all areas of study, researchers and academicians have given little attentions to the voice and perspectives of children. Eva Poluha's *An Annotated Bibliography on Children and Childhood in Ethiopia (2007)* significantly demonstrates the size and depth of research works related to children and childhood in Ethiopia. The attempts of Save the Children Organizations and The Young Live project to develop children and childhood researches and promote children's participation in social and economic development practices is of great significance. However, participation of children in construction of child related knowledge, academic institutionalization of children and childhood studies, research based training, policy, and care interventions for children in the past or at present contexts of Ethiopia is still missing. In spite of these gaps, promising development is being observed in Ethiopian childhood studies. Here it is important to mention three significant contributions. The first is Tatek Abebe's PhD thesis, *Ethiopian Childhoods: A Case Study of the Lives of Orphans and Working Children* (see Abebe, 2008). In this study, Abebe discussed the everyday lives of working children in the rural areas of Gedeo, Southern Ethiopia and Orphans in Addis Ababa, the Capital of Ethiopia. In this

work, the author explores orphan-hood and children`s work as the two aspects of children`s life through cases from Gedeo (rural setting) and Addis Ababa (urban setting). It, in general, deals with how children negotiate their livelihoods in order to cope up with social, political and economic changes in contrasting geographical settings with its focus on orphans and working children (Abebe, 2008). This work renders a significant contribution in constructing the aspects of childhoods in urban and rural contexts in Ethiopia.

The second is Tadesse J. Jirata`s PhD thesis, *Children and Oral Tradition among the Guji-Oromo in Southern Ethiopia* in which he explored how children perform oral tradition as part of their everyday life. Jirata presented oral tradition as a dynamic cultural practice that the children perform as part of their work, play, education and social interactions (interaction with adults as well as with each other). This study emphasized that the performances of folktales and riddles are best analyzed as a dialogue between narrator and audience, in which children and adults are regarded as interlocutors. Situations of storytelling events among the children are compared to situations in which adults narrate folktales to children. It further discusses that children are eager narrators and attentive listeners, who, comparable to adults, intervene in the narrations to clarify points, arrest the narrator if the tale is rendered incorrectly, discuss the moral messages of the tales, The article makes the methodological point that by underplaying the authoritative position of adulthood and trying to engage in dialogues with the children on their own terms.

The third is an anthology edited by Associate Professor Tatek Abebe and Professor Anne Trine Kjørholt. This anthology was titled *Childhood and Local Knowledge in Ethiopia: Rights, Livelihoods and Generations* and published by *Academika Forlag* in 2013. The anthology contains nine research articles that deal with different issues on Ethiopian childhoods with

emphasis on local knowledge, intergenerational relationships, children's rights and education. These studies contributed a lot to responding to the criticism that childhood studies in Ethiopia focus on disadvantaged and urban children and tend to marginalize rural children's childhoods and, thus, focus of 'ordinary' children's lives. Of course, it is obvious that childhoods studies in Ethiopia are urban biased and are focusing on vulnerability of children. Such research works explore factors that put children at risk on street and how children cope up with such risks and also discuss poverty as the main cause for the growth of the number of street children in urban areas and present HIV/AIDS as the primary cause for increments in number of orphan- hood. Put in other words, literatures on Ethiopian Children focus on "children at risk" and have limited themselves to towns and cities in the country (Adugna, 2006).

Street children's right and the government's attention for the right of street children for instance can be considered as a point that has often been embodied in literatures in Ethiopian childhoods. Sophiya Chanyalew's (2008) unpublished master's thesis is an example for such literatures. Chanyalew (2008) in her thesis titled: "Health Seeking Behavior Among Street Children and Government's Response to Their Rights", discusses that street children encounter a number of health problems and lack access to health care facilities because of marginalization. The writer generalizes that no attention has been given from government health care institutions to address the right of street children for health care services.

In general, besides the limitation of literature in Ethiopian childhoods, studies on the places and everyday lives of children in the rural communities in Ethiopia mainly in the northern part of Ethiopia is still lacking.

4.2. Children's Place in a Society

Olwig and Gulløv (2003), in their book 'children's places', a cross-cultural perspective, examines place as both social position and physical location. They further discuss that places are defined through social interaction, but interactions are defined by relationships, aims and conceptions of place. Tauna (1974 as cited in Olwig and Gulløv, 2003:1), argues that the primary meaning of place is one's position in society rather than the more abstract understanding of location in space. Spatial location drives from position in society rather than vice versa (ibid).

According to Olwig and Gulløv (2003), the concept of place from an anthropological perspectives, points to the existence of a close interrelationship between the physical, social and cultural conditions of life. They further state that places frame different kinds of social meetings, and opportunities, and children's movements and varying uses of places have consequences for their social experiences, as well as for the spheres in which they may engage. The places where children are to be found are physical sites and, at the same time, agents' symbolic expressions of social positions and views of the future. In most societies, there are places for children and places where children will rarely be seen (ibid). Questions about the place of children in society inevitably imply queries about the ways in which social institutions, practices, relationships and cultural meanings are reproduced (or not) from one generation to the next (Amit, 2003). Accordingly, I discuss the social places of children and the perceptions of 'place' in constructing childhood.

In any society, children have places in intergenerational relationships and these places are embedded in the social and cultural systems and are conceptualized in different ways some of which are children's roles, their position in social hierarchy, their relationships with adults and the way adults understand and treat them (Nieuwenhuys, 2003).

Smith (2001) asserts that a society is a composite of two systems which are known as social and cultural systems and usually referred to as socio-cultural systems. According to Smith (2001), the cultural systems include objective and expressive symbols that represent the knowledge, values and beliefs of the society, norms that distinguish the wrong from the right, and make grounds for role division and intergenerational relations. The social system, on the other hand considers roles and patterns of actions and interactions of people in a society. Smith (2001), citing Parson's *The Social System* (1970), discusses the concepts of "allocation" and "integration" which are vital for capable functioning of a society. The concept of allocation refers to distribution of roles to members of a society in line with social identities such as gender, age, and generation. As a result of allocation, women, men, adults, children, and youth have their own social roles they are expected to play as members in a society. Smith (2001: 26) emphasizes "the most significant unit of a social structure is not the person but the roles". Smith explains roles as "set of complementary expectations concerning one's own actions and those of the others with whom she/he interacts. According to this concept, social roles create social expectations which in turn systematize concrete patterns of interaction. On the other hand, the concept of "integration" is concerned with management of norms and values that work for solidarity and common beliefs and actions of members of a society. Norms and values are central in cultural system and serve as grounds for people to correspond to each other and harmonize their actions, interactions and relations by establishing roles and expectations. The cultural system, for it embodies the values and norms, regulate the integration and allocation patterns, and direct the social systems. Embodiments of cultural system are expressed through practices and symbols embedded in rituals in which the knowledge, beliefs, laws, art, morals, and values of a society are demonstrated through practices, expressions and symbols.

The social system, which exists under the umbrella of cultural system, operates at micro level and involves the interactions and relationships among persons, groups or unites in a society. The everyday social practices, relationships and behavior observable at segments in a society are constituted in social systems. The interactions, relationships, and social practices among family members, among children, adults, women, men, girls, boys, etc are part of the social system and are observable at local levels in everyday lives. The social systems at the micro parts of a society are shaped by the constituents of cultural system. The relationships between parents and children, between children and adults, women and men, as well as the roles that parents, children, adults, men and women play are regulated by the norms, values and role-expectations embodied in the cultural system. The social hierarchies, acts of inclusion and exclusion, intergroup and interpersonal communications at levels of segments in a society are results of the macro cultural systems. Who is a child and who is an adult and what is normal for a child to do and abnormal to do are questions that can be answered through proper understanding of the social and cultural systems. The social system in a family operates in line with the cultural systems of the society so that the individual becomes an efficient participant in the social actions. For example, a child is socialized in line with the norms and values embedded in cultural systems so that she/he becomes effective in her/his social roles, actions and relationships.

According to Smith, children are part of a society and are affected by both systems. They are shaped and reshaped by the cultural and social systems of the society they live in. The ways adults understand them and they understand each other, their relationships with adults and with each other and their social actions and behaviors are regulated by the cultural systems and observable in the social systems in which they live and act. This tells that children are actors in shaping each other; in influencing their social environment through their everyday activities.

Children's place in the cultural and social systems of a society is explained by Olwig and Gulløvv (2003:2) as "both established places allocated to children by others and informal places created by children as they engage in various kinds of intra and inter generational relationships". Thus, the concept of children's place becomes children's relative status embedded in the cultural systems and practically manifested in the intergenerational relationships in the social systems. The cultural system constructs places for children by embodying values and norms that regulates the incorporation of children in to the society and their relations with adults. Likewise, the social system operates under the shadow of the cultural system and embodies practical roles, forms of interactions and manner of actions for children and adults.

Children's place in a society, therefore, is conceptualized in terms of their position in intergenerational relationships which in its own turn is regulated by the cultural and social systems. Nauck and Steinbach (2009), discusses six dimensions of intergenerational relationships; namely, structural dimension, associative dimension, affective dimension, consensual dimension, normative dimension, and functional dimension. The structural dimension refers to the family structure (extended or nuclear) and family members participated in relationships. In some families, members of three generations (grandparents, parents and children) live in close interactions with each other. In other families, members of two generations have residential or geographical closeness. Associative dimension, on the other hand, measures the nature, frequency and intensity of contact between generations. This dimension examines whether the intergenerational contact is face-to-face or through other networks such as telephone, letters, and emails. The affective dimension and consensual dimensions refer to the emotional closeness as well as conflict and amount of agreement in values and the similarity or difference of values and belief among generations respectively. Normative dimension is

concerned with the roles and obligations that members of the intergenerational relations perform as ways of normalization of each other. Finally, the functional dimension of intergenerational relations refers to the economic and social interdependence between generations. On the basis of this notion, the places of children in the intergenerational relations among Awra Amba people are analyzed from the dimensions of meaning of the child, the roles and social positions of children, intergenerational knowledge transfer and intergenerational interdependence.

4.3. The Social Construction of Childhood

There are diverse theoretical perspectives in different historical times. For example, Sociologists, Anthropologists and Psychologists before the emergence of the new social studies of childhood, viewed children as becoming who are being inducted into adults' social and cultural worlds. They focused on aspects of child rearing, socialization and development of children from the view points of adults (Montgomery 2009). However, the later generation of sociologists rejected the primordial presentation of children as passive receivers of adults' believe and practices and came up with a new way of viewing children and childhood. They presented children as actors in their social and cultural environments; therefore shape and being shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which they live. In the social studies of childhood, there are several theoretical perspectives. Some of these perspectives that will be discussed in this paper are discursive construction, structural construction, generational construction and children as social actors.

4.3.1 Discursive Construction of Childhood

As deviation from the primordial conceptualizations of childhood as a universal phenomenon, researchers in the new social study of children introduced childhood as discursive

phenomenon. The discursive construction of childhood is grounded in the theory of social constructivism which reiterates that construction of knowledge is not external to researcher's interpretation. In line with this theory, sociologists and anthropologists in the new social studies of childhood rejected the claims for objective (value free) knowledge about childhood and the existence of single childhood. According to this new paradigm, childhood is multiple and it is unreliable to consider childhood as a single universal phenomenon.

Prout and James (1990), state that childhood is understood as social construction. As such it provides an interpretative frame for contextualizing the early years of human life. Childhood ... is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies. The central notion in this idea is that childhood is an interpretative concept and the way it is interpreted is different from context to context. This theoretical perspective observes children in their local context and their childhood as embedment in linguistic and symbolic elements in the contexts. Thus, change in context gives different feature of childhood which leads to the notion of the multiplicity of childhoods. According to Prout and James (1990), the ways people perceive children and childhood or the way they make meaning about children and childhood is also different from culture to culture. Discourses that make particular meaning and image of children and childhood are grounded in the local social and cultural practices and values in which children are active practitioners as adults. Corsaro (2005) supports this argument by emphasizing that children are not only passive receivers of influences of cultural forces but are actors in producing and reproducing them. Based on the social constructivist perspective, Corsaro (2005) and Kehily & Swan (2003), argue that children grow in the midst of a complex system of constructing knowledge from their immediate environment. They are born into a set of relationships among family members and through the

relationships they learn the culture of the family and experience the cultural attitudes, behaviors, norms and values that characterize their childhood. As a result, they not only reproduce but also recreate the socio-cultural contexts that they live in.

With an increase in age, as Corsaro (2005) and Kehily & Swan (2003) affirm, the children create relationship to outside of the family, with two areas of influence of which the first includes traditional institutions, values and beliefs observable in their villages. The second area of influence constitutes schools, modern religions and media. The children enter these traditional and modern areas of influence and slowly learn from those experiences and start to construct their self-concept. Therefore, childhood perspectives are shaped as a result of children's interactions and negotiations with the family, the immediate cultural surroundings (Village culture), and modernizing forces (schools, media, and modern religions). The central organizing instrument of construction of childhood by adults and children themselves are symbolic and linguistic phenomenon through which children and childhood are expressed and re-expressed among the local communities and through these expressions adults and children construct their own meaning of childhood. Based on this perspective, I observe childhood and children's place among the Awra Amba community from the way children and parents express these phenomenon.

4.3.2. Structural Construction of Childhood

In the new sociological studies of childhood, childhood is viewed as structural form. The Danish Sociologist, Jens Qvortrup, introduced childhood as a social structure in a society. In his research account, *Sociology of Childhood: Conceptual Liberation of Children*, which is a chapter in a book *Childhood and Children's Culture*, Jens Qvortrup argued that childhood is a constituent of a particular structural form and wouldn't be defined by age or characteristic of the

child (Qvortrup, 2002). According to this argument, childhood is defined by the collective characteristics of its members like class, gender or ethnicity.

Jens Qvortrup in this work emphasized that childhood is a fixed structure in a society through which children pass and at which children share similar features. The main feature that the children share at this stage, according to the author, is that they are exposed to the same societal forces mainly the macro structural forces in a society they belong to. The macro societal structures, (for example culture, government policies, economic status, and religion) shape and reshape the nature of childhood; therefore, make childhood in one society different from the one in other society. Similarly, these structures shape childhood in a different ways from adulthood as they affect children in different ways from adults which the sociological studies of childhood should focus on. Qvortrup (2002:48) supports this argument as,

A sociological understanding of childhood, therefore, demands that we locate those structural features that are general to all children (therefore constitute childhood sociologically) as well as those that distinguish childhood from other social groups, for instance, adulthood (and thus prepare us for understanding childhood in relational terms).

The structural construction of childhood advocates the comparative studies of childhood and children's lives. Comparing childhood across different cultures, economic systems, political systems, as well as comparing children with adults (generational comparison) or male children with female children (gender based comparison) within a culture is exercised as the way of constructing childhood sociologically. The assumption with cross cultural comparisons is that societal forces impact children in similar ways to adults in the same culture and children in one culture in a different ways from children in another culture (Qvortrup, 2002)..

In these cases, in addition to culture, economy, and policy, gender and generation become structural forces that shape one childhood in a different way from the other.

The structural perspective to childhood studies criticizes the discursive construction of childhood for it gives attention to individual child. In this regard, Qvortrup (2002) argues that treating a child as an individual is a problematic for the sociological studies of childhood because it hides that children are collective entity and that they have constructive ability in their own right. Qvortrup (2002) adds dealing with the concept child hinders researchers from understanding childhood in its historical context and separates a child from the society in which she/he lives. Thus, the structural approach capitalizes on childhood and presents children as products of the childhood features which in turn are produced and reproduced by structural forces and contexts. According to Jirata 2013, the roles of structural forces in shaping childhood and children`s everyday lives were observable among the Guji society in Ethiopia. Jirata further discusses that the cultural systems that govern the roles, behaviors, and social relations of adults, children, men, women, male children, and female children, the economic status and activities of the society, the physical environment in which the society lives and government policy which dictates children to attend school are macro structural forces that give picture to the contemporary childhood among the society where he undertook his fieldwork. Thus, constructing the way these forces characterize childhood is a possible approach but not complete on its own.

Thompson (1990) and Edgar (2002) put that there are four forms of relationships among members of a society. These forms are named as hierarchal in which members are in hierarchal network; egalitarian in which there is classless and free relationships among members; fatal where members don`t have any network and individual where members are treated as self-

sufficient and independent ones. These forms of relationships are relevant to find a place of children in a society as children are members and participants in such relationships. In a society characterized by hierarchal relationships, children may take the lower social position; in a society characterized by egalitarian form of relationship, children have equal social positions with adults and the relationships between them are based on sameness. Again, in the fatal form of relationships, there are no significant associations between children and adults and adults are indifferent to children`s lives and development. Among the society characterized by individualism, children are considered to be individuals with their own perspectives, needs and problems and the role of the parents (adults) is supporting children to become independent and self-sufficient members. This perspective is relevant to explore the place and roles of children in the cultural prove among the Awra Amba community. Through this perspective, I observe what forms of relationship are there among the Awra Amba community and what place children have in such relationship.

4.3.3. Generational Construction of Childhood

In the sociological studies of childhoods, observing childhoods as a relative phenomenon has been emerging as another theoretical perspective but much related to structural construction. Leena Alanen (2002) has introduced this perspective in the sociological studies of childhood through profound research works and publications of which one is *Childhood as Generational Condition: Towards a Relational Theory of Childhood*. In this study, Alanene argues that even though it is emerging as a meeting place for childhood researchers, sociology of childhood lacks the perspective that constructs childhood as relational phenomenon and construct of intergenerational interactions. The author discussed four domains of generational relations;

namely, family, friendship, school and personal interests. This categorization is based on the intergroup interactions as family members, friends, school mates and interest mates.

Leena Alanen, has positioned herself in social constructivist epistemology and presented childhood as relational phenomenon. She argues that childhood is better understood when it is studied in relation to adulthood or the childhood of other children. According to Alanen (2000), the social construction approach to childhood studies should focus on generational relations (for example, the relation between adults and children) for the dynamic discourses about childhood are constructed as a result of the interactions and negotiations between these generations.

Children and their parents are social relational beings and are engaged in joint actions in which the meaning of childhood is symbolically constructed; therefore, according to Alanen (2000: 11), “a more consistent and comprehensive constructionist theory would need a methodology that is relational from the beginning”. The concept of ‘generationing’ which Leena Alanen coined to express childhood as relational phenomenon represents the process through which generation is constructed with its accompanying roles and behaviors in a particular culture “to theorize childhood would mean to arrive at a conceptual understanding of childhood as a generational condition” (Alanen, 2000: 15). Viewing childhood as relational phenomenon is to place them in the structure of generation through which some people are identified as adults and the others as children. Based on this perspective, I observe how children and their social actions are shaped by the relationships between generations.

4.3.4. Children as Social Actors

In the primordial studies of childhood, children were considered to be passive receivers of adults` acts in the process of socialization. Socialization itself was understood as a kind of

cultural programming of children through which adults pass on cultural elements and practices to children. In other words, in its previous meaning, socialization was the process by which adults, through social institutions such as family, school and church, indoctrinate skills, values and knowledge in the mind of children so as to shape and prepare them to become successful adults in their future adulthood life (Wyness, 2006). This is to mean that adults were the only actors in the socialization process and were responsible to shape the roles, actions and behaviors of children; whereas, children are perceived to be the passive recipients of adult's perspectives, values, and knowledge. Such theory of socialization was rejected by the postmodern thinkers and childhood researchers (James, et.al 1998; Qvortrup 2002).

However, the sociology of childhood studies construct children as social actors on their own right. According to this paradigm, children are actors in shaping each other; in influencing their social environment through their everyday activities. William Corsaro, in his book, *The Sociology of Childhood* (2005) discussed that children can shape each other through their peer interactions. Corsaro (2005) asserts that children, through their peer culture and routines in their peer activities work to achieve their autonomy and reduce adult's controls. Corsaro (2005) emphasizes that in their play activities, children demonstrate their desire to achieve autonomy from the rules and authority of adults and to gain control over themselves. In this case, children are not seen as passive recipients of adults' perspectives but are actors who can act in the construction of their own childhood values. Alanen (2000: 12) supports such view as,

Children are seen to act in the social world and to participate in ongoing social life and are centrally involved in the construction of their own childhood through their negotiation with the adult world and among themselves.

Thus, in the sociology of childhood studies, children are perceived to be active subjects and actors in socialization processes. They are not passive receivers of adults' outlooks but negotiate with adults and construct their own reality. Children, from this point of view, bargain not only with adults but also among themselves (i.e children negotiate with children) across time and space. Maybin and Woodhead (2003: 6) clarify this point as,

Socialization happens in the course of children's activities in the different places important to their lives; for instance, at home, at school or on street. It occurs in the courses interactions with siblings and other children and with parents and other adults.

The cultural values, beliefs and social practices that children construct through interactions with their environments shape their perspectives, their relationships with others, and their emerging sense of self. Alanen (2000), presents socialization in the contexts of the sociology of childhood studies as transmission of culture between generations; transmission that could be from adults to children or from children to adults. Alanen's concept of socialization also presents children as actors in socialization. The notion of children as social actor converses the perspectives in the social studies of childhood and indicates that these perspectives embody children as subjects in their social and cultural contexts. In other words, constructing children as subjects in a society is the epistemological positions of researchers in the social studies of childhood and these shows that the notion of children as social actors is a main stream perspective in this new pragmatic context.

4.4. Children's rights Perspective

Place and rights are interconnected concepts as far as social roles, social orders, and social positions are concerned. The place a society assigns to a child through the social roles, social orders and social positions determines whether the rights of the child is respected or

violated. Abebe (2013), argues that the human rights of children should be situated within the broader socio-cultural and politico-economic contexts. Having said this, I discuss children's rights in Ethiopia in general and in Awra Amba in particular by taking the United Nation Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC) as a framework.

The UNCRC is believed to have been one of the most ratified conventions in the history of the United Nations being accepted, signed and ratified by almost all countries of the world except the United States, Somalia and recently South Sudan. When declared and entered into force, it had two major intentions; protecting and promoting the rights and welfare of children on the globe through implementation of its officially binding articles (1-54).

The document discusses that every child has equal and the same rights with adults (inseparable and inalienable rights which parents and the state must protect) without distinction of any kind regardless of their race, color, sex, language, religion, political, national, social, property, birth or other status. It emphasizes that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance. It also places huge responsibilities on the state parties in general and on the family as part of the society in particular to offer the necessary protection and assistance that are required and helpful for the growth and well-being of the children by creating an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding so that they develop the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality, and solidarity (UN, 1989).

Ethiopia is one of the countries which are answerable to the UNCRC. However, there are still lots of work to be done in the area of promoting and ensuring children's rights. In a patriarchal society like Ethiopia where male dominance is accepted in making important decisions for and on behalf of children and women, the idea of 'right' may not be the issue of interest and the practicability of 'the best interests of a child' is therefore less significant. Abebe

(2013) states that in Ethiopia, the desire to sustain family solidarity and interdependent lives often overshadows children's individual needs and interests.

Parents claim they are the ones to know what is good or bad for their children. They consider what they say is always right and in this case it is mandatory for the child to accept it with no hesitation. Otherwise, the child is regarded or referred to as deviant, disobedient, rude, etc. The situation does not stop at this very point but it goes up to punishment which is of different types like sticking, hitting, beating, kicking, confinement to a locked room, burning with boiled water, deprivation of food, casting out of home, curse and the like.

In practice, there seems no awareness created for the parents, siblings, children, teachers and all other concerned bodies in Ethiopia regarding children's rights. Almost all of the children do not know that they have rights. Parents and other adults do not recognize that children have rights other than needs, duties and responsibilities because they consider children as 'developing' who do not know for themselves what is good or bad.

In fact, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has incorporated children's rights issue in its constitution even though his harmonization of the national laws with the UNCRC is referred to as "a disturbing development that may hinder rather than empower children and their meaningful role in society" (Abebe, 2013:21). Article 36 of the constitution is all about the rights of children. This Article was drafted taking the provisions of the UNCRC into account. However, when it comes to its practicability in putting it into action, still it remains to be questioned. In my opinion, this is due to the deep rooted and dominant patriarchal system depriving rights for children and women. There are also weaknesses on the government side in creating awareness for the parents and for the children as well. NGO's which were operating

their programs in the area of rights and advocacy in the country are now prevented by the government and this was a crucial debate between the opposition parties and the now ruling party during the 2010 election.

It might be difficult to say Ethiopia is implementing both the UNCRC and the ACRWC while there is still violence and abuse against the rights of children. According to the study conducted by the African Child Policy Forum and Save the Children Sweden in 2006 in five major regions and nine different cities, children experience punishments which can affect their physical, psychological and mental. Some of these punishments identified by the study were slapping, hitting on the head, kicking, hitting with stick, insulting, pinching, whipping with a belt, burning with a hot iron, expelling from home, shouting/glaring, frightening/ threatening, ridiculing and embarrassing and smoking with chili. Here, the legal protection of abuse of children according to the UNCR Articles 37 and 40; ACRWC Articles 16, 17 and 30 are overlooked by the state.

Surprisingly enough, the abusers are not only parents but also siblings, neighbors, relatives, police and the society at large. “In Ethiopia, street children are harassed by the police” (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998: 49 cited Boyden, 1990). Abebe (2009), witnesses about a child abused by a policeman in the capital city being hit to the level he bled heavily from his nose. Both the UNCRC (Article 40) and the ACRWC (Article 17) states that “a child is to be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law.” But here, according to Abebe, the police took action to convince the child without having hard evidence just primarily based on the report made by the woman who claimed her purse to be stolen by the child. Rose September, one of the presenters on the African contexts of children’s rights seminar, stated that abuse and exploitation

are evidence that African countries are not implementing the declarations (Tine and Ennew, 1994).

Although the UNCRC has been known for its universally ratified conventions in the history of the United Nations being accepted, signed and ratified by almost all countries of the world, it has not made significant difference to the lives of children of the global south. According to Burr and Montgomery (2003: 164), the ideals campaign of the UNCRC has not actually been translated into actions which improve children's lives.

However, unlike children in other communities in Ethiopia, the children of Awra Amba community enjoy their rights well. Burr and Montgomery (2003), says the UNCRC is all about the four Ps as far as children's right is concerned. These are protection (Articles 20, 22, and 38), provision (articles 1, 24 and 28), prevention (Articles 34, 37 and 40) and participation (Article 12). Children of the Awra Amba community have provision rights such as (food, housing, clothes and education), they are protected from abuse and exploitation. They plan their activities according to their ability and competence. They are not imposed by their parents to do something that is beyond their ability and competence. They have all the rights to participate and make a speech in all the social forums. Adults give respect and listen to children when they talk. Children also take part in decisions made on their behalf. Corporal punishments, insult, curse or any kind of physical and verbal harassment is not accepted in Awra Amba community.

During the interview and the focus group discussion sessions, I asked the children if they knew/heard about the UNCRC and the ACRWC. But all of them responded that they had no information about that. It is incredible that members of the community managed to promote and ensure children's rights without having the knowledge of national and international rights

conventions. Their achievement in this regard was one of the reasons among many others that were mentioned on the honorary doctoral diploma awarded by Jimma University to the founder of the community, Zumra Nuru. From this, it is possible to conclude that it will be redundant to introduce either the UNCRC or the ACWRC conventions to this community because children have already “unwritten rights”.

CHAPTER FIVE: CHILDREN AND THE EGALITARIAN SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP AMONG THE AWRA AMBA COMMUNITY

In this chapter, I discuss the intergenerational relations between children and adults among the Awra Amba community through analyzing the local meanings and contexts that shape the lives of children. In Awra Amba community, children`s modes of relationship with adults are embedded in the social and cultural systems and are conceptualized through ways of children`s roles, their position in social hierarchy and socialization practices of the community.

5.1. Children and Socialization among the Awra Amba community

Among the Awra Amba community, socialization is based on egalitarian relationship between adults and children as well as among children. Adults of the Awra Amba community (both men and women) consider children as knowledgeable members. For example, a 32 years old woman says:

In our community, we (adults) accept children as competent and knowledgeable. Our children also accept us (adults) as competent and knowledgeable persons. We listen to our children and our children also listen to us. They also listen to one another.

Thus, not only children learn from adults but adults also learn from children. Children also learn values and norms of the society from each other and also participate with adults in achieving its sustainability.

The community exercises two modes of socialization which are parent-child socialization and child-child or peer socialization. The different mode of socialization involves different process of socialization. For example, the parent-child socialization involves teaching and

emulation. The teaching and emulation is bidirectional process in which adults socialize children and children also socialize adults.

In other societies in Ethiopia, parent-child socialization is unidirectional process and the teaching and emulation process is from adults to children. In such societies, social hierarchy characterizes intergenerational relationships. Dominance is a generic social behavior and involves two dimensions: age-based dominance and sex-based dominance and both characterize relationships among children and between children and adults.

For instance, Jirata (2013), states that among the Guji-Oromo society, there are three layers of authority: grandparents over parents, parents over children and older children over the younger ones. In this society, parents do not act as friends and playmates of their children but as tutors, teachers, masters who have the responsibility to direct the social and behavioral development of children. Parents prefer their children listen to them, and use threats of violence or withholding food when children refuse to care for an infant. Children are expected to defer to the requests of adults and be respectful of elders, including older siblings and parents. Corporal punishment is not an uncommon response for children who do not listen to or respect their parents or older sibling (*ibid*).

However, among the Awra Amba community, parents do not exercise authority over children. This tradition is derived from the tradition of egalitarian relationship among the community. Dominance of any sort as social behavior is rarely observable. Adults and older children may order a younger child to bring an object to them, but if the child has refused to do they do not complain as they do not expect compliance. Three modes of values characterize the socialization practices among the community. These are egalitarianism, autonomy and sharing.

Through the egalitarian way of thinking, the community value that others are respected for what they are and it is not appropriate to draw attention to oneself or judge others to be better or worse than others. Men and women, young and old, are viewed as relatively equal and have similar access to resources. Respect for an individual's autonomy is also a core cultural value. One does not force others, including children. Parents socialize their children in line with these values from early childhood. As they value autonomy and egalitarianism, members of the community do not think that they are more knowledgeable than others.

Child-to-child interaction and sharing of knowledge characterizes the place of children in intergenerational relationships. Older children train younger children as well as younger children influence older children and show them how to do tasks. Children spend much of their time with other children, and some proportion of this time for play in the early childhood and for combination of play and work for middle and late childhood. Thus, peer socialization takes places in the context where young children play with each other at home and in the neighborhoods, children in the middle and late childhood work and play together in family farms and pasturelands.

5.2. Children`s belief in equality among all human beings

Children of the Awra Amba community articulate that all human beings are equal regardless of differences in gender, economic class and ethnic backgrounds. Similar to adults of the community, the children underlined that markers of difference such as gender, class and ethnicity are not created with human beings, thus, they are artificial. According to the children, the creator (the supernatural power), created all human beings in the same way and to be equal

without any discriminating one another. My interview with a 15 years old girl illustrates such belief of children.

Abebe: Whom do you respect the most from this village?

The Girl: I respect all people in this village equally

Abebe: What do you mean? Do you respect adults and children equally as they are?

The Girl: Yes, I do.

Abebe: Do you mean your sisters and brothers as well as other children in this village owe equal respect for children and adults?

The Girl: Yes

Abebe: Why do you do this? Can you tell me the reason?

The Girl: We believe in the equality of all human beings. Any human beings whether child or adult, man or woman, black or white and rich or poor are created equal and in our community all deserve respect and receive equal right and respect.

Abebe: How did you learn this?

The Girl: I learned from the community. Our leader, Dr. Zumra, taught us that all human beings are equal. We accepted this education and believe in the equality of human beings.

Abebe: Did Dr. Zumra teach all children about Awra Amba's culture?

The Girl: Yes he did

Abebe: What did he say when he taught children?

The Girl: He said “Respect all human beings equally. Be kind to all human beings. Speak truth to all human beings. Love all human beings equally. Do for others something that you want to do for yourself.”

Abebe: Do you think that all children accept and exercise this teaching?

The Girl: Yes, all children accept and exercise this.

Abebe: What about adults?

The Girl: Adults also accept and exercise the teaching. They even encourage us to exercise it in our daily lives.

Children`s belief in equality of human beings is a tradition that passes from generation to generation. Children acquire the value of giving equal respect and concern to all humans through their participation in community`s social practices. Equal respect for children, adults, women, men as well as the poor and the rich, according to the informants is the tradition that characterizes the Awra Amba community and has been exercised by all members of the community including children. This tradition shows that children of the Awra Amba community are active participants in the community`s tradition of respecting all human beings without difference in age, gender, class and ethnic background.

Informants (both adult and children) assert that honesty and fraternity among all human beings is the core social value of the Awra Amba community. Zumra (66 years old man and the leader of the community) states, “We value honesty and fraternity. Honesty and fraternity are the basis for peace, love and good relationships among human kinds. If there is no honesty in our relationships, we cannot trust each other. If we cannot trust each other, we cannot love and

respect each other. If we cannot respect and love each other, we cannot live in peace with each other”. Another informant, (37 years old woman) added, “ we believe in the fact that one should not do to others something that he/she does not like for him/her self. One should do something for others in the same way he/she does for him/her self. One should give love to everybody without any discrimination. Human beings are brothers to each other and useful for each other”

The assertions are common among members of the community and shows that honesty and fraternity are the deep-rooted social values among the community.

Children’s participation in perpetuation of such social order is significantly observable from the perspectives of the informant children.

A 12 years old girl says,

One’s goodness or badness is manifested in his/her actions. A good action is from a good person and a bad action is from a bad person. One should not do something to others that he /she does not want to be done to him/her. One should do something to others that he wants to be done for him. We should keep on doing something good and avoiding something bad. If we believe that the super creator is with us, we should avoid doing bad things because the super creator does not like someone who does bad things.

A 14 years old boy recited the common motto of children of the Awra Amba community as follows. All children of the community recite the motto together when they start school in the morning and when they end school in the afternoon.

“We children do not take and use others money

We do not want something that belongs to others

If we find something lost, we return it to the owner

We want to cooperate with each other and be productive

We want to live in peace and love with each other.”

Perspectives from both children indicate that children are active social actors in perpetuating the core values of the Awra Amba community. Through participation in the community social practices and process, the children contribute to the development and continuation of the values on which the social orders of the community has been built.

5.3. Children`s social Roles in Awra Amba community

In Awra Amba community, social roles are shared not based on age and sex but on ability and competences of an individual. Both children and adults assert that there is no social role classified as “adults’ roles” or “children`s roles” because a child or an adult can do any activity provided that he/she has the ability to do it. A 13 years old boy says:

I can do any activity that adults can do as far as I know it and have physical ability to do it. For example, I can do what my father and my mother can do. I can plough land, I can make clothes, I fetch water, I can take care of my younger siblings, I can harvest crop and I can sell and buy goods.

A 40 years old woman also said, “Our children participate in all works with us. They have time for school, play and work. They plough land with us, they make clothes with us, and do home routines with us.”

A 14 years old boy also stated, “I share all activities with my father and mother. During school time, I work on learning activities. Then, I work with my parents. After work, I play with

my peers. Thus, I have time for work, for school and for learning.” Children share similar social roles with adults. Statements of the woman and the child affirm the absence of age and sex based division of social roles among the Awra Amba community. This tradition of role sharing is different from the tradition observed by different researchers in different communities in Ethiopia. Abebe (2008), for instance, observed that among the Gedeo society in southern Ethiopia, there is age based division of role which means there are roles for adults and children. Jirata (2013) also states that among the Guji-Oromo society in the southern part of Ethiopia, children perform different social roles from adults. Children herd cattle, fetch water, collect fire woods, care for smaller children, look after homes, clean houses and compounds, and serve neighborhoods messages. However, among the Awra Amba community, both children and adults share roles on the basis of their capabilities, skills and knowledge.

5.4. Children’s Position in Social Forums

The intergenerational relationship in the Awra Amba community empowers children to have equal participation with adults in different social forums. They participate in family, neighborhood and community social forums and contribute ideas in the same ways with adults. A 14 years old girl asserts, “Children take part in family and community meetings and forward their views in the same way as adults. Adults do not despise children’s ideas. Adults listen to children and children also listen to adults. Adults do not think that children are unknowledgeable.” My interview with 14 years old boy also supports the view stated above.

Abebe: Do children attend when adults talk with each other?

Boy: Yes, they do

Abebe: Do you mean that children can attend adult forums?

Boy: Yes, children have equal participation with adults

Abebe: Which kinds of forums can children attend?

Boy: Any forum

Abebe: Can you tell me some of these forums?

Boy: Yes, I can tell you. For example, family discussions, neighborhood forums, community forums

Abebe: What do children do in these forums?

Boy: They listen, they speak, I mean they give their opinion and participate in discussions.

Abebe: What about adults?

Boy: Adults also listen to children in the forum. Adults in our community believe children have something important in their mind and they listen to them.

Abebe: Do adults give time for children to speak?

Boy: Yes, there is deference between adults and children. Everybody can take turn and speak his/her ideas.

Boys and girls among the community articulate that the everyday life of the people among which they live is based on profound social discussions and that they take part in the discussions as members of the community. A boy (13 years old) says, "Children have equal social positions with adults in social forums. Children`s voices are respected and adults accept

children`s comments and claims. Children are active participants in decision makings at different levels.”

A girl (15 years old) added, “Children are as knowledgeable as adults. They can contribute ideas to discussion with adults and also argue with adults to get their views accepted.”

Unlike children of the Gedeo and the Guji, where children are placed in the minor social positions and identified as minors or juniors, children of the Awra Amba community have equal social positions in social participations with adults. An interview with 12 years old girl ascertains this tradition.

Abebe: How are children treated in this (Awra Amba) community?

The Girl; Adults respect children. Adults say, “Children have a lot of good ideas and can do a lot of good things. Children should be listened to and should be followed”. Children participate with adults in family discussions, neighborhood meetings and community forums. In such places, children contribute their ideas and adults listen to children carefully.

What is notable from perspectives of these children is that among the Awra Amba community, children have the power to participate in the community social activities and contribute to the egalitarian intergenerational relationships.

The Awra Amba community attaches strong value to work and knowledge. They believe that the lives of human beings are built on work and knowledge of individuals. All members of the Awra Amba community state that Zumra (leader of the community) showed to them that hard-work and deep knowledge are a corner stone for social development. The following interview (with a boy, 13 years old) shows such disposition of children.

Abebe: Do you work or attend school?

The Boy: I do both

Abebe: How can you do both?

The boy: In school times, I attend school. Out of school times, I work.

Abebe: What do you work on?

The boy: I work on what my parents work on. I work on farm, I work on home routines etc

Abebe: That means, you do not have play time?

The boy: No I have play time. I play when I finish my work.

Abebe: To which do you give more time; to learning, to play or to work?

The boy: I give more time to learning and work.

Abebe: Why?

The boy: Learning and work are more useful than play. Through learning, I gain knowledge which is useful for throughout my life. Through work, I contribute to economic development of my family and community. It is through work and education that one can gain knowledge and skill of life.

Abebe: I see. You are telling me that knowledge and work are important.

The boy: It is work and knowledge that makes someone rich. That is what Dr. Zumra told us.

As shown in this interview, children present work and knowledge as pivotal elements of the Awra Amaba social order. Children's concern for work and education originates from the values that the community attaches to knowledge and productivity as fundamental elements of social order. Following the tradition of their community members, children give first value to work and education and second value to play. Children perpetuate community social order through attaching strong values to work and knowledge.

The interview also shows that children inherit values from their community and exercise as part of their everyday life. The last statement of the boy "It is work and knowledge that makes someone rich. That is what Dr. Zumra told us" indicates that children have acquired the values of work and knowledge from Dr. Zumra who represents the community as culture-bearer. This is to mean children learn the culture of their community through the participation with adults which has also been discussed in several global studies. Kjørholt (2004) which is a study in Norwegian context, for instance, presents that children are active social participants as citizens. Abebe (2008), a study in Ethiopian context, shadows that children are active participants in domestic works. Similarly, Jirata (2013) discusses that the social participation of children is reflected in continuation of social order and local knowledge. Studies such as Bernard (2006), Hanks and James (2004) and Hoffman (2004) present that intergenerational relationships encompasses the network among two or more generations and is shaped by the social dynamics across different social contexts. It involves wider scope of interactions as it contains people of different social and cultural experiences and interests. In some contexts, it includes grandparents, parents and children and in other contexts it holds parents and children. In both contexts, it produces and reproduces the mode of interaction between grandparents and grandchildren or between parents and children as well as shows the cultural and social discrepancies between

generations and changes and continuities in a society. According to Hanks and James (2004), Hoffman (2004), Hurme, et.al, (2010) and Vanderven (2004), in the three generation network, the middle generation (i.e the generation of fathers), is the `sandwich` generation and relates to both the generation of grandfathers and that of the children. In other words, this generation is between the old and the new generation and share experiences from the two contexts.

Among the Awra Amba community, children participate with adults in the common enterprise of keeping values and social orders. It seems that children are exposed to the common values and the egalitarian social relationships through their participation in the community which shape and reshape their values and beliefs. The unique value systems of the community has made the childhood of the Awra Amba children different from the childhood of children in the other community. The relationships and interdependence between children and adults does not emphasize social hierarchy and children are not considered to be immature, and less knowledgeable. This shows that childhood and the relationships between children and adults in the community go beyond the normative childhood perceptions and considers the actual life of children; presenting children as social actors. Thus, childhood and adulthood is based on biological age rather than social roles and positions.

CHAPTER SIX: CHILDREN AND GENDER EQUALITY AMONG THE AWRA AMBA COMMUNITY

In this chapter, I broadly discuss children's perspectives from the point of view of gender equality, social roles and social positions as sites where gender equality among the Awra Amba community is manifested.

6.1. Gender Equality as Social Order

Among Awra Amba community, a differentiation of roles and relationships based on gender is absent. Men and women, boys and girls share similar social roles both at family and community levels. A woman (32 years old) expressed such tradition of the society as:

I do everything my husband does and my husband does everything I do. I respect my husband and my husband respects me. The difference between a man and a woman in our community is only difference in sex.

This quotation indicates that gender equality is a deep rooted social phenomenon that governs the relationships between men and women as well as boys and girls. A man (72 years old) also presents the tradition of gender equality among the Awra Amba community as follows.

In Awra Amba community, there is no difference between men and women except difference in sex. That means a woman has female biological organ. She conceives, gets pregnant and gives birth. A man does not do this. That is how God created a woman and a man. That is the only difference. Apart from this, women do everything men do and men do everything women do. Women and men are equal in our community.

This quotation illustrates that among this community only the biological phenomenon (the biological sex) characterizes the difference between men and women as well as boys and girls. The equality between men and women includes equality in production, possession and consumption of resources including land and household asset. The Awra Amba tradition of gender equality is very unique and different in Ethiopia where gender equality is not a common social phenomenon among local communities.

Studies show that social roles and positions are shared based on social phenomenon such as gender and age. Abebe (2007) which is a study on children's work and gender relationships, show that the gender based labor division among the Gedeo society in southern Ethiopia differentiates boy's and girl's roles in domestic work. According to Abebe, domestic works such as cooking food, fetching water, and cleaning house are for girls. Similarly, Jirata (2013) reflects that the division of social roles among the Guji Oromo society in Southern Ethiopia is based on gender relationships. According to Jirata, the women and children of the Guji are engaged in reproductive domestic activities such as caring for children and managing home, cooking foods and marketing while men and boys participate in productive works such as cultivating land, growing food crops and harvesting as well as herding cattle. Gender and generation are the central social constructs for labor division in Ethiopia (Woldehanna, et al, 2005 in Jirata 2013). Children are trained to play the appropriate gender-based roles through participation in different forms of work in line with their level of biological maturity and under the guidance of their parents. Crossing the borderlines of the gender roles is considered to be violation of values and norms of the society. The Guji parents strongly advise their children to perform roles that are appropriate for their sex and age and folktales are the frequent instances for parents to teach the norms and values related to gendered roles to their children. To demonstrate how gender equality

is a common social order among the Awra Amba community, I will discuss children's perspectives on equality between men and women as well as boys and girls in social roles and positions.

6.2. Equality in Social Roles

The Awra Amba Community is unique in that it is characterized by absence of gender based role divisions. Unlike the role division in several communities in Ethiopia, there is no division of role between men and women among the Awra Amba community. A woman (37 years old) described this tradition as follows.

We do not know about the division of roles between men and women. In other communities in our surroundings, women work in houses and men work on farm. When the husband ploughs land for cultivation of food crops, the wife cooks food in side home. A man does not work on women's work and a woman also does not work on men's work. But in our community, a woman works on farm (ploughs land) and a man cooks food inside home. A man also works on farm (ploughs land) and a woman works inside home. There is no division between what a man and a woman should do.

The interview with a boy (14 years old) and a girl (13 years old), gives more illustration for the tradition of role sharing among the Awra Amba community.

Abebe: What are your everyday activities?

The Boy: Early in the morning, I woke up from bed and wash my face. Then, I eat my breakfast. Then, I go to school. When I come from school, I eat my lunch and go to work. Back from work, I play in the neighborhood with my friends.

Abebe: (to the girl) what about you?

The Girl: I do the same.

Abebe: Do you mean that there is no difference between the kind of activities that the boys and girls do?

The Girl: No difference. Boys do what girls do and girls do what boys do.

The Boy: My sister and I do the same activities. There is no difference between what boys and girls do.

The Girl: I also do what my brothers do. My mother also does what my father does.

Abebe: Can you tell me what your mother does?

The Girl: She cooks food, she ploughs land, she sows seeds and grows crops and she harvests crops. She also spins, weaves and cares for children.

Abebe: What about your father?

The Girl: He does the same.

My observations of children's everyday social activities and domestic routines strengthens what the two children articulated. I observed that both boys and girls fetch water, cook food, clean home, attend school, and work on spinning and weaving and on farm as per their ability (in line with their competences). When I asked another girl, "which activities are for girls and which ones are for boys?", she replied, "there is no any single activity that only girls or boys do except getting pregnant, giving birth to a baby and breast feeding the baby. Girls do activities that boys do as well as boys do activities that girls do." This is different from what

Abebe (2008) and Jirata (2013) observed among the Gedeo and the Guji societies where roles and relationships are gendered. According to these studies, the role divisions and social relationships among the Guji and the Gedeo societies are largely based on gender constructions in which men have superior social positions to women and women's roles is largely restricted to home. Two points can be noted from my observations and views of the children. The first is that children are social actors in continuity of gender equity. Unlike the children of various communities in Ethiopia, children of the Awra Amba community are aware of the gender equity.

6.3. Equality in Social Positions

In many African cultures, gender based marginalization is common (Dupire, 1963) as a result of which women are placed in subordinate positions in political and administrative activities. The marginalization of women is extensively noticeable in Ethiopia, where women are positioned as subordinate to men. Although reducing the burdens of femininity and providing women with equal opportunities of social participations have been one of the elements of global anti-poverty campaigns (Dupire 1963; Soetan 2001), the problem is recurrent among several communities in Ethiopia. As part of this campaign, the contemporary policy instruments and legislative commitments of Ethiopian government enforce gender equality in the social, political and economic sectors of the country. From formulating policy that mainstreams the concerns for gender equality to organizing systems that empower active participations of women in all aspect of their lives, there are adequate principles and directives (FDRE 2000, 1994). However, the impacts of these principles and directives are seldom observable in the everyday lives of the women; mainly, in that of the young women. Even though achieving gender equality at all levels of education is the priority of the government, the number of female children and their participations in schools in the rural environments are still insignificant when compared to that of

the male children. The United Nation's Millennium Development Goals` Report (United Nations 2010, 17-18) confirms these realities of female children in Sub-Saharan African as, "Poverty puts girls at a distinct are disadvantage in terms of education. Girls of primary school age from the poorest 60 per cent of households three times more likely to be out of school as those from the wealthiest households. ...household survey data also indicate that girls in rural areas face added challenges in getting an education."

However, among the Awra Amba community, there is a unique reality of gender relationships. In the gender relationship among this community, women are not subordinate to men and the social relationship between men and women is based on equality. A woman (40 years old) said:

We believe in equality among all human beings. In our community men and women are equal. Men do not treat women as inferiors and women do not consider men as superiors. A wife is not subordinate to her husband but equal to him in anyways. A woman loves her husband and obedient to his words. A man also loves his wife and obedient to her words. A husband does not make decision without the consent of his wife and a wife does not make decision without consulting her husband.

My interview with a boy (14 years old) and a girl (15 years old) shows the equality between men and women more.

Abebe: Can you tell me your favorite plays?

The boy: Football

The girl: Football

Abebe: Both of you like football?

The Girl and the boy: Yes we do

Abebe: Who bought the ball for you?

The girl: (smiling) we made it here

The boy: (smiling) yes, we made it here

Abebe: Can both of you make a ball?

The Girl: Yes, we can

Abebe: How do you make a ball?

The boy: We make a ball from worn-out clothes. We collect worn-out pieces of clothes, put them together in ball form and sew. Then, we play.

Abebe: With whom do you play?

The boy: With boys and girls in our village

Abebe: Do boys and girls play together?

The Girl: Yes, we all play together

Abebe: In other places, I know that girls play with girls and boys play with boys. Is it different here?

The boy: Here, there is no difference between what girls play and what boys play.

Abebe: Do you mean that there is no difference between boys and girls in play practices.

The Girl (after thinking for a while) Girls play what boys play in our community

The boy: There is no difference between boys and girls not only in play but also in all social activities.

The responses obtained above from the respondents regarding playing together (both sexes) equally is demonstrated on picture 6 below. The two boys sitting and watching were in the play. They lost and left the play for others who were on the wait.



Figure 6: Children of both sexes playing together.

Abebe: Do members of your community (your parents, grandparents, neighborhoods) give values to boys and girls in the same way? I mean do parents become happier when they begot a baby-boy than when they begot a baby-girl?

The boy: No, not at all. Our parents give equal value to boys and girls. Even at pregnancy, there is no worry about whether it is a boy or a girl. What we worry about is taking care of the mother and getting the baby born in its fullest health.

The girl: My parents have the same affection and care for me and my brothers. No difference at all. In our community, a child is a child whether it is a boy or a girl. As my brother [all the members of the community consider themselves as brothers and sisters] mentioned, both sexes are equally accepted. We give due attention towards getting a healthy baby. No concern about its sex. That is not our job rather it is the job of the creator who makes it a boy or a girl.

Abebe: Do girls have time to attend school and study their lessons at home as boys?

The girl: Yes. My brothers and I attend school. When we come back to home, we do our domestic works together. When we finish our work, we sit down and study together.

The boy: I and my sister also do the same as she explained it.

The information in these interviews corresponds with my observation in the community. I observed women actively participating with men in social forums, neighborhood meetings, and meetings of elders and even dominating the decision making processes in the community. I did not observe in this community any form of husband superiority and wife inferiority. My observation on the schooling in the community also shows that boys and girls have equal school participation. All boys and girls of the community whose ages are seven years and above attend school.

Children, between the ages of 3-6, attend the village's kindergarten. They learn alphabets, numbers, symbols or signs, language, ethics, values and norms of the community. The village

kindergarten is a small cottage made of mud, wood and grasses. It was built by the members of the community. The seats are also made from mud, wood and grasses. This kindergarten lacks the basic facilities necessary for the learning-teaching processes including playground and qualified and adequate preschool assistants and teachers. There was only one teacher who was assigned from members of the community not by qualification but by interest and relative competence for many preschoolers as of 2012.

Children attend the kindergarten twice a day. One is in the morning and the second is in the afternoon. The village kindergarten for the children aged from 3-6 years is demonstrated below on picture 5.



Figure 7: Children at the village's kindergarten.

The narrative of the woman and the interview with the children shows the equality between men and women and boys and girls from two angles. First the community does not have the tradition of gender based social differentiation. As a result, women have the same social position as men and both receive the same attention for their perspectives and respect for their rights. Second, such tradition of the community characterizes the everyday life of children. As shown in the interview, children do not perceive gender differences in their everyday play practices. Following the tradition among their community, the children exercise gender-free social interaction which implies that among the Awra Amba community children grow without any form of engenderment. This implies that manhood and womanhood as well as the interdependence between men and women is based on the biological sex. In other words, it is only the biological sex that marks the difference between men and women as well as manhood and womanhood. This tradition makes the community unique: a socially transformed society surrounded by highly engendered and hierarchical communities.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis, children's place in Awra Amba Community has been observed from three angles. These are gender equality, social order and intergenerational relationships. It is discussed that children are active participants in activation and perpetuation of gender equity, social order and egalitarian intergenerational relationships. Regarding gender equality, the Awra Amba children expressed that boys and girls as well as men and women enjoy similar social roles and equal social positions. Such perspectives of children indicate that children are well aware of the collective values among the community and are exercising them as part of their everyday lives. Growing in such circumstance, children of the Awra Amba community inherits and perpetuates the tradition of gender equality. Children's place in perpetuation of social orders is observable through children perspectives on equality, honesty, and fraternity among all human beings. Equality among all human beings, honesty and fraternity among all human beings are the pillars of the Awra Amba common values and these pillars of values embedded in children's everyday work, play and social interactions. This is also reflected in intergenerational relationship (the relationships between adults and children) which is based on egalitarian interaction. In Awra Amba community, adults think that children have valuable opinions useful for the community and have ability to improve their situation. Thus, children are always asked to come with new ideas and to make concrete proposals.

As discussed in different chapters of the thesis, in Awra Amba community, the age and gender based household labor division is not a common tradition. Every day work that includes a number of different categories such as weaving, trading and cooking and child care depend on capability and physical strength rather than depending on gender and age category. Thus, for children access to any work seems to depend on the child's skill level and desire. For both girls

and boys; work, play and school took up a majority of time. Smaller children spend more time emulating work in play than performing adult-dependent work and as children grow in age there are clear increases in time spent in work and school and decreases in play. Without influence from adults, children divide their time for work, school and play practicing other work skills independent of adults. Through participation in play and work groups with each other as well as with adults, children socialize themselves to the everyday life of the Awra Amba community, children attain the continuity of equality between men and women, continuity of social order and equality between children and adults.

It is believed that through the work, children learn about economic skills and responsibilities, Children learn about the organization of the household economy and the interdependencies between household members. Among the Awra Amba community, both boys and girls enjoy egalitarian relationships with adults. Everyday activities of children (play, work and school) involve multi-age and multi-sex interactions and participations. Through such participation, children acquire relevant skills of life and exercise the core Awra Amba community's values, egalitarianism and respect for human kinds.

This study illustrates that childhood is constructed as discursive and structural phenomena and produced and reproduced from the perspectives of adults and children. It shows that childhood is a contextual and constructive phenomenon. Children develop and act within the set of embedded social and cultural contexts of which some are the traditional social and cultural circumstances that include customs, beliefs, ancestral values, norms and the others are modern social situations which consists of schools, and livelihood dynamics. In line with the structural approach to childhood, these contexts influence the family life style which in turn characterizes children's behavior, interest, value, and participation. From the perspectives of the social study

of childhood, the study clarifies that childhood is a social construct which means embedded in the cultural and social systems and practices of a society. Children's place in a society is understood through observation of children's relationships with adults, children's participation in the community and children's concern for common values. Childhood is understood as part of social process in a society and multiple theoretical perspectives such as "generational construction", "cultural construction", discursive construction" and "children as social actors" are useful for this understanding.

Eventually, I would like to put the following recommendations for the gaps observed in the process of the research. As it was displayed in picture 7, the wall, the roof and the seat of the current kindergarten in the village is made of mud, wood and grass. It also lacks the basic facilities and playground. Therefore, I encourage any institution that is willing to take part in the intervention of making a better schooling environment for the children.

It was also mentioned in the body of this thesis that the community lacks qualified preschool assistants and teachers. Therefore, I suggest that institution (public, private or civil) would collaborate with the community in transferring knowledge and skill by training selected members of the community is highly invited.

The major livelihood of the community is from weaving. Currently, the community uses manual weaving machine which is operated by hand. This is time taking and energy wasting old-fashioned system. In order for the community to have a better life, modern weaving machines and special training about the modern weaving methods is needed. Therefore, any capable and voluntary organization can take part in providing both the modern technology and the knowledge

about modern weaving approaches that can transform the living standards of the community to a much better improved level.

Children's health care center is also needed in the community in order to promote the health and wellbeing of children of this community.

Finally, I suggest a broader and longitudinal research in order to further explore children and childhood of this community from different perspectives.

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