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THE STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION

A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE ZAY



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List of Zay Terms

Arasho	- Men's cultural playing
Atemachit	- Old man used for bride inquires
Atomoqu	- Thick beer made from sorghum
Aydery	- Thick beer made from gešo plant
Barano	- Bridegroom
Bärbäri	- Pepper and spices
Birr	- Ethiopian Currency (1 USD ≈ 18 Birr)
Chim	- Sweet honey wine
Digis	- Ceremony
Fetasho	- Women's cultural playing
Gešo	- Leaves used to make Aydery
Huthutu	- Flour boiled in water with spices and butter, a thick porridge
Iseechi	- Butter
Mäsüb	- Low wicker basket used for eating
Mäsübwerk	- Lacework used to decorate a Mäsüb
Mušru	- Bride
Wasteña	- A judge for each partner in a married couple to help solve marital disputes
Tabeta	- Ethiopian sour pancake made from millet flour
Tafi	- Millet used to make tabeta
Wachit	- Clay pot

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1 INTRODUCTION

A salient issue in contemporary African studies is that of ethnicity, as seen by the many studies published on the subject over the last decade (cf. Abbink 1997, 2006, 2011; L. Smith 2007; Teshome-Bahiru and Zahorik 2008; Vaughan 2003; Yeros 1999b). These studies, while ambitious and generally extremely relevant, often focus on major ethnic groups, conflicts between two or more large ethnic groups, and their relation to the State. What is missing, and what I have done here, is a case study on a smaller ethnic group that is often overlooked by both scholars and national governments.

Since 1991, Ethiopia has been based on an ethnic-federal model, which has served to primarily politicize ethnicity (Aalen 2002; Abbink 1997; Clapham 2004). Whereas before ethnicity was fluid and unconscious (to a significant extent), it has now – in a national setting – become more rigid and the vehicle through which ethnic claims are voiced and (ethnic) identities maintained. The Ethiopian Constitution enshrines this ideology, stating that “all sovereign powers resides in the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia (Article 8.1)” (Aalen 2006:243). Abbink (1998) recognizes the State and globalization as playing key roles here and notes them as two factors that “lead to ethnicities hardening and being presumed, also by their adherents, to exist as immutable collectives,” he defines these factors as:

The nature of state activity in a culturally heterogeneous country: the state – apart even from the regime running it – has hegemonic ambitions as an administrative structure with its own codes, and is a vehicle of partial or elite interests; and b) the characteristics of emerging globalization as a cultural process. By connecting the local and the global – through market forces, migration, new electronic and media communications, and ideologies of group contrast and identity–these trends redefine local particularisms and accord them a new role in wider arenas. [Abbink 1998:60-61]

In Ethiopia these processes can be seen to affect the Zay, a minority ethnic group living on the islands of Lake Zway,¹ Zway town, Meki and the villages around the lake. Thus, this research will focus on two main salient topics. First it examines the Zay through a modern lens, seeing how historical traditions are interpreted contemporarily and by critically examining Zay oral traditions, history, and current expressions of identity. Second, it will look at the State (both federal and regional) and ethnic-federalism as they relate to the Zay on issues such as political representation and recognition.

¹ Alternative spellings for “Zway” are numerous, some being: Ziway, Zeway, Zuwai, Zuai, Suai, Swai and Zwai. The spelling used here will be “Zway,” cf. Wolf Leslau, 'Review: People of South-West Ethiopia and Its Borderland by Ernesta Cerrulli', *American Anthropologist*, 59/5 (1957), 917-918, Wolf Leslau, *Zway Ethiopic Documents: Grammar and Dictionary* (Aethiopistische Forschungen, 51; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999).

1.1 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The Zay, who inhabit the islands of Ethiopia's Lake Zway, as well as lakeside towns and villages, claim to have first settled in the area in the 9th century, when, religious refugees were fleeing queen Yodit who was destroying churches and church property in Aksum. Other migratory waves to the islands and Lake Zway area are said to have occurred during the reign of Amda Tsion (r. 1314-1344), Zara Yaqob (r. 1434-1468) and finally during the wars with Imam Ahmed ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi around 1527. References to the islands are found in various Royal Chronicles and travelers' accounts such as: a chronicle collected by a priest *Qésä Gäbez Täklä Haymanot* of Aksum (Andersen 2000; Sergew Hable Selassie 1972); the chronicle of Susneyos (Esteves Pereira 1892); the *Futuh al-Habash*, a chronicle of the Muslim conquest of Abyssinia (Shihāb 2003); Bahrey's *History of the Galla* (Bahrey 1954); the Chronicle of Menilek II (Gabra Sëlläse 1930b); stories recorded by Father Francisco Alvares (1961) who traveled there in 1520; W.C. Harris (1844b, 1844a), a British emissary to Ethiopia during the time of Sahle Selassie; a traveler, Captain M.S. Wellby (1901); (Blundell 1906) (Hodson 1922) (Le Roux 1905) and even studies such as those by: Eike Haberland (1963), Paul B. Henze (1973a, 1973b, 1989), Ronny Meyer (2000, 2005) Finally, linguistic surveys of the Zay language (Zay or Zayña) have also been carried out, and can provide information as to how many Zay speakers there are, though the data seems to be incomplete (cf. Gardner and Siebert 2001; Jordan et al. 2011; Wedekind and Wedekind 2002).

The Zay are a Semitic-speaking people whose language is quite similar to Silt'e, Ulbarag and Wolane dialects of the Gurage group, as well as the Harari language (Haberland 1963:787). Ancestors of the Zay most likely moved on a large scale to the islands during the Oromo migrations during the 16th and 17th centuries (Henze 1973:31). The first inhabitants of the islands were most likely from different groups, as some Zay have claimed that they were religious refugees from the northern city of Axum or the eastern city of Harar during a time when these cities were sacked by Muslim conquest. The islands are mentioned in various royal chronicles and travelers' accounts as well. A prophet, Abba Mikael, head monk at Dabra Malago (in Simean), was banished to the islands by emperor Baeda Maryam (r. 1468-1478) for predicting the defeat of the Amhara army at the hands of the Muslims (Perruchon 1893). Lake Zway is also mentioned during the time of the wars with Ahmed Grañ (a 16th century Muslim ruler from Harar who is said to have destroyed many churches and church property), under the rule of Lebna Dengel (r. 1508-1540) and Galawdewos (r. 1540-1559). An account is

given of a Muslim general who camped on the shores on the lake and wanted to sack the churches there. However, his men were frightened at the thought of crossing by boat so the general had to give up on this idea (Shihāb 2003:306). Again, the lake and the islands are mentioned during the reign of emperor Sartza Dengel (r. 1563-1595) during which an Oromo army that was causing trouble in Shoa was defeated in the area (Beckingham and Huntingford 1954b:lxv).

By isolating themselves on the islands, the Zay are said to have been able to preserve their Orthodox Christian faith and develop a unique culture, despite being surrounded by the predominantly Muslim and pagan Oromo. It wasn't until 1886, when Emperor Menelik II 'reconquered' the Zay region, that they were reconnected with Christian Ethiopia (Henze 1989:34-35). Prior to that time, contact with the northern Ethiopian Empire was very limited and typically involved monks or priests visiting the islands for short periods. After recognizing the authority of Menelik II, the Zay were granted the status of an independent tribal entity, governed by a *Balambaras*² (title granted to local governors). Due to the relatively amicable relations between the Zay and the surrounding Oromo, currently many Zay have settled on the lakeshores and began farming large tracts of land and keeping herds of cattle. Many of the Zay who settled on the lakeshores have assimilated to Oromo culture and intermarriage is not uncommon (Haberland 1963:788). More recently, an increasing number of Zay have been moving to the mainland towns because living on the islands presents economic and educational limitations.

With the implementation of ethnic-federalism in 1991, Ethiopian citizens were no longer only members of their respective states, but also members of a specific ethnic group. An example of this is that for election registration purposes, Ethiopians must state their ethnic identity (Abbink 1997:160). A key aspect of ethnic-federalism that pertains to the Zay is the status of "minority groups." As the number of Zay is estimated between twenty and thirty thousand, it is imperative to see how a system that is supposed to support and promote ethnicity is actually doing – or failing to do – so. With these issues in mind the importance of "ethnic identity" labels comes to the forefront. If other groups in Ethiopia have been granted this special status it begs the question: why have the Zay not been given this special status as well?

² The title "Balambaras" means "keeper of the citadel," cf. Denis Nosnitsin, 'Balambaras', in Siegbert Uhlig (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* (Vol. 1 A – C; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003), 452.

The issue at hand deals with two main aspects; the first with the determination of an “ethnic group” and the second with aspects related to recognition and representation such as: representation in the House of People’s Representatives (parliament), linguistic and cultural rights, and self-administration through a *liyyu woreda* (a special district reserved for minority ethnic groups). These issues have been especially relevant in Ethiopia since the advent of the new government in 1991.

The conceptualization of ethnicity in Ethiopia has been officially defined in a “primordialist” sense, similar to that as espoused by Geertz (1973). Aalen (2006) sums up this view superbly and is worth quoting at length here:

The Ethiopian Constitution’s definition of ethnic groups as clearly distinguishable cultural groups is akin to primordial ideas of ethnicity. Article 39.10 of the Ethiopian Constitution defines a nationality as “a group of people who have or share a large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory.” [...] It means that every citizen must belong to an ethnic group and define themselves along ethnic lines. As we have seen, the colonial indirect rule, with its official definition of ethnic identities as fixed and inborn, created and rigidified ethnic identities. [Aalen 2006:247]

The main problem with the Ethiopian government’s line of thinking is that it fails to take into account the fact that ethnicity is not static, and that “the importance and significance of ethnicity and its political expression is likely to change from time to time, all according to the current political and societal situation” (Aalen 2006:248) and that it “imprisons” people in one identity.

Finally, it is important to question any sort of language espousing ethnic claims, as it is “usually a political language in disguise.” The continuity of historical forms of social organization is important to examine when one is trying to determine legitimate forms of current social organization. Another question to ask is in what forms are these methods of social organization and interaction being reinvented and how they are resurfacing in contemporary Ethiopia. Lastly it needs to be addressed to what extent these ethnic groups have been “invented” to further political claims (Abbink 1997:161).

After 1991 the administrative map of Ethiopia was redrawn. Out of this emerged nine ethnically based administrative regions (known as *kilil* in Amharic), and two federally administered cities. The regions are divided into zones, which are in turn divided into *woredas* (districts) that are composed of *kebeles* (neighborhood administration). The Ethiopian Constitution recognizes that within these ethnically defined *kililoch* (plural of *kilil*) there may be ethnic minorities that deserve recognition and representation. Thus they made

exceptions for these groups by creating what is known as a *liyyu woreda* (special district), which are “carved out along “ethnic” lines within a larger region which become relatively autonomous enclaves in a member state” (Abbink 1997:167). These *liyyu woredas* are administered by members of the ethnic group and gain special rights such as the ability to teach in their own language and an automatic representative in the Council of People’s Representatives. The Zay have been trying to achieve both a *liyyu woreda* and a representative since 1991 without success.

Despite the lack of success, the Zay have continued to push for recognition and representation. In recent years they have stepped up pressure on the government with more petitions and letters expressing their wishes. The Zay are not alone in their quest for representation and recognition, as recently the Silt’e (previously part of the Gurage) were granted this special status (cf. Nishi 2005). The implications for their lack of representation and recognition are twofold. It seems that for a majority of the people it has only served to reinforce their ethnic identity as Zay (as we will see a major theme in Zay history is struggle). On another level, for some people, mostly those that are living in Oromo areas, it has served to weaken their sense of identity and “Zayness.” This seems to occur as they are essentially swallowed up by the dominant Oromo culture in the area.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Since 1991, Ethiopia has been based on an ethnic-federal model that has in effect served to primarily politicize ethnicity. Whereas before ethnicity was not a prescribed identity and more fluid and unconscious (to an extent), it has now become the vehicle through which (ethnic) claims are to be voiced and (ethnic) identities maintained. This, however, wrongly presupposes a primordial conception of ethnicity. In the analytical sense, a constructivist approach to ethnicity is needed in order to understand the many facets inherent in an ethnic identity and the ways in which “the importance and significance of ethnicity and its political expression is likely to change from time to time, all according to the current political and societal situation” (Aalen 2006:248). When it comes to the “identity” part of an “ethnic identity,” ideas put forth by Charles Tilly (1995), Tania Murray Li (2000, 2005), Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2000), and Peter Geschiere (2009) have been useful in understanding different moments, categories, expressions, and conjunctions of “identity.” Thus, in this study I will examine how an ethnic identity has been (historically), and is

(currently) constructed or deconstructed around the Zay. I will also examine the role of the State (both federal and regional) vis-à-vis the Zay and what affect this has on their ethnic identity expressions.

There are various questions that need to be answered in order to understand the situation of the Zay. The two central questions and supplementary questions guiding this research are:

1. How has an ethnic identity been (and is) constructed or deconstructed around the Zay?
 - a. What are the socio-political implications of this construction/deconstruction?
 - b. How do oral traditions inform Zay identity?
2. Why, how, and to what extent have State policies affected the Zay and what does this mean for Zay identity?
 - a. Why are the Zay not represented in the Council of People's Representatives?
 - b. What, if any, are Zay political claims?

1.3 METHODS

The research for this thesis was conducted over a six-month period beginning in mid-July 2011 and ending in mid-January 2012. A follow-up research trip was taken in May 2012 for some clarifications and to get comments on a draft of the thesis from several Zay.

As the research focused on the Zay ethnic group, I found it useful to base myself in Zway town for a number of reasons. First and foremost, I had friends in Zway (both Zay and non-Zay) who could help facilitate my research and help me settle down in Zway at the beginning of the rainy season. Second, it was a perfect location to gain access to the islands. There are usually several boats that leave daily to the islands of Aysut or Debra Tsion, located on the other side of the lake. An alternative to Zway could have been the town of Meki, located twenty minutes north of Zway and to the northwest of the lake; however, I was told that the boats from Meki to the islands are more difficult – which they were – and do not leave as often to the islands. Lastly, Zway was an excellent launching off point for conducting research in other areas, as the Zay population lives all around the lake.

When it is not raining Zway is a very dusty town, and I found this out immediately after the rains stopped in September. Thus it was useful to conduct interviews in different locations. Over the course of the research, interviews, surveys, and ethnographic research was

conducted in: Zway, Meki, Adama, Bochesa, Herrera, Aysut, Debra Tsion, and Addis Ababa. When going to Meki, Adama, or Addis Ababa, I found it useful to use semi structured interviews to get specific information, as I usually had an appointment with someone who was referred to me as being knowledgeable in certain areas of Zay history and culture. After the interviews were over I was able to have less formal talks with the person, accompanied by my assistant/interpreter. These talks turned out to reveal even more information as my assistant/interpreter would often state that they had not heard a certain story before or were unaware of an aspect of Zay culture. From this, I was able to distinguish between certain customs as they were remembered and how they are actually practiced or preserved today.

What I found very interesting about these interviews was the sense of attachment that different informants had for the islands. Most of the informants in Addis Ababa and Adama had grown up on the islands but had moved to either Zway or Meki as young men, and from there found jobs, often far from the islands in places such Jimma or Addis Ababa, and were now retired or close to retiring. It was these informants who had a great sense of nostalgia for the islands and ‘things as they used to be.’ This is not to say that these men do not return to the islands, as most of them return several times a year for various reasons, be they church festivals, weddings, or funerals.

For those living closer to the lake in towns such as Zway or Meki, interviews, questionnaires, and ethnographic research were also conducted. Interviews varied from semi-structured interviews to casual conversation. The latter often yielded very rich information on certain sentiments and attitudes that were not expressed during the more formal interviews. During the interviews I always had my assistant/interpreter present; however, during my casual jaunts around town I would often go alone, and we spoke in a mixture of broken Amharic, Zay, English, and even occasionally throwing in some Oromo or Silt’e words I had learned. In Zway I also found myself walking around a lot and visiting areas where I knew that I would run into someone I knew or even visit their home. This was very useful in establishing a rapport with the Zay community and “get my name out there,” as often I would visit people who I had not met before and they knew who I was and that I was conducting research on the Zay. These casual encounters and the esteem they created greatly helped later in the research when I asked more sensitive issues related to politics and inter-ethnic relations.

When planning this research, I had assumed that I would be able to rent a room on one of the islands and conduct the island-based research from there. When I arrived in Zway I told this to a friend who had grown up on the island of Aysut and whose mother, father, and one of his older brothers still lived there. It turned out that there were no rooms to rent on the islands, and in fact, no one had inquired about it before. He insisted this would not be a problem and that I would be able to stay in his brother's house when I needed to go to Aysut. This also turned out to be the same when I visited the island of Debra Tsion, as there I was able to stay in the house of my assistant/interpreter who grew up there.

The island-based research was conducted over various short trips to the islands ranging from two weeks to only a few days. On the islands, interviews, surveys, and ethnographic research were conducted. The entire community was helpful in directing me to people who would be useful to interview, people they say as knowing history or specific ceremonies. I was even directed to a woman whose husband had recently passed away to interview her about Zay funeral customs. On the islands I was able to see 'traditional' aspects of Zay everyday life. For the men this was fishing, farming, and weaving, while for the women it was more in the preparation of food, the managing of the household, and the weaving of baskets. It is interesting to see the difference between specific times when the islands are more crowded, mostly during summer and specific events (church festivals, weddings, and funerals), and when they are less crowded, i.e., other times than those just mentioned. During the crowded periods there are people of all ages on the islands. During the less crowded periods I noticed a stark contrast in the population. It was mostly the elderly and very young who stayed there year round with the exception of a few younger men and women, who decided to live and work on the islands. Specific events that I was able to see and take part in were the Aysut Abraham Church celebration, the *Meskel* holiday on Debra Tsion, the visit of a recently married couple paying their respects to a man who is their "marital judge," a funeral on Aysut, and a wedding on Debra Tsion.

For most of the research I was directed towards older men. Subjects discussed with these men ranged from politics, culture, customs, and history. The times I was directed to women dealt with subjects such as weddings, funerals, and food. The different people who I was directed to definitely shaped the research that is presented here. For example, certain informants were less inclined to speak about conflict, especially with the Oromo, as they currently live together. It seemed that they did not want to bring up old conflicts and they

would often summarize conflicts as being over one issue or another instead of going into detail.

Figure 1 – Interviewing an old woman on Aysut



My use of an assistant/interpreter also greatly shaped the research. Over the first three months I used a female assistant/interpreter, who was from Debra Tsion, and specifically from the *Wayzaro gosa* (*Wayzaro* is discussed below, *gosa* is a kin group). Because of this we mostly spoke to people she knew and mainly from Debra Tsion, as many Zay living in Zway are from Debra Tsion. With her I had greater access to this *gosa* and thus my initial research was slanted in this direction. For the second three-month period I used an assistant/interpreter who grew up on Aysut. Again this shaped my research and was useful in correcting the bias my first three months had produced. With him we conducted interviews in Zway with many people from Aysut. We also made many trips to Meki, as many Zay from Aysut live there. With these two people I was able to get a more or less accurate representation of the Zay population, both males and females, and from both of the inhabited islands of Aysut and Debra Tsion. Moreover, from the informants I interviewed with these assistants I was given access to more people. During one research outing to Meki I recall

beginning at one man's house, and then he accompanied us to another man's house that he recommended us to speak with. This second man, along with the first, then accompanied us to a third home for an interview. This produced very interesting results, as the interviews became layered in a sense that those interviewed previously would chime in and add something they had forgotten during the subsequent interviews. Something quite uplifting about working with these assistants was that over the course of the research they were able to learn more about their own culture and history.

1.4 INNOVATIVE ASPECTS

I believe the innovative aspects inherent to this research to be the following. First, it examines the perceived history of an ethnic group as a means of understanding their current understandings about themselves. Second, it examines the historical basis of current ethnic claims by looking at historical forms of social organization and comparing them to those of the present. Third, one of the possible mechanisms through which an ethnic group could be maintained, connections, is examined by looking at the importance of rural-urban connections. Fourth, by uncovering the political claims of various political actors this research sheds light on the ways in which small groups are able to use ethnicity as a means of achieving political goals. Lastly, it provides a much-needed current case study on Zay ethnicity in Ethiopia that will enable researchers and policy makers alike to make better-informed decisions when dealing with ethnic groups, and especially 'minority ethnic groups.'

1.5 SOCIAL RELEVANCE

The increasingly critical literature on ethnic-federalism in Ethiopia suggests that the idea of basing one's citizenship on ethnicity has been disastrously unsuccessful. A critical examination of this experiment and the effects it has on the Zay will uncover the ways in which the State fails to implement this supposed 'liberating' ideology for these people. The salient phenomena of the rise of ethnic claims in Africa, and especially in Ethiopia, cannot go unexamined. By defining the political use and scope of an ethnic identity it will render concepts that are not immediately self-evident, evident (Abbink 1998:77).

Revealing the cultural, social and political transformations that have occurred among the Zay, especially since 1991, will lead to a better understanding of how basing one's citizenship on an ethnic group rather than on the individual themselves causes tensions and skirmishes within and at the borders of ethnic groups. Presently there are various

International and Domestic NGOs operating within Ethiopia. Some of these NGOs are focusing on the Zay and attempting to promote their ethnic identity, while others are focusing more on improving the living conditions of the Zay, mainly on the islands.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Here we are faced with several theoretical problems and choices when it comes to the various themes and subjects dealt with herein. For this study I wanted to examine the processes and circumstances under which an “ethnic identity” has been and currently is constructed around “the Zay.” Immediately we are faced with two problems: the first deals with the concept of “ethnicity” and the second with “identity.” When dealing with an “ethnic identity” we must not eschew the fact that these two terms often have a large deal of interplay. Elements of ethnicity can and do inform aspects of one’s identity and vice versa. That is not to say that these two terms are always mutually interwoven, as there is room for these concepts to grow and transform independently of one another. Let us first break these terms down in an attempt to examine and theorize with them independently of one another.

2.1 APPROACHES TO ETHNICITY

The conceptualization of ethnicity has had three main thrusts: the primordial approach, which envisions a rather timeless ethnicity based on historical and cultural symbols (Geertz 1973); the instrumental approach, which acknowledges the use of ethnicity by “political entrepreneurs” as a way of legitimizing ethnic and social claims (Norval 1999); and the constructivist approach, which attempts to look at the constant flux that is ethnicity and the ways an ethnic identity can change due to varying political or social circumstances and actors (Yeros 1999a; Young 1994). While the constructivists hold the current ‘hegemonic’ view on ethnicity, and is the view subscribed to here, it is important to look at the different schools through which constructivism emerged, those being primordialism and instrumentalism. These are both necessary to examine because remnants of these theories can be found in the current constructivist discourse. Moreover, it is important to know the primordialist point of view, as this is the view the Ethiopian government had in mind when they were crafting the Constitution.

2.1.1 PRIMORDIALISM

Early primordial scholarly work can be seen by Geertz (1973), who sees people as “incomplete animals, who fulfill themselves through the culture they create, which assumes the role of a primordial “given” of social existence” (Young 1993:23). Geertz’ assumptions are based on two ideas, which are worth quoting here:

The first of these is that culture is best seen not as complexes of concrete behavior patterns—customs, usages, traditions, habit clusters—[...] but as a set of control mechanisms—plans, recipes, rules instructions [...]—for the governing of behavior. The second idea is that man is precisely the animal most desperately dependent upon such extragenetic, outside-the-skin control mechanisms, such cultural programs, for ordering his behavior. [Geertz 1973:44]

Thus, according to Geertz, humans need culture as a means of self-fulfillment and for any sense of direction. Without this cultural direction “man’s behavior would be virtually unfavorable, a mere chaos of pointless acts and exploding emotions...” (Geertz 1973:46). Furthermore, Barth (1969) also notes the signals and signs – such as clothing and language – and the basic value orientations to which one’s conformity implies a certain basic identity.

Primordialist views stress that “ethnic identity stems from the givens of social existence – blood, speech, custom – which have an ineffable coerciveness in and of themselves” (Geertz 1973:259). Emberling (1997) notes that the primordialist scholars “think that ethnic groups maintain their identities because of emotional attachment to the symbols of their group” (Emberling 1997:306). The primordialist view thus sees ethnicity as a priori, as an innate characteristic that is instilled in a person from birth. This view was propagated by early cultural anthropologists’, and has become enshrined in the Ethiopian Constitution, as stated by Aalen:

The Ethiopian Constitution’s definition of ethnic groups as clearly distinguishable cultural groups is akin to primordial ideas of ethnicity. Article 39.10 of the Ethiopian Constitution defines a nationality as “a group of people who have or share a large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory.” [Aalen 2006:247]

This view sees ethnic groups as neatly divided and eternal. This fails to take into account the fact of the fluidity of ethnicity and the extent to which ethnicity is a social construction. Finally, the use of ethnicity by ‘social entrepreneurs’ during times of political and social competition is overlooked by the primordialist view. This is where instrumentalism begins to fill in some of the gaps.

2.1.2 INSTRUMENTALISM

The instrumentalist approach tried to politicize various actors and saw ethnicity being used in times of political and social competition. Young (1994) succinctly sums up the basic tenants of instrumentalism as:

The uses of ethnicity as a weapon in political combat and social competition. Ethnicity was contingent, situational, and circumstantial; it was an available identity in a repertoire of social roles for use in the pursuit of material advantage. Such a conceptualization beckoned

exploration of the political factors that might induce its activation, the cultural entrepreneurs who supplied its doctrine, and the activists who exploited these solidarities. [Young 1994:77]

Atkinson (1999) notes that this approach was used by scholars in various disciplines such as anthropologists concerned with “understanding ‘tribal’ Africans in multi-ethnic urban settings,” political scientists who wanted to understand ‘modern’ conceptions of nationalism, politics and the state as well as various materialist scholars.

This view also stresses “that ethnic identity is nothing but a mask deployed strategically to advance group interests which are often economic in character” (Norval 2012:306). The notion that ethnicity is something to be yielded as a weapon and used to advance one’s interests or one’s group interest brings up an important issue. Those who are capable of mobilizing an ethnic group and instilling a group identity are more often than not elites of that group and have a material interest in the advancement of group claims. The claims of these ethnic elites may or may not be legitimate, however, in the expression and politicization of these claims they become a reality. In this sense the instrumentalist view aims to see “the ‘rationality’ of ethnicity in the process of political organization, in the context of novel social, economic, and political circumstances” (Yeros 1999a:113).

2.1.3 CONSTRUCTIVISM

The constructivist approach seeks to draw certain aspects from both primordialism and instrumentalism while at the same time seeking a departure from these previous approaches. Noting the constructivist approach, Aalen (2006) states, “The importance and significance of ethnicity and its political expression is likely to change from time to time, all according to the current political and societal situation.” There are various strands of constructivism, which have attempted to be integrated into a single monolithic approach, however the results thus far have been unsuccessful. Despite this, a useful explanation of constructivism has been offered by Crawford Young (1994), which is worth quoting at length here:

The constructivist inverts the logic of the instrumentalist and primordialist, both of whom presume the existence of communal consciousness, either as a weapon in pursuit of collective advantage or as inner essence. The constructivist sees ethnicity as the product of human agency, a creative social act through which such commonalities as speech code, cultural practice, ecological adaptation, and political organization become woven into a consciousness of shared identity. Once a threshold is reached, the consciousness may become to a degree self-reproducing at a group level but continue to be contingent for the individual, who remains engaged in an ongoing process of transacting and redefining identity. The constructivist thus places higher stress on contingency, flux, and change of identity that the other two major approaches would concede. [Young 1994:78]

In this research, it will be enlightening to see how “the creation of ethnicity as an ideological statement of popular appeal in the context of profound social, economic and political change” in Ethiopia “was the result of the differential conjunction of various historical forces and phenomena” (Vail 1989:11). The new claims and ethnic awareness after 1991 in Ethiopia will be important to analyze in light of the situation that led to these new configurations.

Although we have seen that the Ethiopian State’s conceptualization of ethnicity is ill-informed, in this study it is useful to use the same categories espoused in the Constitution as a means of defining an ethnic-group, as this is the framework that the Zay must work with to achieve their goal of being recognized as an ethnic group. Article 39.5 of the Ethiopian Constitution states that “A Nation, Nationality or People [. . .] is a group of people who have or share large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory.” Therefore, in our critical examination of the Zay, it will be useful to try and highlight these aspects to show that the Zay are indeed an ethnic group, or using “A Nation, Nationality, or People” despite the fact that this official conceptualization of ethnicity is primordialist (cf. Aalen 2006; Abbink 2006; Vaughan 2003).

Drawing on Anthony D. Smith (1993) and Redie Bereketeab (2011) we can define “ethnicity” as (1) a named human population, (2) with a myth of or actual common descent (ancestry), (3) shared memories, (4) a link with, or persistent residence in, a specific territory, (5) specifically identifiable cultural traits (e.g., values, norms, special types of dress and food), and (6) a measure of ethnic solidarity. Tentatively I will add (7) a shared common language, however I would note that this should not be any sort of prerequisite for defining an “ethnic group” as often smaller ethnic groups may lose their language owed to them being situated within a larger ethnic group (cf. Abbebe Kifleyesus 2006). Moreover, we should not forget that many of these elements are in a constant state of flux. As populations grow and wane and memories may change as elements are forgotten and incorporated, so do the groups perceptions. Even cultural traits are in constant flux as new materials may replace items traditionally associated with a group or with a certain ceremony such as clothes and items for food preparation. Ethnic solidarity will also change depending on the sociopolitical benefit or disadvantage such identification with such group may incur.

2.2 IDENTITY

Moving from the “ethnic” to “identity” we can see that even the term “identity” has recently come under attack. These critiques note the overuse and duplicity of meanings that “identity” has come to mean. Some attempts to overcome these critiques follow. Charles Tilly (1995) notes:

The emerging view is relational in the sense that it locates identities in connections among individuals and groups rather than in the minds of particular persons or of whole populations. It therefore breaks with both the sorts of individualism that have dominated recent analyses of social life: both (1) methodological individualism with its independent, self-contained, self-propelling rational actors and (2) phenomenological individualism with its deep subjectivity as well as its penchant for solipsism. The emerging view is not only relational but cultural in insisting that social identities rest on shared understandings and their representations. It is historical in calling attention to the path-dependent accretion of memories, understandings and means of action within particular identities. The emerging view, finally, is contingent in that it regards each assertion of identity as a strategic interaction liable to failure or misfiring rather than as a straightforward expression of an actor’s attributes. Thus scholars have come to think of citizenship as a set of mutual, contested claims between agents of states and members of socially-constructed categories: genders, races, nationalities and others. [Tilly 1995:5-6]

He further goes on to outline various concepts that we may use to help locate the interplay between identity and citizenship, or in our case – ethnicity. These concepts are:

- Actor: any set of living bodies (including a single individual) to which human observers attribute coherent consciousness and intention.
- Category: a set of actors distinguished by a single criterion, simple or complex.
- Transaction: a bounded communication between one actor and another.
- Tie: a continuing series of transactions to which participants attach shared understandings, memories, forecasts, rights and obligations.
- Role: a bundle of ties attached to a single actor.
- Network: a more or less homogeneous set of ties among three or more actors.
- Group: coincidence of a category and a network.
- Organization: group in which at least one actor has the right to speak authoritatively for the whole.

However we are still left with the ambiguity for the term “identity.” Despite the ambiguity of the term, “identity” has remained an indispensable tool for analysis for three noted reasons:

First, the phenomenon of identity is not private and individual but public and relational; second, it spans the whole range from category to organization; third, any actor deploys multiple identities, at least one per category, tie, role, network, group and organization to which the actor is attached. That others often typify and respond to an actor by singling out one of those multiple identities - race, gender, class, job, religious affiliation, national origin, or something else - by no means establishes the unity, or even the tight connectedness, of those identities. That illness or zealotry occasionally elevates one identity to overwhelming dominance of an actor’s consciousness and behavior, furthermore, does not gainsay the prevalence of multiple identities among people who are neither ill nor zealots. [Tilly 1995:7]

Again, from this we can see the multiplicity of roles that an “identity” can have depending on the situation and which category, tie, role, etc., is pinpointed and elevated at any given moment or interaction.

Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2000) give a murderous critique of the notion of “identity” and have proposed moving beyond the term “identity” in favor of more meaningful and precise words. This consists of various sets such as “identification” and “categorization,” “self-understanding” and “social location,” and “commonality,” “connectedness,” and “groupness.” By moving beyond “identity” we can then examine the *processes* involved, and within these processes we can further see relationships inherent in such constructions.

The act of “identification” is done by various actors and in various contexts. Identification can be done by the individual, the group, the other, or the state. These different actors may have different rationales for *categorizing* individuals, groups, etc. in a specific manner. The categorization deals with how “one may identify oneself (or another person) by membership in a class of persons sharing some categorical attribute” (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:15) (for our purposes, such as ethnicity, occupation, language, religion, or *gosa*). It should be noted that “how one identifies oneself - and how one is identified by others - may vary greatly from context to context; self- and other-identification are fundamentally situational and contextual” (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:14). Self-understanding can be characterized as the “‘situated subjectivity’: one’s sense of who one is, of one’s social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act” (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:17).

Drawing on the work of Stuart Hall (1990, 1995, 1996), Tania Murray Li (2000) notes a “global conjuncture of belonging” in her work in Indonesia:

A group’s self-identification as tribal or indigenous is not natural or inevitable, but neither is it simply invented, adopted, or imposed. It is, rather, a positioning which draws upon historically sedimented practices, landscapes, and repertoires of meaning, and emerges through particular patterns of engagement and struggle. The conjunctures at which (some) people come to identify themselves as indigenous, realigning the ways they connect to the nation, the government, and their own, unique tribal place, are the contingent products of agency and the cultural and political work of articulation. Other conjunctures have a different resonance, but are no less political in character. [Li 2000:151]

Relevant to Li’s argument here is her call for “a more complex rendering of the relationship between simplification, control, and improvement, and [to examine] the range of contexts in which metis (contextualized, situated knowledge and practice) is nurtured both within and beyond the state apparatus” (Li 2005:384). Another aspect pertinent here is the suggestion to

go beyond the question posed by James Scott (1998) in the subtitle of his book *Seeing Like a State* “why have certain schemes designed to improve the human condition failed?” to questions posed by James Ferguson (2005) such as: What do these schemes do? What are their messy, contradictory, multilayered, and conjunctural effects?

When looking at the relationship between simplification, control, and improvement one needs not discount the value (and complexity) of metis for revealing sites of interaction between Zay identity and State schemes. Li identifies four such conjunctures useful for examination:

(1) When systematic data is ignored in favor of local knowledge, (2) when adjusting local knowledge and practice is the purpose of the intervention, (3) when local knowledge sustains bureaucratic and profit-making schemes that would otherwise collapse, and (4) when local knowledge and practice is embraced because experts recognize it to be intrinsically sound. [Li 2005:388]

By examining such conjunctures, one is able to see the ways and means that States incorporate local knowledge in their dealings with specific peoples or groups. Fukuyama (2004), states that “the most successful programs are often idiosyncratic, involving what James Scott labels metis, the ability to use local knowledge to create local solutions” (Fukuyama 2004:199).

Peter Geschiere (2009) notes various problems with “identity,” in that it is used to explain both essentializing and actor oriented approaches to “identity.” It is noted that “An essentializing view of identity risks taking autochthony’s deceiving self-evidence for granted, thus neglecting its constant shifts and reorientations” and that “an actors approach has even more serious limitations: it risks resulting in a kind of instrumentalist view, reducing the impact of these notions to conscious choices and strategies of key figures” (Geschiere 2009:31). Central to Geschiere’s “belonging” is the notion of autochthony “to be born from the soil.” Two central reasons are given for its use:

First of all, it seems to represent the most authentic form of belonging: “born from the earth itself”—how could one belong more? This means that the notion not only condenses the essence of the idea of belonging but also highlights in a particularly pregnant form its inherent ambiguities. A second reason to study it is its impressively wide but fragmented spread: it turns up at highly different moments and places, without a clear link, yet assuming everywhere the same aura of self-evidence. [Geschiere 2009:2]

Again here we see the ambiguity for certain notions, in this case “autochthony,” and the multiplicity of meanings and manifestations that these notions may engender. This is not a hindrance however, as it is rendered more useful in this form. There is no millennial “identity,” or a culmination of such, there is one specific moments and events where certain

expressions of ones “identity” may come to bear light and overshadow other expressions. Moreover, the unclear linkages are another conjuncture (to borrow from Li) we should try and follow, as even if there is no clear link, it is still interesting to see why or why not this is occurring.

As a means of overcoming these limitations a processual approach has been presented (cf. Appadurai 2006; Bauman 2004), and it is noted that:

A determined processual approach may be crucial for interpreting autochthony’s riddles, precisely because of the notion’s inherent tendency to deny change and history. This makes it all the more tempting a topic for trying to explore the practical relevance of notions like subjectivation— following Foucault’s vision of the *sujet* in the double meaning of the word as both agent and being subjected—and its more concrete associate, “techniques of the self,” as crucial to *dispositifs* of (auto-)disciplining. These notions are certainly in fashion now—which makes it all the more challenging to try to test their practical relevance. [Geschiere 2009:32]

In this analysis it will be useful to use elements presented by the above authors. First Tilly helps with an “identity” in that it is “an actor’s experience of a category, tie, role, network, group or organization, coupled with a public representation of that experience; the public representation often takes the form of a shared story, a narrative” (Tilly 1995:7). Similar notions were presented by Brubaker and Cooper that will help to break down “identity” into its constituent parts. Second, we must examine the four conjunctures as presented by Li, to see how state planning (ethnic-federalism) impacts “identity” and the Zay. Lastly, Geschiere’s notion of autochthony merits analysis as related to the Zay, as well as to examine them as being “both agents and subjected.”

2.3 OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The use of oral traditions is also a key element of this research, and thus, there are theoretical understandings that may help us in our critical analysis of them. The oral traditions can be grouped into three categories. According to Spear (1981) we can classify oral traditions into three periods: early, middle, and late. The early traditions are mythical in the sense that they are more origin or genesis stories. The middle period is characterized by a sort of repetitive cyclical process, or “things as they should be.” The late period is more linear and reminiscent and remembers “things as they are.” There are certain biases that we should also be aware of when examining oral traditions.

Quirin (1993) has noted “Ethiopic written documents’ centrist and elitist focus on the royal monarchy and Orthodox church” and that “oral and local written traditions from the various peoples now included in Ethiopia can provide a partial corrective to the centrist

biases of royal written sources” (Quirin 1993:297). It is also noted that even when using oral traditions, it is difficult to overcome these biases as even most local oral traditions focus on the elite. It is also the case here that Zay oral traditions tend to have an elite bias.

When examining oral traditions here it will be useful to use the periods suggested by Spear (1981) in looking for certain core narratives. However, we cannot look at certain periods as purely myth-based, as we have certain historical written sources that often compliment and verify the oral traditions. Where we do find some problems is when it comes to the sources of some of these written histories, as they are often travelers’ accounts or royal chronicles, we do not necessarily know where the writers obtained their information, as it could very well be that these written sources are based on oral traditions and vice versa. Therefore, in our analysis of oral traditions juxtaposed along side certain written histories, we must take care in accepting these traditions as *truths*, and analyze them through a modern lens as a means to draw out certain relationships (whether they are group, intergroup, cultural, or geographic) and themes (such as Christianity, migration, or suppression).

3 THE ZAY: HISTORICAL AND ORAL TRADITIONS

The history and oral traditions of the Zay are often interrelated with much larger events in Ethiopia. They are part of the history of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian State, as well as the Aksumite and Gurage peoples' history. As we will see, relationships between Zay history and the history of greater Ethiopia range from Muslim invasions to the conquests of Menilek II and from the destruction of churches in Aksum to emperors and Christians seeking refuge on the islands of Lake Zway. References to Lake Zway and a Christian population living there can be found in various Royal Chronicles, travelers' tales, journals, and oral traditions. These sources help us shed light on the mismatched and sometimes contradictory historical traditions that have been passed down for generations. The historical record has not been kind to the researcher here, as many sources do not recall the people living on the islands, but deal primarily with external history and events related to the islands, such as wars, conquests, and occupations. However, we do have various oral traditions correlating with the historical events and sources. This is not to say that the oral traditions are historical truths, and we should not analyze them as such. Rather, we must critically assess oral traditions through a modern lens focusing on the connections and relationships that these oral traditions seek to explain and highlight. With these understandings in mind, we can then turn to history and see how it has shaped current events, understandings, and relationships. This chapter aims to bring together all the written sources and corresponding oral traditions on Lake Zway and the Zay in an attempt to reconstruct the historical timeline. The timeline may occasionally jump a few hundred years, and some of the sources are based on legends and exaggerated chronicles; however, it will nonetheless help to uncover the connections and relationships associated with Zay historical traditions and lay a foundation from which the Zay identities – discussed in the next chapter – are built upon. Oral traditions are, occasionally, presented at length here; the intentions are to give a greater voice to these Zay oral traditions without filter and to lend credence to the subsequent analysis. The chapter is presented as follows: first, a discussion on the etymology of "Zay." Second, an overview of Lake Zway and its islands is given. Third, Zay origins are discussed followed by, fourth, the four waves of migration to Lake Zway.

3.1 THE ETYMOLOGY OF “ZAY”

It is not known exactly where the name “Zay” came from; however, we do have several stories regarding how the people came to be called Zay. The first is that the name “Zay” comes from a Hebrew word, *Zayin*, one of the twenty-two names for God:

«Zay, is a Hebrew word, it is the seventh letter of the Hebrew alphabet . . . As you might know, all Hebrew letters are meant for God, names for God . . . The seventh letter is Nitsu (Ge’ez translation of Zayin, meaning upright or holy).» [Informant #1 2011]

We are not given a specific reason as to why “Zayin” was chosen or whether it is a self-ascribed name or if it was externally ascribed to the Zay. Expanding on this notion, we can find Zayin in the Psalms of David 118/119. It is said that this Psalm relates to Zay historical experiences and was thus a good fit for their name:

י Zayin

⁴⁹ Keep in mind your promise to your servant on which I have built my hope.

⁵⁰ It is my comfort in distress, that your promise gives me life.

⁵¹ Endlessly the arrogant have jeered at me, but I have not swerved from your Law.

⁵² I have kept your age -- old judgements in mind, Yahweh, and I am comforted.

⁵³ Fury grips me when I see the wicked who abandon your Law.

⁵⁴ Your judgements are my song where I live in exile.

⁵⁵ All night, Yahweh, I hold your name in mind, I keep your Law.

⁵⁶ This is what it means to me, observing your precepts.

[New Jerusalem Bible: Psalm 119.49-56]

⁴⁹ ፩ ፤ ዛ፪ ፡፡ ተዘከር ፡ ቃለከ ፡ ዘአሰፈውኮ ፡ ለገብርከ ፡፡

⁵⁰ ወደእቲ ፡ አስተፈሥሐተኒ ፡ በሐማምዓ ፤ አስመ ፡ ቃልከ ፡ ኣሐዓወኒ ፡፡

⁵¹ ዕቡያን ፡ ዐመፃ ፡ ፈጽፋጸ ፤ ወእምሐግከሰ ፡ ኢተገሐሥኩ ፡፡

⁵² ወተዘከርኩ ፡ ፍትሐከ ፡ ዘእምዓለም ፤ ወተፈሣሐኩ ፡ እግዚኦ ፡፡

⁵³ ሐዘኝ ፡ አጎዘኒ ፡ እምታጥኣኝ ፤ እለ ፡ ጎጂጉ ፡ ሕገከ ፡፡

⁵⁴ መዝሙር ፡ ኮነኒ ፡ ኩነኔከ ፤ በብሔር ፡ ጎበ ፡ ፈለስኩ ፡፡

⁵⁵ ተዘከርኩ ፡ በሌሊት ፡ ስመከ ፡ እግዚኦ ፤ ወዐቀብኩ ፡ ሕገከ ፡፡

⁵⁶ ወደእቲ ፡ ኮነተኒ ፤ አስመ ፡ ኩነኔከ ፡ ጎሠሥኩ ፡፡

[Ethiopic Bible: Psalm 118.49-56]

We could also reason that because of various trials and tribulations (e.g. fleeing Aksum, keeping their faith despite being surrounded by Muslims, and various “pilgrimages”) the Zay kept their Christian faith and survived only by the grace of God, and that this name was chosen based on a sort of group experience. A second story is seen here:

When the first religious refugees from the north reached the shores of the lake, they found the place, especially the islands, very suitable for hiding and tried to enter them. As they did not know how to build canoes they simply stepped on big pieces of swimming grass which suddenly sunk down a little bit so that they stood in the water up to their knees. They were afraid of their lives and cried in panic *way way*, which is an exclamation of surprise or sorrow. The people still on the shores were crying *ze ze*, which is similar to Ge’ez «This!» and showed with their fingers toward the islands. The people on the shores as well as on the sinking grass were crying together and so the name of the lake was invented *Ze -way*. In accordance to the name of the lake the people who entered the islands by swimming grass called themselves Zay. [Temesgen Wolde Medhin 1998 in Meyer 2000:318-319]

As appealing as this story may be, I was told this cannot be the way the lake was named because this is a story from *Wayzaro* (the last migratory wave), which arrived from the east, close to the three southeast islands and the people were already known as Zay when they arrived. It is said that the first migrants to the area also named the lake *Zay Haik* (Lake Zay or Gods Lake, as Zay also means “God”), it is unclear how this changed to “Zway.”

It is not known when these people started actually calling themselves Zay nor for how long recent arrivals were deemed “not Zay.” In the first example we see a religious reason for the name “Zay” and its application to these people. If the first example is correct, then we can assume that this was an act of self-naming, because the Oromo refer to the Zay as *Laki* meaning “stirrer” or “paddler” and do not refer to them as Zay. When the Oromo first saw the Zay on their boats they did not know what they were doing and knew only the stirring motion they made with their paddles. Either way, from the first story, what we can see is the connection and importance Christianity has for the Zay, owed to the oral traditions claiming that the name is sourced from the Bible and that the Zay claim to have suffered and endured similar experiences like those in Psalms 118/119.

3.2 LAKE ZWAY

«[Lake Zway] is known as *Amist Deber Zay* . . . *Amist* is five, *Deber* is mountain, and *Zay* is God. *Amist Deber Zay*, when we translate it, you see, *Deber* is a Ge’ez word, it means “mountain” or “church,” a church built on a mountain. So *Amist Deber Zay* means a church built on the five mountains of Zay [God]. So . . . *Amist Deber Zay*, in a sense, is the church of God built on a mountain. The five islands are the five mountains. The people are known as *’Zay Debra Wold* or *’Zay Wold*, which means they are the community of that church, the children of the church.» [Informant #1 2011]

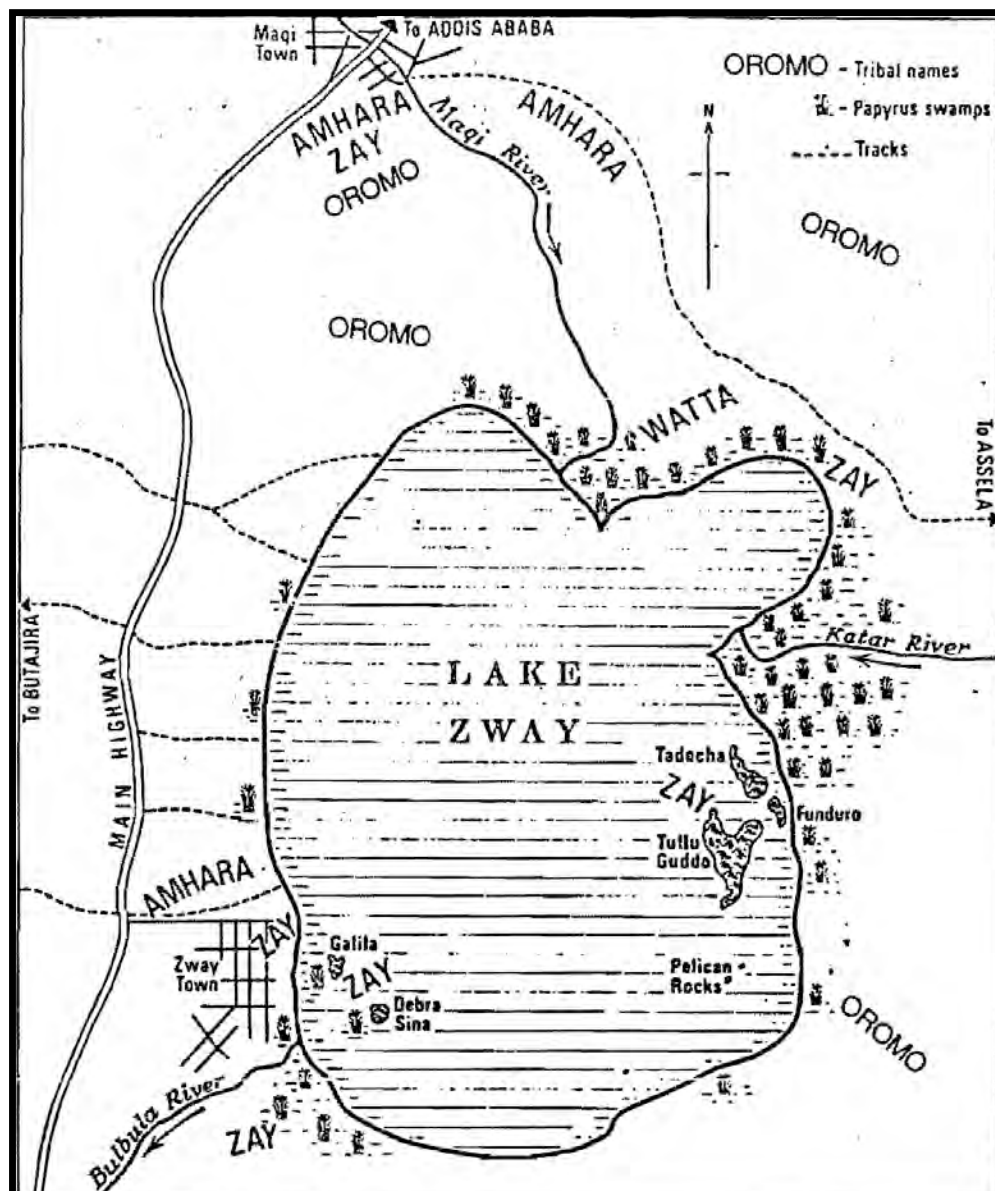
Lake Zway³ (*Zway Haik* in Amharic) is the northernmost of the rift valley lakes; the lake itself has five islands in addition to an outcrop of bushes and marsh plants known as Bird Island, and rocks known as pelican rocks. The islands can be grouped into two categories, the southwest islands of Debra Sina and Galila, and the three eastern islands of Aysut, Famat, and Debra Tsion. In the past the islands were most often referred to by the name of the church on the island. Therefore, Aysut was known as Debra Abraham, Famat as Geta Simany, Debra Tsion as Debra Tsion, Galila as Kahinate Semay⁴ (the twenty-four elders), and Debra Sina as Debra Maryiam. The Oromo refer to some of the islands by different names: Aysut is

³ The lake is also known by other names in Oromo such as *Laki Dambel* and *Hara Dambel*.

⁴ This church is also known mistakenly as *Tekla Haiminot* owed to the fact that *Tekla Haiminot* and *Kahinate Semay* are celebrated on the same day.

Tedecha (acacia), Famat is Funduro (in front of or near the mainland), and Debra Tsion is Tullu Guddo (big mountain) (cf. Meyer 2000). Of the Zay that live on the islands, currently the largest populations live on Aysut and Debra Tsion, with around seven hundred people each. Famat currently has around twenty-five people living there. Galila has one person living there and Debra Sina is uninhabited. Although Zay life can be said to be centered around the islands, mostly due to the churches, currently a majority of the Zay population lives in the mainland towns and villages, most notable Zway, Meki, Bochesa, Herrera, Bashira, and Mekdella.⁵

Figure 2 – Map of Lake Zway by Paul B. Henze



⁵ There are also sizable Zay populations in Assela, Hawassa, Adama, and Addis Ababa.

The earliest inhabitants of the lake are said to be the Watta, hippopotamus hunters who might have shown the Zay how to build boats out of papyrus (Henze 1989:30). The Watta are “believed to be remnants of earlier inhabitants of the Horn” and are “known generally as *Watta*⁶ though each tribe ascribes a name to its group” (Shack 1966:8). The Watta can still be found in several villages on the northern edge of the lake, and in various travelers accounts we see the Watta working as boatmen, transporting the travelers to the islands (cf. Le Roux 1905). They sometimes come to the islands asking for offerings of *iseechi* (butter). For the most part, the Watta have assimilated with the nearby Oromo.

3.3 ZAY ORIGINS

As seen before, there are often different stories and explanations for single events. We must not discount the discrepancies as mere inaccuracies but contemplate these divergences and see the relationships and themes that they may help to explain. Here we have a story about the creation of Lake Zway as told to a traveler to the area in 1898:

A curious tradition, perhaps suggested by the apparent elevated shore, exists that at some far distant epoch what is now the lake was a kingdom 50 miles across, inhabited by seventy-eight chiefs, and that there was a tremendous cataclasm, accompanied by extraordinary noises; the territory with its population disappeared in a single night, and the lake and its islands made their appearance. [Blundell 1906:530]

We can also see an oral tradition of how Lake Zway came to be:

«In the beginning there was no water, only dry land. There was one well for water that people used. One day a woman getting water left the top open and water poured out. The many ethnic groups in the area Silt’e, Oromo, Gurage, and Tigray went to the mountains when the well caused a flood. The Areñ *gosa* (kin group) was there first, a Silt’e group, and the other groups joined them, and then Zay and Zayña (the Zay language) came to be.» [Informant #2 2011]

These traditions are similar to those of how other lakes in Ethiopia were created. Looking at the second example, despite that groups such as the Oromo were not there until the sixteenth century, and the Silt’e were not “created” until around the time of the wars with Ahmad Ibrahim (see below), what we can see from this tradition are several relationships that should be pointed out. First, the Zay are the result of many ethnic groups coming together, as the story tells of the Areñ, Silt’e, Oromo, Gurage, Tigray, and other groups in the area who went to the mountains during the flood. It is a way of explaining the rationale for how people from different groups were able to come together and create their own society and unique culture,

⁶ They are also known as *Wayto* by the Amhara, *Watta* by the Oromo, *Manjo* by the Kafa, *Midgaan*, *Tumaal*, and *Yibir* by the Somali, and *Fuga* by the Gurage, cf. William A. Shack, *The Gurage: A People of the Ensete Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966) at 8.

which in the end is a patchwork of the various groups and cultures that assimilated throughout the years. Despite this assimilation, there is still a sense of difference between different groups within Zay. By knowing one's own *gosa*, and the inherent specific history, individuals will have slightly different individual and sub-group identities. Specific traditions and identities may come out at certain times. The most obvious of these sub-group differences is between *Ager* and *Wayzaro*. *Ager* is made up of the first three migrations to the lake area while *Wayzaro* consists of the last migration to the lake area and made up the ruling dynasty of the Zay until 1974.

Second, we can see that there were already people living on the islands before these other groups arrived, which also stresses the similar experiences of the groups that would come to the lake and the islands later, through waves of migration. Something that we do not see here that should be pointed out is the lack of anything related to Christianity in the creation of the lake or the rationale for the people coming together, as the Zay are an almost homogeneously Orthodox Christian people. Let us now turn to the Zay as a people.

Within Zay oral tradition it is commonly accepted that the first wave of migrants to the area came from Aksum. Below is an oral tradition told to me by an elder from *Ager* (meaning a group of people or country):

«They believe that these two [Biruk and Lot], brought the *tabot* from Aksum. When they reached this area, they saw islands there, and carried the *tabot*, they saw a cloud and prayed, they didn't use the water, they didn't use boats, but the cloud carried them with the *tabot* and they arrived on the island. They first landed in Debra Sina accompanied by the Levite priests. The first three migrations landed on the western islands of Debra Sina and Galila before moving to the southeastern islands. They arrived from the west, which is why we see the vast "Ager" settlers from the Awash River down to Sheshamene and the Shala lake districts.»
[Informant #1 2011]

A rather recent development in Zay oral tradition is that many people from *Wayzaro* have begun to say that it was their group that came during this first migration to the islands. It seems that they want to equate their group with this migration to defend their previously dominant position as the ruling class. However, most Zay from *Ager* and even many from *Wayzaro* accept that *Wayzaro* was the last migration and that *Ager* is comprised of the first three migrations. In the next sections the various migrations are discussed in more detail.

According to Zay tradition, the Zay once stretched from Assela to Sheshamene and from the Awash River to Gurage Sodo (cf. Henze 1973b, 1989). Especially after the second migratory wave from Tigray, the Zay are said to have occupied this vast area. We have evidence of this from both Zay and Gurage oral tradition. Moreover, there are various

historical sources that note this migration (discussed below) and it was only after the last migratory wave – owed to the Muslim invasion – and the Oromo advance, that the Zay were more and more confined to the islands and cut off from those that settled away from the lake and islands.

The Zay distinguish between those who live on the mainland and those that live on the islands. First, we have the *tinta Zay*, the *Areñ gosa* who were on the islands before the advent of the migratory waves. Next we have *’deber Zay*, those Zay who came to live on the islands, both during and after the various migratory waves. Finally, we can see *’derga Zay*, the people who lived around the lake. This group would also include the *Wege*, who are also said to have been living there before the arrival of the migratory waves. The Oromo also classify the Zay along the similar lines, as one Zay remarked:

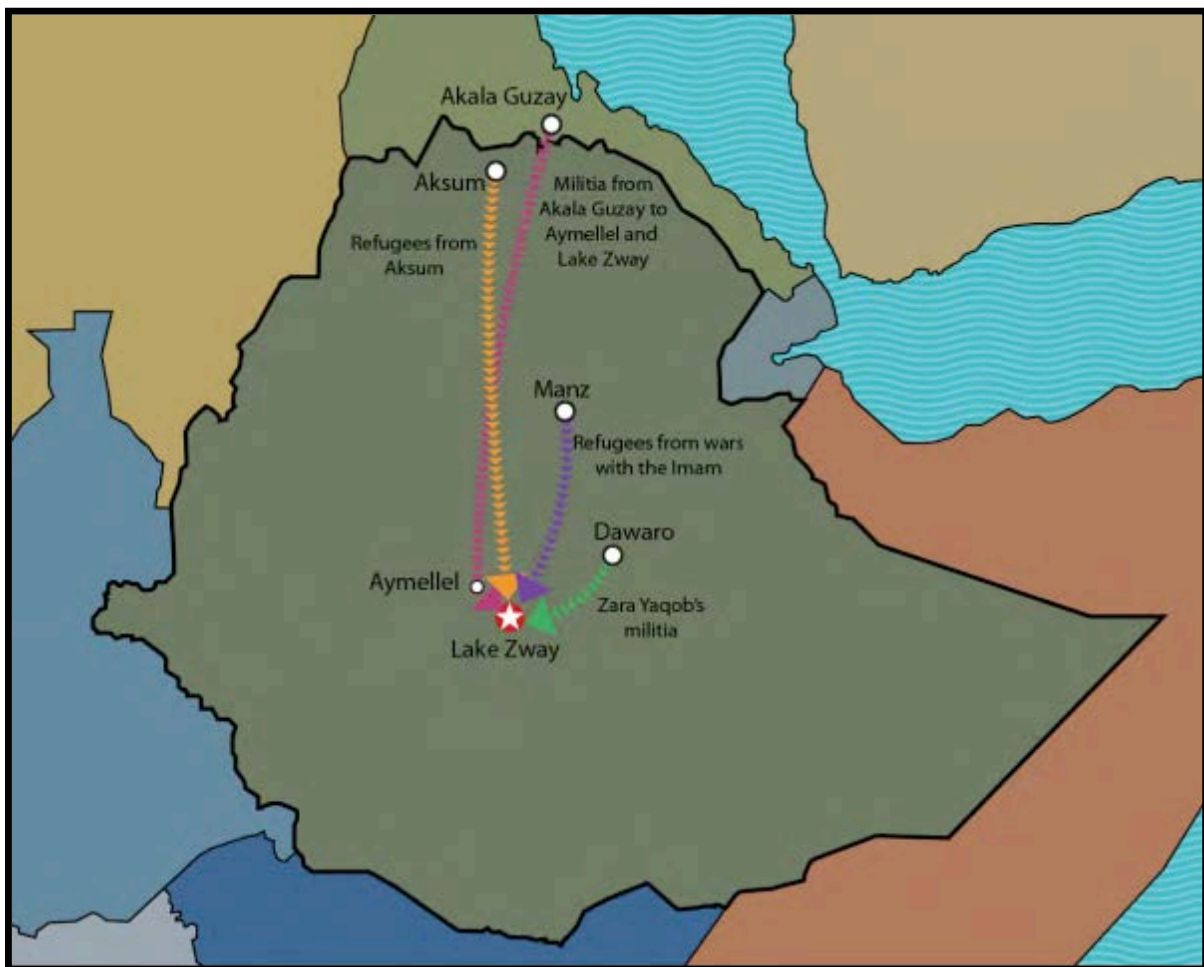
«Even when the Oromo speak to us they ask if we are *Laki Hara* or *Laki Alla*, those on the islands or those on the mainland. This is just to tell their distribution, where they live, some people say or believe these people are only on the islands, but [it’s] not like that, they are everywhere, this is what it means, those on the islands, and those on the mainland.»
[Informant #1 2011]

Even with these forms of distinction and the noted geographic spread of the Zay, they are often – erroneously – equated only with the islands.

3.4 THE FOUR MIGRATORY WAVES

As the Zay are a conglomeration of four different migratory waves of peoples to the Lake Zway area – in addition to the peoples who were already living on the islands and in the area – it is important to see these waves and the events that catalyzed them. The waves can be classified into two different types: religious refugees resulting from attacks on Christianity and the throne, and southern incursions by Ethiopian generals and militias. The first and fourth waves fall into the former category while the second and third waves belong to the later type. We also have oral traditions that recount these events; however, we do not know whether these oral traditions began immediately after these events or if they are a more recent creation. This becomes especially relevant when informants know of the written histories pertaining to the oral traditions. Nonetheless it is useful to see the relationships that these oral traditions highlight and seek to strengthen. Moreover, we will see how these four waves of people to the islands forms the basis for many aspects of “Zayness.”

Figure 3 – Map showing the four migratory waves to the Lake Zway area



3.4.1 RELIGIOUS REFUGEES FROM AKSUM

The first wave of refugees to the Lake Zway area was during the reign of Gudit (circa 842), a *Falasha* queen who destroyed churches and killed priests. However, the term “*Falasha*” is a bit misleading here as it is more likely that she was Agäw, a Cushitic group, and the name *Falasha*, or Beta Israel was applied to this group around the 15th century (cf. Abbink 1990; Quirin 1993). Oral tradition remembers this event in great detail:

«[They came] from Aksum because of Yodit Gudit,⁷ she was a Falasha, or Beta Israel. You see this war was against the kingdom, the Solomonic dynasty, and the Church. At that time, this king, Anbessa Wedem, was twelve years old, he was so young, so he could not control the government – it was weak. His advisors were quarreling with one another, because of this, she got the chance, he could not stand her, the army was divided and weak – he could not hold them to anything. So they fled to the south. From the north in Aksum to southern Ethiopia, and they came to where, you have seen that lake [Lake Zway], and they came to southern Ethiopia, and from southern Ethiopia to the islands. The royal family and the clergy, according to the oral tradition and historical tradition, these people were, before being Christian, were Jews, this was before Christ, because from king Solomon of Israel, king

⁷ The name “Yodit Gudit” is redundant, and when not quoting sources, will be written as “Gudit.”

Menilek I is supposed to be the son of Solomon. He brought the ark from Jerusalem [to Aksum] with the twelve Hebrew tribes. So by one way or another the *tabot* was taken from Jerusalem and the king gave him the twelve tribes of Israel to accompany him and they came to Aksum. This covenant was guarded and served and all the service was given in the Jewish custom, in Jewish belief. So Ethiopia was a country of Judaism, at that time [of Menilek I].

These people first came in 842 with all their Judaist culture and the new teaching of Christianity. When we are speaking of the Zay people you have to know these things. So these people are – from their fathers – from the generation of these people, in both senses, the clergy on one side, and the royal family on the other. They settled here for about forty years, this is what is written in the Kebra Nagast, but our people believe it was seventy-two years. So the clergy, in tradition, are the Levites, from the Levi tribe, and the royal family is from the line of Judah.

Forty years they settled here, and after forty years the ark and the king went back to Aksum, Yodit Gudit was dead and gone, so they went back, which means the southern area was the seat of the Church and the government for forty years, many people forget this, they don't want to say it. They just say the *tabot* was in Zway for forty years then left, it is not the whole truth! The others, who have stayed behind, are the fathers of today's Zay. All of them did not go. Those who have stayed, they liked it, this area was nice, it was a good area to live in, simple, everything was good, even forty or fifty years ago it was all nice, forest, the view was very fascinating. So those who stayed are the fathers of us. So you see from this, they claim themselves as Israelis by birth, not by religion, because their religion had already left. By blood they are Jews, by belief they are Christians. So because of this there is a culture in Zay, they don't eat this flesh, the loins of an animal, Jacob in the Bible speaks of this, because of this they don't eat it, the heart they don't eat it as well, this is from southern people, the Cushites, this came from those people who assimilated with the Zay, the not eating of the heart is from the Cushites. These people are supposed to be Cushites, this place was supposed to be theirs, so these Semitic people came and . . . let's say settled there as refugees, not invaders, because we just fled from Yodit Gudit to save our lives and our beliefs and our books and holy things.

The Wege and the Zay people they came together and had a verbal accord, the Shamo and Shabo. One is the father of Zay and the other is the father of Wege. Wege you see, are the people around Zway town, Adami Tullu up to Bulbula, they are speaking Oromo now, but they claim themselves to be Hadiya, Mareko, to the west of Zway. So these people are Cushites. So now, their leader was supposed to be Faro (from Areñ), this Faro I told you about Biruk and Lot, the fathers of the Aksumites, or the Semitic people, they had a lot of hard work, on the islands there were making a wall, a great wall, which reaches very high, so when his clothes are washed, to put them, so the people on the other side of the lake can see these are the Faro's clothes, this place is in Debra Tsion. You see without food, without water, it is a very hard thing. So one day, Biruk and Lot, they prayed, Faro tried to make them to convert to his God, a different God, because they were newcomers, the first settlers saw them as slaves, like the Jews in Egypt, the same thing happened to them there. They did lots of hard labor. Carrying stones for them, building walls, the fathers, this Biruk and Lot, they did not go for the God of Faro, but they hide themselves in the cave and prayed, one day, one version says, the wall itself crumbled, like in Babylon, the king was standing with his family around there to see the work and to laugh at them. When the wall crumbled everyone there died, and Faro was killed under the stone. God freed them by this, that's why now our people remember them in their ceremonies by a blessing given, it goes "*Yay Egzer Yay, save and protect us as you did our forefathers Biruk and Lot.*" "*Yay Egzer Yay*" literally means "*the God of Zay whose name is Yay.*" About fifty people died when the wall fell. No one gave them water, they were not allowed to eat, they wanted them to starve, and in the hard work and starving God saved them.» [Informant #1 2011]

Some aspects of this oral tradition are qualified by other historical sources. First we can see that The Orthodox Church supports the story that the *tabot* was brought from Aksum to Lake Zway during the time of Gudit. Abbink (1990) notes that:

According to the Christian Ethiopian story, the Aksum cathedral was burned down by [Gudit]. (The original Ark of the Covenant or *Tabot* had allegedly already been transported to the monastery of Dabra Siyon, on an island in Lake Zeway, in the South). [Abbink 1990:420]

Another qualifying, or rather, correlating aspect of the oral tradition with historical sources and Chronicles is that of the Levite priests accompanying the *tabot* to Zway. A chronicle collected by a priest, *Qésä Gäbez Täklä Haymanot* of Aksum, tells us more about this:

One day because she wanted to show the number of her army, she ordered each one to go to a high mountain called Gobodra carrying a stone and to leave it there. (The heap) became like a big mountain. (The heap of stones) is found to the present day. After that she promulgated a decree saying: "churches should be closed because I am a Jewess and my husband also is a Jew." She ruled forty years. After this (decree) the exile of the Levite priests and the people became widespread. And Zion, the tabernacle of Law, was exiled with them and came into a region towards the east which is called Zway and was deposited there with all due respect and in a clean abode under a vigilant watch for forty years. After forty years Gudit died and Anbessa Wedem came to the throne and then peace and order were restored. The Levite priests returned to their country, Aksum, with Zion, the tabernacle of Law, with great honour and much joy, in the year of Mercy, 910. [Sergew 1972:117; Andersen 2000:39]

That the Orthodox Church supports this is very fascinating and the story would in fact have Zway being the seat of both the Church and the throne during this forty – or seventy-two – year exile. This, according to Zay tradition and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, is how the first wave of settlers made it to the islands of Lake Zway.

From the above oral tradition we also see another aspect worth mentioning, and that is the meeting of Shamo and Shabo. This story is supposed to be the first meeting between a Zay and a Wege leader. As an Oromo informant told Meyer (2000):

Shamo was a leader of the Arsi, Shabo of the Laaqi (Zay). When Shamo came with his troops from the southern parts of Ethiopia, he rode on a horse to the shores of Lake Zway. When he reached the shores, he got off his horse and went, a spear in his hand, to the beach. There he saw Shabo in a canoe. When Shabo recognized Shamo he stood up, took his spear, and asked: «Hey, what are you?» Shamo answered: «I am a human being. I am Shamo!» and put his spear down to the earth. Shabo also put his spear down. Both changed greetings. Shamo said: «This place is very suitable for the horse and for the life. May I live here?» Shabo answered: «No! A lot of people, Ethiopians and strangers, went into exile from this place. It is not suitable at all!» Then Shamo replied: «I will live according to the law of the Oromo. I will slaughter a grey cow and will prepare honey-wine». After hearing this, Shabo said: «If it is this way you will do, you can live here». Then both of them sprinkled the honey-wine around the meeting place and beat a stock (*xiribbaa*) into the earth. From that time on the Laaqi and the Arsi have been living in peace. [Mr. Heye Seene in Meyer 2000:325]

In this story we can see the application of more recent ethnic groups to stories that are supposed to have taken place before they arrived. As the informant told Meyer this meeting was between the Arsi (Oromo) and the Zay, it is more likely that this story is an oral tradition detailing the first meeting between the Wege and the Zay, who predate the Oromo. The placing of more modern ethnic groups within older oral traditions occurred many times when recording oral traditions.

Within these traditions we can analyze the various themes. The most important, and perhaps obvious theme that we can see in these traditions is that of Christianity. The fact that these people suffering from the wrath of Gudit were Christians – whether priests, royalty, or commoners – should not be discounted. The Christian connection is stressed in all forms of the story. What could be more Christian than saving to Ark of the Covenant from destruction at the hands of a usurper? The Zay are very proud of this tradition and it is one of the first stories anyone asking a Zay about their history will be told. Christianity is the central theme, but there are other relationships and themes that these stores tell us.

Migration, or being forced into exile, is another theme seen here. From the oral traditions we can even trace this all the way to Jerusalem, beginning with the migrations of the twelve tribes of Israel accompanying Menilek I, and the Ark of the Covenant. From this there was a migration to Lake Zway and after forty – or seventy-two – years and a migration back to Aksum. That most of the current Zay claim ancestors from the various migratory waves should not be discounted.

Subjugation, and the eventual deliverance from subjugation, is yet another theme we have seen here. From the priests escaping Aksum, to Biruk and Lot being delivered from Faro's wrath, we can see that these traditions deal strongly with this theme as well. But these themes also play a role currently for the Zay, who are essentially subjugated by their neighboring groups. These themes should be taken hand in hand with the relationships these traditions express, most notably those related to certain groups and geographic locations.

3.4.2 THE INCURSION OF AZMACH SEBHAT

The first mention of Christian Ethiopia delving into matters near Lake Zway and its inhabitants comes from the southern incursion of one *azmach* (general) Sebhat, an imperial commander during the reign of Amda Tsion I (r. 1314-1344) around 1323. It is said that *azmach* Sebhat was from the town of Gura'é in Akala Guzay (Tigray, now Eritrea; see figure 2). He is supposed to have settled in Aymellel in northern Gurageland. We have two possible explanations for the name Gurage. First, that *azmach* Sebhat left the town of Gura'é and settled in the Gé “country,” hence, the name Gurage. The second is that the country was on the *Gra* (left) when viewed from Gondor or Entoto (Beckingham and Huntingford 1954a:lxix; Isenberg et al. 1968:97; R. Pankhurst 1997:75).

The villages of Aymellel on Galila island and Gumarge on Debra Tsion island are said to have been inhabited by people from this migration. It is claimed that these settlers came from Aymellel in Gurageland and are the descendants of the militia that came with *azmach* Sebhat. Oral tradition gives us a detailed account of this second wave of peoples to the lake and islands:

«Azmach Sebhat is from Tigray. This king [Amda Tsion I], he was the one who sent this militia to the area. During 1323, he sent a militia to the area, that means not Zway only, but other areas too. So Amda Tsion called these people from Akala Guzay and sent them to this area, these people came to help the Christians around here, because they were few, there were many pagans always fighting the Christians. They are more or less slaves, like that, so Amda Tsion sent a militia to this area to help the Christians. First he settled there in Gurageland, and from Aymellel he came to the island and settled on the island. So this is why we say the second wave is from Tigray. He settled and many of the militia stayed as well. They were also Tigrigna and Ge'ez speaking people. But he settled first in Gurage, in Aymellel, you see he settled there and he waged war in the area, conquered the area, then he settled there, and for his settlement and government, he chose the island, he himself and his descendants chose the island, this is what we say. Our people orally also tell us that we are connected with the Gurage people by birth. The Gurage also tell us that, and we also believe, or say how our culture is related. There are certain houses or *gosas*, that are related to Gurage, this is what it means, and we believe and do it in practice, "this family is with the Gurage," so we say the Gurage and we are the same, because of this migration. They mention the names of *sost* (three) *gosas*. The father of the Gurage, Zay *gosas*, because they came first. This is the Gurage themselves, I told you the *ʔderga* Zay and *ʔdeber* Zay, so the Gurage were known as *ʔderga* Zay as well, the outside Zay. From the Awash to Sheshamene, from Assela to Gibe. So when the Gurage's came and settled on the land, they assimilated, so there are so many clans of the Gurage who claimed themselves with their forefathers as Zay. From those who already officially have. These are the fathers of the Gurage houses, the forefathers are Zay, they claim from Zay, now they claim themselves as Gurage, they tell or believe their ancestors are Zay. The Siltani Kristos, Tekla Mehidin, and Temirta Meskel of Sodo Kistani. Tayo, Arbo, Demo, Dewadin, and Mendil from Meskam Bet Gurage. Serto, Ture, Kedo, and Gergis from Dobi Bet Gurage. Ajamo, Gindo, Abzana, and Ertube from Silt'e and Iemor and Enur from Sebat Bet Gurage.⁸ The Gurage's accept our forefathers, we settled on them is what they say, and that means the Gurageland, what we see now, and Zay land, before the Oromo's came and the invasion of the Imam, they were one.» [Informant #1 2011]

One advantage, or disadvantage, depending on how you look at it, was that my informant knew the written histories related to the Zay and Gurage, such as the work done by Shack (1966) and Denberu Alemu et al. (1995 [1987 Eth. cal.]). We can see that work done on Gurage history and oral traditions also presents a similar story. Both Bahru Zewde (1972) and LeBel (1974) have noted that the local traditions of the Aymellel Gurage (also known as Kistani, or Sodo Gurage)⁹ also trace their origins back to *azmach* Sebhat. Moreover, the work

⁸ For more on this notion see: Denberu Alemu Et Al., *Gogot: Yägurage Biheräsäb Tarik, Bahilinna Qwanqwa [Gogot: History, Culture, and Language of the Gurage Nation]* (Walqite: Culture and Sports Ministry, 1995 [1987 Eth. cal.]).

⁹ The Aymellel Gurage are, for the most part, Orthodox Christians.

by Denberu Alemu et al. (1995 [1987 Eth. cal.]) details the Gurage tradition that both the Zay and the Gurage have some *gosas* in common.

There is another version that states it was not during Amda Tsion, but during the reign of Susneyos (r. 1606–1632) that this migration occurred:¹⁰

Surrounded by hostile Galla [Oromo] and continually exposed to attack, they sent an embassy to Gondar asking Susneyos (1604-1632) for help, and as a result the azmač Sebeate was sent from Tigre. After fulfilling his task of helping the people of Guragē, he settled in the country and made himself king, establishing his headquarters on an island in Lake Zeway. His descendants ruled till Se'ela Sellase, king of Shoa, overthrew the dynasty between 1832 and 1840. [Beckingham and Huntingford 1954:lxix]

However, LeBel (1974) discounts this version stating that “If the etymology on ‘Guragé’ is at all correct, this interpretation would have to be discounted, since references to the Guragé date back to the chronicles of Amdä Seyon” (LeBel 1974:102). Moreover we know that Sahle Selassie never completed his planned expedition to Lake Zway so he could not have overthrown a ruling dynasty on the islands. A Zay elder also dismisses this version claiming that:

«This king [Susneyos] couldn't send any help at anytime because he himself was in great trouble with the Orthodox Church because he converted to Catholicism by the Jesuits in Gondor. Many Christians lost their lives and he was overthrown and his son Fasilidas took over.¹¹ Fasilidas helped the Catholics leave Ethiopia. It was king Amda Tsion who sent Azmach Sebhat.» [Informant #1 2012]

From this tradition we can see some relationships that are stressed by the Zay traditions. The first relationship is that of the wave coming from north of Ethiopia, in this case Akala Guzay. We also see a group based relationship between the Zay and the Gurage – particularly the Aymellel Gurage. This relationship is also seen by the *Ager* – a category said to make up all the *gosas* that came with the first three migratory waves to the Lake Zway area. The Aymellel Gurage also use *Ager* to distinguish between kin groups. Perhaps it is this connection with the Aymellel Gurage that the concept of *Ager* comes from. These relationships also lead us into some of the themes we have mentioned, most notably those of Christianity, subjugation and migration.

These three themes are also expressed in this oral tradition. We can see that according to tradition, the reason for *azmach* Sebhat going to the area was because Christians were in

¹⁰ Cf. Antonio Cecchi, *Da Zeila Alle Frontiere Del Caffa* (Vol. II; Roma: Società Geografica Italiana, 1886) at 86.

¹¹ For more on this see: E. A. Wallis Budge, *A History of Ethiopia, Nubia & Abyssinia: (According to the Hieroglyphic Inscriptions of Egypt and Nubia, and the Ethiopian Chronicles)* (Volume II; London: Methuen, 1928) at 383-396, and Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) at 103-108.

conflict and being subjugated by “pagans.” Even now the Aymellel Gurage are predominantly Orthodox Christians. Migration is rather obvious in this account as we see that the militia first settled in Aymellel and then some of them migrated to the islands. The migration theme is important and a major aspect of Zay traditions, as almost all Zay are said to be the descendants of various migrations.

Figure 4 – Aysut with Debra Tsion in the background



3.4.3 THE INCURSION OF ZARA YAQOB

In 1445 Zara Yaqob (r. 1434-1468) defeated the Muslim ruler Sihab al-din Badlay¹² of Dawaro in the battle of Gomit. This was done in response to Ahmad Badlay’s rebellion against the empire (Pankhurst 1967:36-38). After the defeat of Ahmad Badlay, Zara Yaqob placed a garrison of soldiers in the area as a means to safeguard the frontiers of the empire, the descendants of whom are said to be the members of the modern day Zay, Gurage and other groups (Conti Rossini 1937:132-133). Others support this noting that the Zay and Gurage, along with the dynasties of Wollamo, Amarro-Koyra, Gangero, Dorze, Bosha, and

¹² Also known as “Arwe” meaning “the beast.”

Kaffa all claimed Amhara or Tigray descent (Haberland 1964:237). It is said to be these soldiers who formed another wave of settlement on the islands.

The oral traditions related to this event are lacking, but we can see a small excerpt of how the event is said to have unfolded:

«The third wave is Zara Yaqob; his reign was 1434 to 1468 Eth. cal. This also was an army, or militia, in the Gurageland, and a few moved to the islands. This time the kings were conquering the area. Some people came to the island and settled. Their forefathers today are Wobewober and Amharege on Debra Tsion.» [Informant #1 2011]

From this we cannot make too many inferences, but we nonetheless can see a possible third wave of migration to the islands and the link to two villages on Debra Tsion where they are said to have settled. We do have some historical sources related to this time period, however it places a militia in Dawaro, not in the Gurageland. The province of Dawaro (roughly the Arsi area to the east of Lake Zway) was under imperial control, and *chäwa* (imperial troops) were stationed in the area, some of whom proved to be insubordinate and more soldiers had to be brought in (R. Pankhurst 1997:133-134). We do see a propensity for the *chäwa* to be insubordinate, as during the reign of Baeda Mariam (Zara Yaqob's successor) we are told that the *chäwa* were again involved in a plot to defect (R. Pankhurst 1997:120). It is quite possible that some troops did defect under Zara Yaqob and made their way to Lake Zway, however the chronicle is silent about this.

With this migration we must be very critical of its authenticity, as both historical and oral sources are lacking. Furthermore, only one informant knew this story, however when I presented this version to other Zay, despite it being a new story for them, they acknowledged that it could be possible that some of the defecting soldiers sought refuge on the islands. Despite this, for the time being we should only consider this story as an oral tradition until more sources are found.

To a lesser extent we can see a theme of migration to the islands, as according to the oral traditions, it was some of these troops who migrated to the islands. We also see yet another relationship, this time more likely with the Amhara area than with Tigray, as the two previous traditions have shown. Even the name of one of the claimed *gosas* from this migration has a link to the Amhara through the name "Amharege" who are supposed to be from Enkober.

3.4.4 RELIGIOUS REFUGEES DUE TO AHMAD IBN IBRAHIM AL-GHAZI

The invasion of Imam Ahmed ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi¹³ in 1527 was cause for another wave of refugees to the area. The Lake Zway district was located in a territory known as Waj, about which little is known (Braukämper 2004:43).¹⁴ Recorded in both written and oral tradition, we can see how this event greatly affected the area. Both the Gurage and Zay claim to be the descendants of religious refugees fleeing the wars with the Imam (Shack 1966:15-16). Other sources – albeit unconfirmed – point out that maybe it was not only Christians who were fleeing the destruction of the Imam, but that Muslims also came from Harar to Lake Zway at this time. Many ethnic groups living in the eastern part of Gurage claim to be descendants from Harar, and that it is highly probable that these are some of the Imam's soldiers that were left behind (Trimingham 1952:185). According to Father Azais, there might have been a migration of fanatical Muslims fleeing Harar and who settled near Lake Zway. It is also claimed that Abdul Qadir, a brother of the Imam, led them from Harar to an area near Lake Zway (Beckingham and Huntingford 1954a:lxix).

When the Imam began to wreak havoc on Ethiopia, Waj was one of the first provinces attacked. The emperor, Lebna Dengel (r. 1508-1540) was at his palace at Gebergé (in Waj) when the invasion began. He misinterpreted the invasion for a raiding expedition and was caught off guard. After Waj was finally conquered the Imam tried to force its inhabitants to convert to Islam, which they staunchly refused, even mounting guerrilla style attacks against the Imam's troops (R. Pankhurst 1997:204-205). Owing to pressure from the conflict, it is likely that the islands took on many refugees who were fleeing persecution. These refugees would have been from Waj, the Amhara region, and even Harar. The oral tradition of this event is very detailed:

«The fourth wave is with Gagn Muhammad, during Lebna Dengel, this king was, his place was on Yera Mountain, between Debra Zeit and Mojo, his place was there. The seat of the government was there. During Gagn Muhammad, [refugees came] from Simean Shoa, Menz, and Enkobar. They were similar to the Aksumites who brought different crosses and books. By Abuna Natniel of Arsi,¹⁵ the church believes this migration, and accepts this. The teachings today are expanding because the islands helped to preserve Christianity. The renaissance of the church was due to this, not only the church, also of the Solomonic dynasty. They again

¹³ Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi was the general and Imam of Adal, a Muslim Sultanate encompassing Harar and modern day Djibouti. He is pejoratively referred to as "Gagn" or "Grañ" (the left-handed) in many texts and oral traditions.

¹⁴ While said to be located in Waj, Lake Zway is also referred to at times as being in the land of the Gurage.

¹⁵ Abuna Natniel of Arsi is the current bishop of the Arsi area.

came back, the king who had died; Haile Selassie is from this line. During the Yodit Gudat then during Gragn Muhammad the islands helped save the church. During that time Gragn was helped by the Arab countries and Turkey [Ottomans]. He came from the east, now the central government was at risk, all southern and central Ethiopian countries were under Gragn Muhammad, directly or indirectly they were under the yoke of Muslims. So during that time, the land of the Zay and Gurage from Assela to Gibe and Awash, the countries of the Gurage and Zay, now the people, most of them became Muslim, the outside areas by force. The emperor went away, this is what they say, by that jihad war almost all Ethiopian people became Muslim. So the Christianity in Lake Zway and around Zway and the Gurage area became endangered. The outside, our people who were left outside, the others left inside were engulfed by this, so some people came to the islands during this. Zay moved into the islands, but the others around there they became Muslims.

So it was during this time that Atque Selassie, Amha Selassie¹⁶ and Temirta Meskel, who are known as the three brothers that came during this time. These people are from Simean Shoa, Enkober, Manz, and the Shoa area. Temirta Meskel settled in the Gurage area. Amha Selassie settled in the Abora area, Atque Selassie settled on the island. All three are, they have their own followers, these people are near to the church, and the royal family, they are just like the Aksumites. They brought crosses and books and bibles, now they are together, you can separate the waves from what they brought. There is a book on Debra Tsion brought by the first group from Aksum, its about King Kaleb, he was an Ethiopian king who reigned in Aksum, this book cannot be brought by the Simean Shoa group, what you see is the, eastern cross, the oriental crosses, those are from the Aksumites. The cross, a bell is there, a stone bell on top of the mountain. These are the three people, the fathers, they are Amhara.» [Informant #1 2011]

It is not known exactly when during the wars with the Imam that Atque Selassie made the journey to the islands, but we do have oral traditions about his arrival and movements in the area:

«This was during the time of [Gragn]. He was destroying churches and spiritual items. To protect these items, Atque Selassie, Abro and Temirta Meskel began the journey from Manz. Atque Selassie is from Abraham's family; at the end of their family tree is Jacob. There were many people; the followers of Atque Selassie, people followed him like he was a king. At that time, people in all places followed him. His brother left them at Abora and another left in Gurage Sodo. Atque Selassie and other people; Amhara, Oromo, and Tigray are with him arriving in the Abora area in a cave called Sango. They put the items in the cave and lived there for a few years. Then they investigated the Lake Zway area, seeing if it would be a good place to live. Then they cut grass as a way to get to the islands. They brought their religious items to the grass and first arrived in Aysut. Aysut means "I have not been mistaken; God delivered me to the correct place." When they arrived there they looked at one of the mountains and they called it Isaak Dagit [Isaac Mountain] after the one in the bible. After that they moved to another place, called Misa Naber [the lunch place] and ate their lunch there. When they first arrived on the island there were many people with them, and they named each new place.

After he lived on Aysut for a few years. The people who came with Atque Selassie mostly stayed on Aysut, some moved to Famat. They built churches and some went to Debra Tsion with Atque Selassie. When he went to Debra Tsion he arrived at the shore called Timket Abahir, then he moved to many areas giving them all names. All the people with Atque Selassie were Orthodox when they arrived on the islands. They were already people on the islands when Atque Selassie arrived. The people on the islands said that they were created with mud from God and therefore creatures of God – Christians. When Atque Selassie fought with these people they said you only came recently and were came here before you. After

¹⁶ This version gives the name as Amha Selassie whereas other versions say his name was Abro Selassie.

Atque Selassie took leadership of the islands he elected seven judges on each island.»
[Informant #3 2011]

After establishing himself on Debra Tsion, Atque Selassie eventually came to rule the Zay (discussed below). This wave made up what is now called the *Wayzaro gosa*. It is said to be called *Wayzaro* because the wife of the king was with the men (*Wayzaro* means Mrs. in Amharic).

Regarding this migration, recently there has been a change in the oral traditions related to the date of this migration, as in many interviews with members from *Wayzaro* I was told that this migration (i.e., with Atque Selassie etc.) came from Aksum. This is incorrect and it is unclear why they are now trying to promote this idea as even the former *balabbat* (local ruler) Biru (from *Wayzaro*) told Tuma Nadamo (1982) that *Wayzaro* came from Manz during the wars with the Imam, and not from Aksum during the time of Yodit.

We have contradictory stories as to what happened next. M. S. Wellby (1901) traveled in the area during the late nineteenth century and relays an account of the lake stating that:

About the middle of the sixteenth century, Gagn, or Grangye Mohammed, a powerful chief of Danakil, invaded and devastated the country, and hid for safety on these islands an immense quantity of treasure, the results of his plunder. [Wellby 1901:125]

The story told by Wellby is interesting insofar as it claims it was not the Christians who sent treasure to the islands for safekeeping, but the Muslim conquerors. Despite how interesting it may be, this account cannot be taken seriously as it is refuted in *Futuh al-habesha*, an Arab chronicle of the conquest of Ethiopia written by an Arab eyewitness:

The imam set off from Gurāgē [and after] two days pitched camp above lake Zway whose water is sweet. Their (the Zay) boats took three days to cross it. There were three islands in it, at a distance from one another, and each island had three churches upon it. The imam wanted boats to be made to cross it, but the Muslims complained of the paucity of their supplies and said to him, "Leave the lake, and go up to the land of Hādyā and the people of this region who have become Muslims will suffice against the islanders." So the imam withdrew from the area and set off for Hādyā. [Shihāb 2003:306]

We are also told that it was Christians who hid treasure on the islands. As a traveler in Ethiopia was told in 1839:

In the lake of Gurague, called Suai, five islands exist, in which the treasures of the ancient Abyssinian Kings, are said to have been hidden from Gagne when he entered Abyssinia. That there are Æthiopic books is confirmed by a man whom the King sent there as a spy. [Isenberg and Krapf 1968:179]

This version coincides with what another that claims after the area was under Muslim control Lebna Dengel sent valuable manuscripts to the islands of Lake Zway for safekeeping, as they were still under Christian control (R. Pankhurst 1997:207). The manuscripts can still be

found in the churches of Lake Zway today (see Figures 5 & 6). Most are found on Debra Tsion, and of particular interest is a history book known as *History of the Gällä, Vision of King Lebna Dengel and the Invasion of Grāñ*, which is said to have been found by Wayzaro Agaya, the granddaughter of King Zädengel (r. 1603-1604), who said she brought it from Zway (Bairu Tafla 1987b:81-83; Sergew Hable Selassie 1991:65).

Figure 5 – Tullu Guddo Book of Saints (Photo by Paul B. Henze)¹⁷



¹⁷ Source for Figures 5 and 6 is “Mazgaba Seelat: Treasury of Ethiopian Images,” available at <http://ethiopia.deeds.utoronto.ca/>

Figure 6 – Tullu Guddo Book of Saints (Photo by Paul B. Henze)



Another oral tradition tells us how, after the invasion of the Imam, the *Derga Zay* were cut off, it also names this invasion as the reason that many of the people who were once considered to be Zay, are no longer, due to religious conversion:

«Gragh Muhammad came with his revolution and cut the people off, and many Semitic people became Muslim [e.g. the *Derga Zay*]. Then because of the fighting they became Muslims, the Cushitic's conquered, the Cushitic character when they conquer is that you take my family, you are my branch, also Langano, Shala (Ethiopian Lakes), these peoples are Zay, then because of Muhammad – these Muslims – these Semitics because Muslim, because the order of Muhammad was everyone should be Muslim. You should have to pray, otherwise kill him. If you don't want to pray to Muslim they will kill you, you should take water and clean yourself and pray, otherwise kill him. Then if you like or not you should pray. Then because of this we have Muslims [in the Hadiya, Silt'e, and Gurage areas].» [Informant #4 2011]

It is claimed that after the defeat of the Christians by the Imam at the battle of Worabe in 1525, the *Derga Zay* who were living in this area (present day Hadiya, Silt'e, Mareko areas) became *Selamté* (Muslims), yet continued to speak the Zay language. We can see remnants of this Christian/Zay past in the Silt'e language (said to be derived from Zay, and currently classified as a Gurage language along with Zay). The Silt'e word for Saturday (*Yanes Senbet*) and Sunday (*Yegeder Senbet*) are said to show this Christian past as *Yanes Senbet* means minor holiday while *Yegeder Senbet* is supposed to mean the big holiday. These names are

claimed to be the minor holiday to show the shift of the people from Judaism to Christianity. Saturday being the Jewish holy day while for the Christians it is Sunday. Moreover, it is claimed that the name Silt'e comes from *Sileté*, meaning "God save us from danger," referring to the flight from Aksum during the time of Yodit. We are told that contact between the Lake Zway area and the north was reestablished during the reign of Susenyos (Esteves Pereira 1892:38).

Again, from these oral traditions we are able to draw out certain relationships and themes. We can see a strong Christian theme in the first oral tradition. We see claims that the islands were responsible for saving various religious items and for the renaissance of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The refugees were forced to migrate from various places (mostly claimed Amhara) to the islands as a way to save themselves from the wars. We also see a fear of subjugation in the tradition that there were many forced conversions to Islam, something the island Zay seemed to have escaped but some of their Gurage counterparts did not. It is said that due to this wave of Islamization in the area, that peoples who were once known as Zay, became Muslim and thus separated from the Zay. These groups would include the modern day Silt'e, Mareko, Gurage, and Hadiya.

We see another relationship between Atque Selassie and the islands, but we can also see that because of the Muslim advance, Christians living near lake Zway would have fled to the islands to seek refuge. Second, with Atque Selassie it is claimed that he brought with him various religious items and documents, which it is claimed, helped bring about the renaissance of the church after the Imam was finally defeated near Lake Tana. Third, with Islam engulfing the area around Lake Zway, the islands were isolated and the islanders were cut off from the rest of Ethiopia. This led to the fragmentation of the wider people who it is claimed were once a single people. With them being taken up in this Islamic wave, the Gurage became a different people and many of them became Muslim, we also have other groups such as the Silt'e and Mareko – whom it is claimed once belonged to this larger group – diverging from Zay and became mostly Muslim. Fourth, it is claimed that the Zway islands helped restore the Solomonic line to power after the Imam was finally defeated, it does not say how this was done, but tradition dictates that Atque Selassie was from the Solomonic dynasty; however, we still do not see Galawdewos – the son of Lebna Dengel who finally defeated the Imam – ever coming to the islands. Finally, we can see how this further isolated the Zay and pushed those living on the shore to live on the islands.

3.5 CONCLUSION

By focusing on the relationships and connections that these stories highlight we have seen what themes are most often present in Zay oral traditions. These themes are: Christianity, migration, and suppression are all major themes within these oral traditions. These consistent themes are present in most of the oral traditions pertaining to the Zay, from the origin of the Zay to the reasons for the various migratory waves to the area.

A major relationship is between the Zay and the other groups that are said to have begun during the *Ager* migrations, i.e. the first three migrations. They serve as a step to connect the Zay (and these other groups) with northern Ethiopia and seek to establish these groups (Gurage, Silt'e, Mareko, etc.) often ignored Christian past. However, we should not forget the *Wayzaro* migration. *Wayzaro* oral traditions and the traditions pertaining to the arrival of *Wayzaro* establish the reasons for how and why *Wayzaro* came to rule the Zay. They even serve to illustrate the relationship of *Wayzaro* with northern Ethiopia and royalty. It was these connections that enabled *Wayzaro* to rule the Zay until 1974. Currently it seems that these relationships and connections with royalty are a detriment to *Wayzaro* legitimacy and thus some are trying to remake *Wayzaro* oral traditions to associate them with the first migration to the lake area.

We still have an elite bias when it comes to Zay oral traditions. This, combined with the elite bias inherent of the written traditions is a problem that for the moment, we cannot overcome. Despite this bias, these oral traditions do give us a wealth of insight into how the Zay want to, and do, remember their history. In the subsequent chapters we will try to overcome this bias by hearing from a variety of Zay from different occupations, genders, and *gosas* related to Zay socio-economic practices, identity, and politics.

Finally, when it comes to the Zay as a people, we can see that the Zay acknowledge that they came from different places; however, because of their shared experiences, cultural assimilation, and the passage of time they have merged into a single ethnic group. Of course there are the usual internal divisions inherent in all groups, most apparent for the Zay is the distinction between the *Ager* and *Wayzaro gosas*.

4 HISTORICAL EVENTS RELATED TO LAKE ZWAY AND THE ZAY

Previously, we have seen four waves of migration to Lake Zway and its islands and the oral traditions related to these events. These events hold great significance to the Zay but that is not to say that these were the only events we have knowledge of in the past millennium. The islands were used as place to send monks who fell out of favor with the kings of Ethiopia; the stories of three of these monks are seen below. The defeat of the Oromo near Lake Zway is also something of historical significance as the Oromo migrations would serve to engulf the Zay and leave them isolated for years to come. We also have Sahle Selassie planning an expedition to Lake Zway (that never materialized), and Menilek II reaching Lake Zway and making contact with the islanders. Various travelers' in Ethiopia would take routes past Lake Zway and note the lake and its islands. Finally, we also begin to see research interest in the Zay by scholars such as Eike Haberland and Paul B. Henze.

4.1 LAKE ZWAY AS A PLACE OF EXILE

During the reigns of Amda Tsion (r. 1314-1344) and Säyfä-Ar'ad (r. 1344-1372) there was a religious conflict between the emperors and the *Abuna* (the head of the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia). The punishment for those monks who lost favor with the reign – most often for being troublesome – was exile. Under Amda Tsion, many of these exiled monks were sent into Tigray and the northern Amhara provinces; however, there is one exception to the northern exiles and that is the exile of Bäsälotä-Mika'él. According to tradition, Bäsälotä-Mika'él, who led the clergy against Amda Tsion, was sent into exile for a period to Lake Zway (Taddesse Tamrat 1972:187 fn 1). There is little known about his exile except he most likely preached on the islands and tried to convert the local people (if they were not already Christians, as we have seen from the oral traditions).

During the reign of Säfyä-Ar'ad, the conflict between the Church and State continued. Again, monks were sent into exile, and again, some of them ended up on Lake Zway. Taddesse Tamrat elaborates on the activities of those in exile:

Filipos and Anoréwos were transferred to Lake Zway. They were taken to one of the islands, and the hagiographical traditions about this exile provide the earliest description of the lake and the people who lived there in the fourteenth century: “The lake was famous for its great depth and width, and no one can enter it without Wäbäl [?] [*Yäbäl* (boat) is correct]. They took them into an island inhabited by pagans who did not have any religion and who ate the flesh of both properly slain and dead animals.” The monks are believed to have converted some of these peoples, and it seems probable that the island monastery of Lake Zway had its origin in this early mission work. According to these traditions the monks were soon

transferred from the lake region to what appears to be the area further south and south-west of Lake Zway, where they are also said to have preached. [Taddesse Tamrat 1972:189]

The description of the islands is especially interesting to note here as it claims that those living on the islands were not Christians, but rather pagans. I approached informants regarding this issue and they claimed that the monks were most likely sent to the island of Famat (closest to the shore on the east side of the lake), which, as they claim, was possibly inhabited by the pagan Watta (known for eating hippopotamus) at that time. Regardless of this, it seems that this was the beginning of an established monastic community on the islands of Lake Zway, which kept in periodic contact with the north. Taddesse Tamrat further notes that “Abba Sīnoda (d. before A.D. 1433), founder of Däbrä Simona in Gojjam, went to school in Lake Zway, and he was given the monastic habit by one Indryas, at the island monastery” (Taddesse Tamrat 1972:189 fn 3).¹⁸ If Abba Sīnoda was educated in Lake Zway, there must have been a flourishing Christian community there before 1433 when he was given his monastic habit. Although the sources here are imperfect they still serve to illustrate that Lake Zway and its islands were a center for Christianity.

4.2 THE DEFEAT OF THE OROMO NEAR LAKE ZWAY

The Oromo migration, beginning in the first quarter of the sixteenth century greatly influenced Ethiopia and the area around Lake Zway. Beginning around 1522, the Oromo swept up from south-western Ethiopia, occupied vast areas, and intermingled with many of the peoples of Ethiopia, especially in the southern areas (Huntingford et al. 1989:30). The defeat of the Oromo by Sarsa Dengel (r. 1563-1597) in 1572 near Lake Zway highlights this push. Since the Oromo migration began in 1522, they had swept north and east across Ethiopia. It is not known what relationship the Oromo had with the Zay at this time; however, it was most likely one based upon trade, as religious and cultural differences – and finally conflict – limited contact between the two. A description of the battle tells us that:

After eight years Harmufa went out of office and Robālē son of Mudanā was made luba [head of the warriors] in his place; [...] It was he who devastated Shoa and began to make war in Gojam. The king of Ethiopia [Sarsa Dengel] gave battle to him at Zeway, killed many of his men, and captured many of his cattle; thanks to this booty many people became rich. Robālē killed the azmāč Zar’a Yohannes, chief of the dignitaries: may he rest in peace! [Bahrey 1954:119]

¹⁸ Cf. “Gädlä Sinoda”, MS. Dima, ff. 3^a-5^a.

The defeat of the Oromo near Lake Zway most likely forced many of the mainland Zay to move to the islands to escape persecution at the hands of the Oromo, as the defeat did not send them fleeing, but merely stalled them for a short while. The Oromo advance also served to cut off this area from northern Ethiopia. It is noted that after the defeat of the Oromo there was so many cattle that even some of the local peasants took some. Moreover, the Oromo migration had a similar impact on the area as the wars with the Imam did. The Zay people were further cut off from those not living on the islands or close to the lake i.e., those in Aymellel.

4.3 THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Ethiopian emperors desired to reconnect with Lake Zway and the Zay. Religion and treasure were the driving forces behind this desire. Despite the lakes relative proximity to the Ethiopian capitals, this reconnection proved difficult – mainly for logistical reasons – as the crossing of the lake to the islands required the construction of boats, a craft not yet well known or necessary for the emperors armies.

4.3.1 SAHLE SELASSIE ATTEMPTS TO RECONNECT WITH LAKE ZWAY

The myths surrounding the islands had even begun to affect the rulers of Ethiopia. In 1840, Sahle Selassie (r. 1813-1847) was very interested in reconnecting with Lake Zway as a means of reuniting the scattered Christian populations in the south of what used to be the extent of the Ethiopian empire, (Darkwah 1975:28). It is noted that:

The tradition that the treasures and valuable manuscripts of the ancient Abyssinian Emperors were deposited on an island in Lake Zeway during the Muslim invasions of the sixteenth century was very popular in Shewa at this time; the rescuing of these treasures as well as the reuniting of the pockets of Christians living in the predominantly pagan occupied provinces were said to have been Sahla Selassie's greatest ambitions. [Darkwah 1975:29]

Sahle Selassie even invoked the help of W.C. Harris, a British emissary to Ethiopia, telling him:

It is my intention shortly to undertake an expedition to the great lake in Guráguê. In it be many islands which contain the treasure of my ancestors. There are jars filled with bracelets of solid gold. There are forty drums made of elephant's ears, and many holy arks pertaining unto ancient churches, besides seven hundred choice Æthiopic volumes, some of which have unfortunately been defaced by the animals called ashkoko [Hyrax Abyssinicus]. Elephants abound on the borders. In the trees are found black leopards of a most ferocious nature, multiplying always among the branches, and never descending upon the earth; and the waters of the lake, which are smooth as glass, and without bottom, teem with monstrous gomari

[Hippopotamus], and with fish of brilliant colours, red, yellow, green, and blue, such as have never before been seen.

Moreover there are specifics against small-pox and other dreadful diseases. No resistance is to be anticipated, for the inhabitants, who are chiefly Christian monks, have often invited me. I must no longer delay to recover the lost wealth of my forefathers, and it is fitting that you, with the British officers who have come hither from a far country, should accompany me and construct boats. Hereof my people are ignorant, and your name as well as mine will therefore become great, and will live in the annals of this kingdom. [Harris 1844a:31-32]

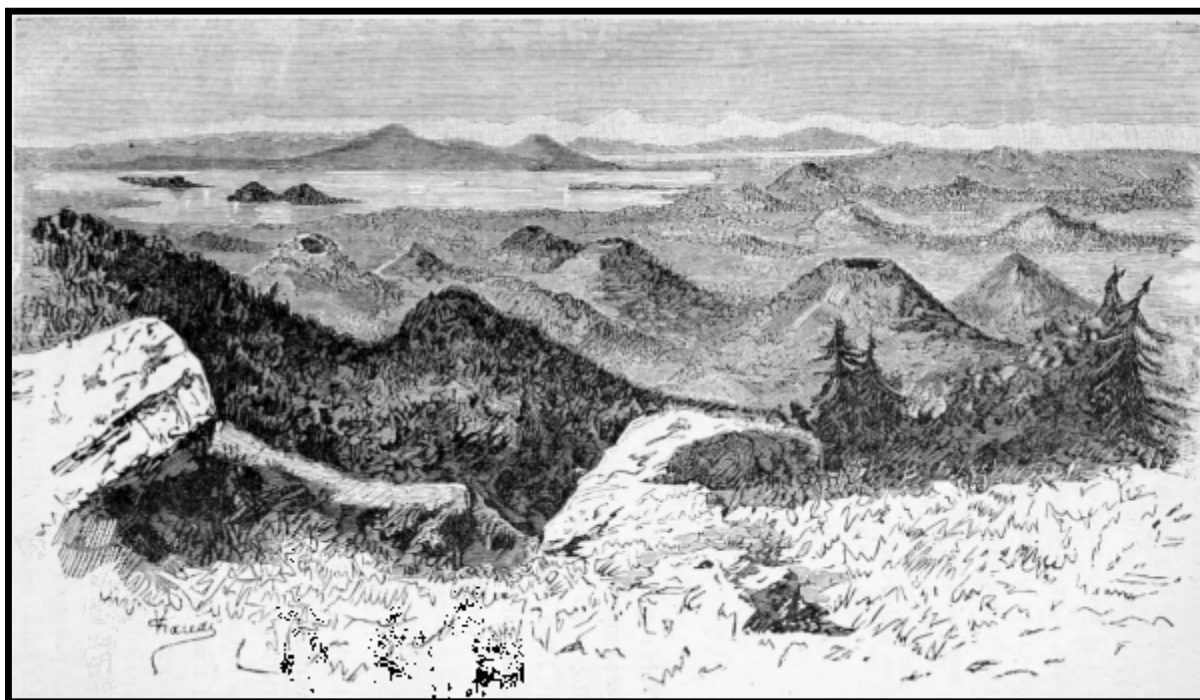
Unfortunately the expedition to Lake Zway never fully materialized, even after Harris had his men construct boats in preparation for the journey across the lake (Harris 1844b:33; R. Pankhurst 1968:303). Harris also gives a description of the islands – most likely not from anecdotal evidence, but hearsay – as a place of a prosperous Christian population:

On both sides of the river Gochob, there exist in various quarters, isolated communities professing the Christianity of Æthiopia, who for a long period of years have successfully held their position among the mountain fastnesses in the very heart of the now Pagan and Mohammadan country. One of the most remarkable of these seats is in the lake Zooai, where in the church of Emanuel are deposited the holy arks, umbrellas, drums, gold and silver chairs, and other furniture belonging to all the sacred edifices of Southern Abyssinia; which, with numerous manuscripts no longer extant, were here deposited by Nebla Dengel at the period of Graan's invasion.

Five rivers empty themselves into this lake. It is described to be a noble sheet of water teeming with hippopotami, which frequently destroy the frail bamboo rafts employed maintaining communication betwixt the shore and the Five Islands. These are covered with lofty trees, and contain upwards of three thousand Christian houses, constructed of lime and stone. In religion the population are said by the clergy of Shoa to have sadly degenerated; but although destitute of priests, the churches are preserved inviolate, and monks and monasteries abound. [Harris 1844b:74-75]

From this passage we can see how Lake Zway and its islands had become a place of great mytho-historical importance. For it was in part the desire to reconnect with this Christian population that drove Sahle Selassie and then Menilek to the lake. We again see stories surrounding the islands of “treasure” being hidden there during the wars with the Imam.

Figure 7 – Lake Zway seen from the summit of Mt Zequala (From Cecchi 1886:Fig. 90)



4.3.2 MENILEK AND THE ZAY

Perhaps it was the proximity, yet the seclusion of Lake Zway and the island community that made it so attractive to successive emperors, as after the failed attempt by Sahle Selassie, it was Menilek who finally reconnected with Lake Zway and its islands. While subduing the Arsi Oromo in 1886 the chronicler of Menilek tells us:

A week was spent going around the lake. There was a Galla area called Katar whose inhabitants kept the Zway people from going to and from their islands. Emperor Menelik laid it waste . . . The Emperor forbade his soldiers to disturb the Zway people or their possessions . . . Emperor Menelik then proclaimed: 'The Zway people will have freedom to come and go wherever they wish; they will be able to trade; whoever disturbs the inhabitants of Zway will be my enemy. [Gabra Sëlläse 1930:335-338]¹⁹

Menilek went to Lake Zway on 14 December 1893 and returned in early January 1894 (Prouty 1976:162,164). It is around the reign of Menilek II that we begin to find more sources pertaining to Lake Zway and the Zay. Some of the reasons for the desire to reconnect can be seen here:

It was not only the south-westerly region which attracted Menilek; the Gurage country situated to the south of the Awash river, the large Arussi group of Galla and other Galla groups inhabiting the region to the south-east of the river also attracted the king. The attraction of these areas was much the same as that of the south-westerly region. In the

¹⁹ For the full version of the encounter between the Zay and Menilek cf. Gabra Sëlläse, 'Les Habitants Du Lac Zouaï Se Soumettent À L'impôt', *Chronique Du Règne De Ménelik Ii Roi Des Rois D'éthiopie* (Paris, 1930a), 335-338.

conquest of Gurage the memories and the Christian traditions of the medieval empire appear to have played a considerable role. In the whole of the southerly and south-westerly regions it was, perhaps, in Gurage that the relics and some traditions of the medieval empire were best preserved. The tradition that the islands situated in Lake Zeway harboured the treasures of the Ethiopian church taken there for safety during the Gran wars of the sixteenth century had been popular in Shewa. Like Sahla Selassie before him, the desire to recover these treasures was one of the motives which induced Menilek to the conquest of Gurage. It was with this intention that an expedition was led by Menilek personally in the autumn of 1879 [1886] to the Lake Zeway district. The district all round the lake was ravaged but the islands themselves could not be reached. To reach them the soldiers needed boats which they did not have; and for this reason the expedition failed to achieve its objective. [Darkwah 1975:100-102]

From this account we see that the first attempt to reach the islands was unsuccessful because Menilek and his army did not have boats. Details of the next expedition show us that he wanted the Zay to submit to his rule, peacefully, and that this time he came prepared with boats:

Lake Zwai contained five islands, on each of which was a monastery or religious community. These groups had never acknowledged Menilek as their ruler, nor been subject to the hegemony of the Orthodox Church.

After the failure in 1886 to coordinate a landing on these islands, Menilek now prepared an appropriate strategy. On the banks of the lake his soldiers made papyrus barques, each of which could hold about four men and a cannon. Sixty of these boats were built. As the flotilla approached the largest of the islands, a cannon was fired. In the ensuing talks held between the 'king' of the island and the emperor, Menilek persuaded 'King' Alibo that his aim was only to regularize baptisms and communions by sending properly ordained priests, while Alibo convinced Menilek that he was descended from an emperor and was re-appointed governor. The Lake Zwai Christians said they had been prevented from leaving their islands by pagans. Menilek took care of that problem by attacking the surrounding Oromo lands and ordering the inhabitants to stop interfering with the people of Zwai.

A priestly delegation landed to inspect the Lake Zwai libraries, which had been famous as depositories for religious books since the 16th century when they were hidden there from Muslim predators. Menilek ordered all the books to be brought to Addis Ababa. [Prouty 1986:110]

The significance of Menilek II's campaign at Lake Zway cannot be understated, for it had repercussions for all of Ethiopia, one was the founding of Addis Ababa:

A monk brought from Lake Zway a manuscript of the Kebra Nagast, or "Glory of Kings", which included a history of Lebna Dengel stating that the angel Raguel had prophesied that Menilek would build a city at Entoto (i.e. about 8 kilometres north of Felwaha), and construct there churches in the honour of the Virgin Mary, and the angels Raguel and Urael. Since, however, the site of old Entoto could not immediately be found, Menilek established himself at a favourable location near Mount Wuchacha (a dozen or so kilometres to the south-west of the former settlement), where he made his headquarters in 1878-9. [Pankurst 1968:697]

With Menilek's campaign to Lake Zway, the Zay were affirmed as an independent tribal entity, with their own ruler designated and reaffirmed by Menilek as Balambaras. Menilek is also said to have ousted the Oromo at two areas around the lake to give land to the Zay. The first called Herrera, near the three northeastern islands, and the second at a place called

Bochesa, near the southwestern islands. This would prove to be a source of conflict between the Oromo and the Zay in the near future.

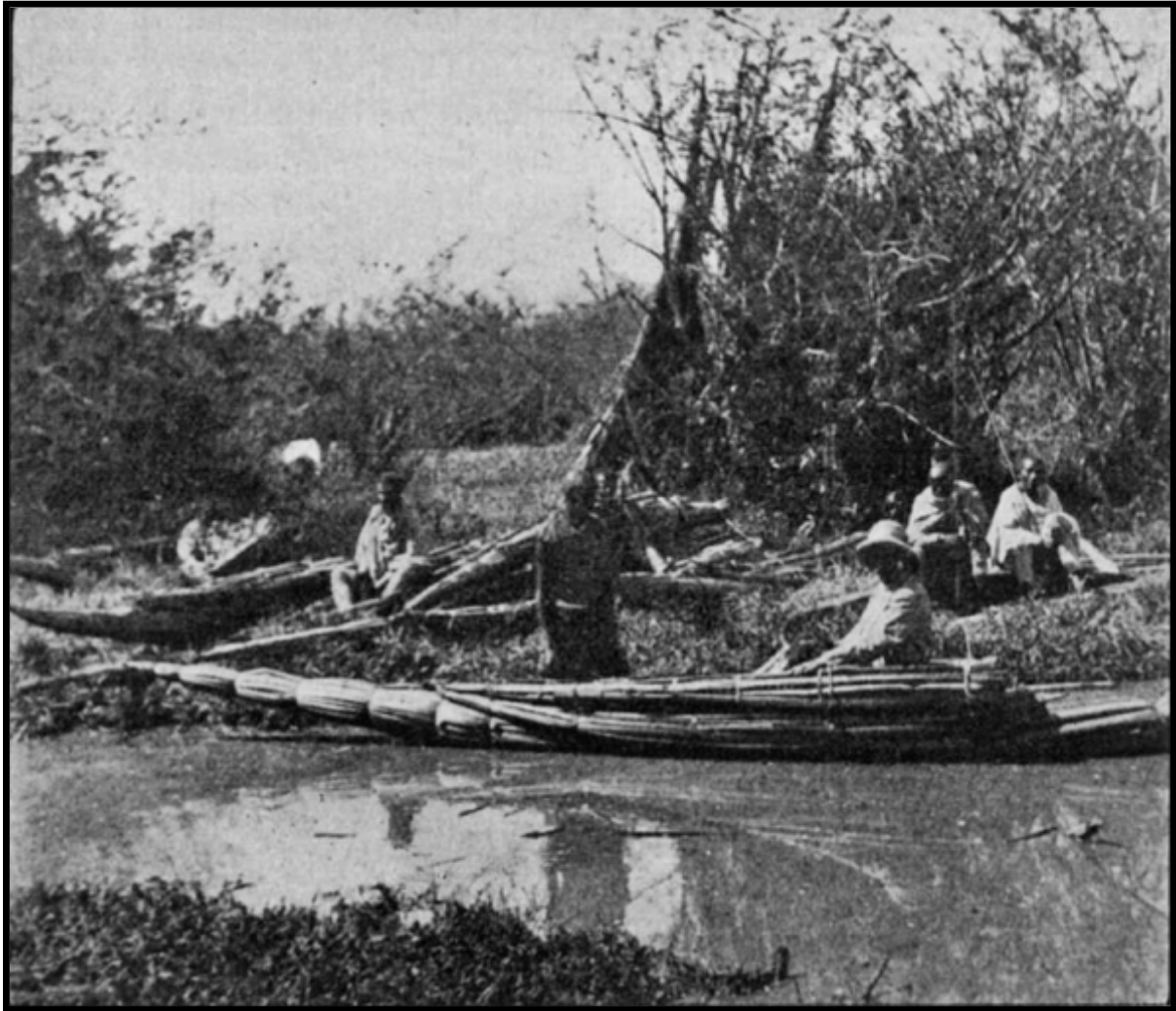
A Frenchman, M.H. Le Roux was sent to the islands in 1901 at the behest of Menilek. The purpose of the journey was to see what sort of religious documents the Zay had in their monasteries. The reason for this mission is noted as:

With the desire to improve the political unity of his empire, Menelik conducted in 1894 an expedition against the islands of Zouai. From the neighboring shore, with an army of 10,000 men and new guns he was trying, he surrounded the lake and bombarded the islands to motivate people to come together. They surrendered and swore loyalty to the emperor. Currently their king Alibo is a prisoner in Addis Ababa, with his wife, son, brother and the father of his wife. Menelik imprisoned him for failing to provide him with a crown, a scepter and a throne, that according to Alibo, date back to Solomon . . . These are the facts that determined the Negus to assign Mr. Hugues Le Roux with the mission of geographically recognizing the region of lake Zouai, to study the natives and their Christian archives. [Le Roux 1905:67]

He goes on further to mention, “The population of the islands is today [in 1901] from 4 to 5000 souls. In the past, it reached 15,000 people, but the plague which came as a result of an epidemic, imported by the dung of cattle that the rowers take from the Oromo land to patch houses, has decimated the natives” (Le Roux 1905:68). This epidemic reduced the Zay population on the islands by two-thirds.

Something in the text that we should note is that despite Menilek reaffirming the Zay leader, helping them with their conflict with the Oromo, and giving them land, Menilek still imprisoned the leader a short time later for failing to deliver a few items. In the end it seems that the Frenchman was unable to retrieve many books, stating that “asserting that this sale would be sacrilege and that the islanders would throw them away, with their families, in the lake” (Le Roux 1905:69).

Figure 8 – Blundell on Lake Zway



4.4 RECENT HISTORY

Various travelers visited the lake in the 20th century, for what we can presume is its relative closeness to Addis Ababa and that it is on the way to many southern destinations.

Arnold Hodson visited the lake and gives us a description:

In the lake itself there are five islands Dadacha, Tulu Guda, Funduro, Dabra Sina, and Galila. The largest of these is Tulu Guda, which consists of two hills, one being called Guba Mote and the other Gumerge. On this island the Abyssinians have a prison for important political prisoners, and there is also a church and some priests. The islands are inhabited by a people called La-Ke [the Zay], who speak a language peculiar to themselves. The shores of the lake are inhabited by Gallas. [Hodson 1922:66]

Even the twenty-first century Zay history is rather ambiguous. We still have few historical sources on the Zay even for recent history, and because there were no major events, memory recalls no major developments. Despite this, the sources we do find along with oral traditions help us to piece together Zay history during this time. We can begin with the visit of Haile

Selassie to the island of Aysut. As the churches on the islands of Lake Zway were considered to be very spiritual places, more priests and monks began to pay visits there. “On 25 Ter [2 February 1935], His Majesty negusä-nägäst Haylä-Selassé visited the island of Zway” (Bairu Tafla 1987a:298). It is not known exactly why he visited the island but Bairu Tafla also mentions “Traditionally, Ethiopian sovereigns visited particular monasteries or churches before they went on a military expedition” (Bairu Tafla 1987:n. 122). Oral sources claim that Haile Selassie visited the island of Aysut, most likely because it is close to the shore. It is said that he arrived by airplane and landed near the lake shore, where they had the *kidame gabbia* or the market, and that a large papyrus boat was constructed for his crossing to the island. Oral tradition also says that Haile Selassie bestowed areas of land to the Zay as well; however, it is possible that it was the same areas given to them by Menilek, only reaffirmed.

Later, the traveler David Buxton visited the lake and one of the islands, most likely Galila. He traveled in the area and visited a German named Goetz who was living in Adami Tullu but had since moved to the island of Galila because the Arsi Oromo were hostile to him:

A car, driven by a Somali, had broken down not far from Lake Zwai the evening before we passed. Apparently the car had been surrounded by Arussi warriors during the night; the wretched driver had been speared and mutilated and his body thrown into a hole. When we came by we found a large crowd assembled as the local Governor had already arrived with his soldiers to attempt – almost hopeless task – to track down the murderers.

Another who had suffered from the ferocity of the Arussi was Goetz, the old German recluse. Looking down from Aselle over Lake Zwai I could just see the little island on the far side of the lake where I had visited him eighteen months before. I had more than once passed through Adamitullo, a village near Lake Zwai on the road to the south. There is a rocky hillock near the road, crowned with the ruins of a house. It was here, I learnt, that Goetz used to live, but he had since retired to the island. I determined to visit him, and managed to do so when passing that way, with a friend I was bringing back from the south, in the autumn of 1943 we drove along an almost invisible, disused track to the shore of the lake. I had sent a message to Goetz to tell him of our coming, and the canoe-men said that he was on his way to meet us. In fact, we soon saw one of the little papyrus canoes of the lake approaching us across the water. The paddler, wielding a double-bladed paddle like that of a rob-roy canoe, was facing forward, back-to-back to his passenger. The canoe slid into a little creek among the reeds and out stepped the old man, very small in stature, very sunburnt, wearing shorts and shirt and dark glasses. He greeted us kindly, and was pleased to hear that we wished to come over to his island.

A canoe apiece was found for us and we all three set out across the water, each carefully balanced on his tiny float of papyrus bundles, sitting back to back to the paddler. We splashed through the small waves that had risen and made surprisingly good progress towards the island. But if the canoes were fast, mine at least was not dry, and I was soon sitting in the lake water which came up through the papyrus. However, we remained afloat and reached the rocky shores of the little island without mishap. When we had disembarked, the canoes were pulled out of the water to drain and dry.

We climbed to a little plateau and found a considerable number of round stone-built huts. One of these, indistinguishable from the rest, was the old man's home. As we sat there at a make-shift table he told me a little of his history, and his present way of life. He spoke German-the only European language at his command.

He had come out from Germany in 1902 as a young man seeking fortune and adventure, and had never since been back to Europe, or even outside Ethiopia. He became a pioneer trader in the country south of Addis Ababa (then only recently reconquered by Menelik), and after a few years definitely settled at Adamitullo. He indulged in trade, and also acquired stock and became a cattle farmer. Through many years of varying fortune he remained there, sometimes alone, sometimes with a colleague, and built the romantic hill-top house, the remains of which still stand.

Apparently the Arussi had always been a menace, and resented the settler who had obtained power and prestige in the country they regarded as theirs alone. Their chance came in 1936, during the Italian invasion, when chaos reigned throughout the country and destruction and murder walked abroad unchecked. Goetz's house was sacked and burnt, his goods scattered, and he fled to the island. Here he was safe, for the Arussi never attempt to cross the water, and the island people are a tribe apart.

When order was restored during the Fascist regime he tried to return to the mainland, but the Italians were unkind to him, took over what remained of his house, and obliged him to live in a shack below. Then followed a second interregnum when the Italians departed before the British advance. Disorder prevailed once more and the Arussi were again on the warpath, looting and destroying. This was the last straw; Goetz withdrew to the island for good. He managed to carry away what he valued most – his German classics and the works, in translation, of Ralph Waldo Trine, the American mystic and author of “helpful” books. [Buxton 1949:153-155]

An informant told me that it was *balabbat* Wake Bedane who invited the German to live on Galila. From the description of the way the Arsi Oromo treated Goetz, it is not surprising that the Zay kept to the islands for the most part, occasionally leaving only to trade their goods with the Oromo.

A German, Eike Haberland (1963), also visited the lake and islands of Galila and Debra Sina. From this research he published a short ethnography on the Zay in his book *Galla Süd-Äthiopiens*. The American diplomat, writer, and researcher Paul B. Henze developed an affinity for the Zay, and wrote several pieces on their history and culture (cf. Henze 1973a; Henze 1973b, 1989). These pieces give a unique glimpse of the Zay and their culture.

Figure 9 – Zay family on Galila (Photo by Eike Haberland)



Figure 10 – Zay men in a boat on Lake Zway (Photo by Eike Haberland)



After Haile Selassie was deposed, the Derg²⁰ assumed power in Ethiopia and this indeed influenced the Zay. The Zay seem to have mixed feelings about their treatment under the Derg. Some remember it with a sort of nostalgia and some say things are much better now. We can get a view of some Derg developments:

«At that time a Derg member divided the land. The Derg gave full rights to Zay people, to build another home in Herrera etc. The Derg said to keep your culture and “land for the tiller,” there was an idea to build an airport²¹ on Aysut, but nothing came of it.» [Informant #5 2011]

During the Derg the Zay were able to rule themselves and enjoyed relative independence. Apparently, the initial plan was to get the Zay to mix with those Oromo on the shores of the lake, especially around Herrera, where it was also rumored that an airport was to be built. However, they said they did not want to mix with the Oromo, so the Zay were given land in Herrera, Meki, and Mekdella. The land grant in Herrera would again prove to be a source of conflict between the Zay and the Oromo, and one Zay named Hamda Tola was killed there.

Here we have both good and bad opinions of the Derg policies and how they affected the Zay:

«The Derg took many lands from the Zay, after that the agricultural system came apart. The Derg said to make a cooperative for agriculture and gave each cooperative more than twenty hectares. They also formed a fishing cooperative. So we had a fishing cooperative and the government helped us by giving wheat, oil, etc. During the famine or drought times they also helped.» [Informant #6 2011]

We can see the initial criticism due to the breakup of the agricultural system, which before the Derg benefited the ruler of the island. The creation of the cooperatives was accepted along with the support that came with it in the way of foodstuffs. During this time the Zay did have a representative in the *Shengo* (National Assembly):

«During the Derg regime I was selected for parliament to represent the Zay. I was not a party member, I was not even with them, just they came, they took me, and said you have to represent Zay, because we are at that time, you know, they are making from different nations, just a little bit, making in the house, the government house, they have to have from different nationalities, so because of that, they got me when I was working in Assela, I was a branch manager at that time, and they said you have to be in this parliament, but I said “But I am Red Cross person, what can I do?” they said we have selected you, you have to be there, it was only three years or something like that, after that Mengistu fell and it was finished.» [Informant #7 2011]

During this time there was also a famine in the area, and food aid was distributed to the Zay and especially those in Zway Dugda. The Red Cross even saw it necessary to donate an

²⁰ Amharic for “committee.”

²¹ Other accounts state that the airport was to be built on the mainland, in an area known as *Kidame Gabbia* near Herrera, not on Aysut.

ambulance boat for the islands, as at that time transportation was primarily done via papyrus boats.

4.5 CONCLUSION

From this brief overview of the historical writings pertaining to Lake Zway we can see some important points. First in the variety of events that exerted pressure on the Zay, from the Oromo advance to more recent events such as Derg and EPRDF policies. Most importantly is how these external events also supported various myths and legends about the Zay and the islands. Sahle Selassie, Menilek and other travelers were interested in these legends surrounding the islands and it was because of this that Menilek finally visited the islands and incorporated the Zay into his empire. The more recent history also serves as a sort of bridge that connects the oral traditions with the present day customs and culture of the Zay.

5 CULTURE, CUSTOMS, AND SOCIO ECONOMIC SETTING OF THE ZAY

The Zay have a unique culture and customs that have been shaped by both the origins of their ancestors as well as their geographic location. In the previous chapters we have seen Zay historical traditions and origin stories. Key in those chapters was the analysis of relationships and connections that are highlighted by the historical traditions. These historical interpretations play a role in the current formation of Zay “identity” or “Zayness,” however these interpretations are not the only factors, especially currently, which influence this. We must also examine the *processes* that lead to the creation of “Zayness.”

Some might argue the extent to which the name “Zay” can be applied to all of these people. Because the Zay admittedly came from different places, we can argue that they are the culmination of years of assimilation and cultural appropriation and sharing, a process that is still occurring today. Throughout this chapter we will see various moments when aspects of “Zayness” can be seen. All of those interviewed, with the exception of one, identified themselves as being “Zay.”

5.1 CURRENT INTERPRETATIONS

Current interpretations of identity help us to see how and under what conditions Zay “identity” has been shaped. We can say that the foundation of Zay identity is the history, both oral as well as written; but more importantly, it is the current understanding of these historical traditions that may greatly influence the processes involved in creating a sense of “Zayness.” However, this is not to say that history is the only factor influencing “Zayness.” An elder from Debra Tsion gave some reasons for his “Zayness”:

«We were born here, we live here, and our parents were born here. The people began living here before many centuries. Yodit Gudit was destroying the north. There were people here before and then others came from another place. The identity has a relationship with this history.» [Informant #6 2011]

Here we can see historical and self-replicating reasons for one’s “Zayness” à la Young (1994). Other informants gave similar reasons as to why they were Zay. We can see another explanation from a Zay elder living in Addis Ababa relating his reasons for his “Zayness”:

«The first reason is I was born there (Debra Tsion), the second one is the place I grew up, this place is a historical place, with my parents, everyone told me that, St. Mary [church] is here, and this is the place of God, this place is a blessed place, all these things are in my mind. So I am really, when I am in Lake Zway, I am very proud. That is why I like to be called a Zay person. The third one is, I have this favority, I don’t know why, the island people, they like their native place. You know, I stayed in Romania six years, after six years I finished my study

and I came here, so at that time, my adoptive parents, who supported me to grow up, they were in prison. So I didn't have anyone, so immediately, the second day, from the hotel, immediately I ran back to Debra Tsion to see my people. I don't know why, now we are eager to go down there, to be there, even for one, two, three days. Especially now, there is no problem of transport. At the early time it was very difficult, we went by papyrus boats from Zway, it was 5 hours paddling. It was very difficult.» [Informant #7 2011]

In the first excerpt we can see a more historical basis and reasoning for “Zayness”. In the second, we see three things, the first linked to a geographic location, particularly the islands; second, we see the historical traditions playing a role in the formation of “Zayness.” Third, we see a sense of groupness surrounding the islands, or what Geschiere would refer to as belonging. We can see a sense of “Zayness” as related to a place, particularly the islands, and also a sense of inherited “Zayness” from parents. Topically, yes, this makes sense, because they were born of Zay parents or on the islands, thus they are Zay. But being Zay depends on more than where you were born and who your parents are. Everyday interactions also highlight certain moments and conjunctures when specific aspects of “Zayness” may materialize. Below we will see two more such conjunctures; the first takes place within Zay society and deals with one's *gosa*, while the second relates to contact between and other groups such as the Watta and the Oromo.

5.1.1 THE ZAY GOSAS

In the previous chapters we have seen that the Zay are a conglomeration of four waves of peoples who combined with two groups already living in the area. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the Zay *gosas*. Whenever there is a meeting they open by saying “*Zay simony, Ager simony, Wayzaro simony.*” This saying gives us details of the various groups that make up Zay. “*Zay simony*” refers to all Zay, *’deber Zay* (on the islands) and *’derga Zay* (on the mainland). “*Ager simony*” refers only to *Ager*, that is, the Zay who are the descendants of the first three waves to the area. “*Wayzaro simony*” refers only to the *Wayzaro gosa*. From this we can begin to see the fragmented whole that makes up the Zay.

The *gosa* works as a way of dividing up the Zay into subgroups that have distinct historical backgrounds. The *gosa* also plays a role relating to whom you can and cannot marry. For example, I was told that those from *Wayzaro* tend to try and marry only within the different *Wayzaro* subgroups, as it distinguishes them as the (former) ruling dynasty. However, during the course of the research I noted many people from *Wayzaro* who had married someone from a *gosa* other than *Wayzaro*. It seems that the only taboo related to the

gosas and marriage is that it is forbidden to marry someone from the same *gosa* as your father. Finally, *gosas* often roughly correspond with a geographic location. People of the same *gosa* will often be associated with a specific village.²² Therefore, when it comes to marriage, a woman will leave her village and go to live with the man in his village surrounded by people of his *gosa*.

Table 1 – Zay Gosas

Ager		Wayzaro	Others
1. Gumarge	10. Oragee	23. Wayzaro	24. Wege ²³
1.1. Amale Mesa	11. Yamesnugi	23.1. Deraji (<i>Balabbat</i>)	25. Areñ ²⁴
1.2. Nurko	12. Lengu	23.2. Sakume (Levites)	
1.3. Wene Dedesa	13. Zafita	23.3. Adahbo	
1.4. Ertube	14. Awaro	23.4. Kuno	
1.5. Akakele	15. Megabi	23.5. Ebarko	
2. Worre	16. Tear		
3. Wayo	17. Ahbos		
4. Dogoyi	18. Lakoli		
5. Ahjamo	19. Ahmaregi		
6. Suli	20. Woboruber		
7. Shersheraber	21. Assala		
8. Baja	22. Gindo		
9. Betigi			

The importance and meaning of ones *gosa* can fluctuate depending on the context an individual or group is placed in. Furthermore, it seems that history and historical processes also play a role in this. For example, when speaking to members of *Wayzaro* they often recalled Atque Selassie coming to the islands and establishing himself as ruler. They also noted the fact that they made up the ruling dynasty and were from the *balabbat* family. These events were often remembered with pride and reverence. However, when I would bring up topics such as slavery, subjugation or the sometimes cruel treatment of other Zay as committed by some members of *Wayzaro* in the past it seemed to arouse a feeling of shame and sorrow. Another, more contextual example we can use is in the current political struggle of the Zay, some individuals from *Wayzaro* are trying to play a leading role in this process. This again brings up historical grievances from some members of *Ager*, who see this as an

²² This is less true when it comes to the Zay living in larger towns.

²³ It is unclear whether the Wege ever intermixed with the Zay, as currently they have been assimilated with the Oromo and are considered to be an Oromo *gosa*.

²⁴ The Areñ are said to be original inhabitants of the area and the base of the *Ager* groups.

attempt for Wayzaro to again ‘rule the Zay.’ In response to this some individuals have begun to downplay the fact that they are from *Wayzaro* and attempt to emphasize their “Zayness” with one stating “I am from Wayzaro from my mothers side, on my fathers side I am Ager, but I prefer to just say that I am Zay.”

In analyzing the notion of *gosa*, we are also dealing with issues related to autochthony. As within Zay, it is those from *Ager* that claim to be the first settlers in the area; however, even within *Ager*; moreover, those that claim Areñ descent assert an even stronger historical tie to the area (Tuma Nadamo 1982). Below we will see more moments when ones *gosa* may become more important for individuals. The *gosa* is just one aspect of “Zayness” that we can analyze; let us now turn to the Zay and other groups.

5.1.2 CONTACT: THE ZAY AND THE OTHER

While looking at an ethnicity it is also important to see how the members relate to those of another ethnicity. For the Zay, the main other is obviously the Oromo. For hundreds of years the Oromo and the Zay have lived alongside one another, whether in conflict or in peace. The Watta also come into contact with the Zay on a regular basis.

Over the years the Oromo and the Zay developed what Knutsson (1969) characterizes as a symbiotic relationship. Perhaps everyday relationships based mostly on exchange can be labeled as such; however, when it comes to political relationships there is nothing symbiotic (see next chapter). As we have seen, prior to the arrival of the Oromo the Zay farmed the areas around the lake. According to Knutsson, when the Oromo finally pushed the Zay back to the islands after years of on and off conflict, a relationship developed between the two that was mutually beneficial. This relationship was based on trade. We are told “The islanders supply cloth, fish, and some items of merchandise and the Arsi market butter, ghee, fresh cheese, sorghum, corn, and occasionally meat” (Knutsson 1969:91). The Zay had very limited livelihood opportunities and what they could not produce themselves, had to be traded for. It is the market, or moments of exchange when these groups often come into contact with one another, with each group having something the other wants.

Another relationship also developed between the two, and it is related to an Oromo ceremony called *Hodaja*. This is an Oromo ceremony in which *Korma Jimma* (in Oromo *korma* means young bull and *jimma* is chat) is blessed and eaten. This ceremony concludes with the blessing of *bokus* (elders). The *jimma*, or chat, must be from the island of Debra

Tsion for the blessing to be accepted. According to some Zay elders, this practice establishes the Zay as “elders” of the Oromo and also indicates Debra Tsion as a sort of holy place.

Yet another point of contact between the Zay and the Oromo occurs in everyday life. For essentially all Zay living around the lake in places such as: Zway, Meki, Mekdella, Herrera, Bashira, and Bochesa; there is everyday contact with one another owed to the fact that they are neighbors. In Bochesa especially we can even see that Zay assimilation to Oromo culture and language is most strong (discussed more in the next chapter).

Another group the Zay come into contact with on a semi-regular basis is the Watta. For the most part, the Watta live on the northern shores of the lake and historically have been known as hippopotamus hunters. Reasons for contact between the Zay and the Watta are mostly for economic reasons. Instances of these exchanges might occur when a Zay has killed a hippopotami and wants to sell it to the Watta (although I was told it is now illegal to kill hippopotami). Other instances may occur when the Watta come to a Zay village asking for gifts of food or butter. A final point of economic contact is through fishing, as recently Watta have also started to fish and the Zay who run the motorboats will often buy fish from artisanal Watta fisherman to sell in towns such as Zway, Meki, Adama, and Addis Ababa.

Figure 11 – Watta fisherman on Lake Zway



5.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC PRACTICES

Owed to years of isolation resulting from their geographic location, the Zay were forced to develop extremely specialized livelihood practices. These practices revolve around fishing and farming, the two sources of food and sustenance for the Zay, and weaving, which is another activity the Zay are known for. These three practices have historically – and to an extent currently – been the major Zay occupations. By examining these three cultural practices we will reveal certain aspects of “Zayness” and how it plays out within Zay culture.

The Zay most likely learned to make their papyrus boats from the Watta, who are thought to be one of the earliest inhabitants of the lake area. Despite the fact that more modern wooden rowboats are also available, the *shefit* (papyrus boat) is still the most popular to use. These boats are similar to those used historically in Egypt as well as those on Lake Tana in Ethiopia (Heyerdahl 1971). As many Zay live on the islands and shores of Lake Zway, it is not surprising that they became fishermen and relied on this in tandem with agriculture to survive. What is unique about this is that until recently Ethiopians were not known for eating fish and in the past the Zay were even referred to derogatorily as “worm eaters” by the Oromo because they ate fish. It is interesting to see the radical change of view on fishing and eating fish that has occurred rather recently, Zerihun Doda (2009) has noted these changes (see Appendix I). The attitudinal change can be attributed to the growing acceptance and popularity of fish in Ethiopia, especially during fasting times. The widespread acceptance and eating of fish has benefited the Zay fisherman as there is more demand and they can now get higher prices for their fish. Whereas previously it was predominantly Zay who fished, now many Oromo and Watta have taken up fishing as a means to make a living. Oromo and Watta fishermen can be seen mostly in the north of Lake Zway, using the same type of boats as the Zay. The fish caught by the Oromo and Watta is then sold to Zay who own motorboats and transport the fish to nearby markets. When doing research, 1 kilo of fish cost five *birr* on the islands, when it reached Zway; the price was thirty *birr* per kilo and substantially more in Adama or Addis Ababa.

They fish by either setting a long line with many hooks, or simply with a net that is either set or thrown. Fishing is primarily a male occupation, and males often help one another fixing and untangling nets. Women are also involved, but more so when it comes to the preparation, cooking, and preservation of fish. Despite being a predominantly male occupation, the activities involved with fishing transcend the gender boundary. Both men and

women of all ages weave fishing nets and whenever one enters a Zay home, they can see a net in progress hanging from a nail in the wall. Often times during coffee ceremonies people will speak and weave nets at the same time. These nets are either used by a member of the family or sold. A typical net can be two hundred meters long and around eight meters deep.

Figure 12 – Zay man on Debra Tsion showing off a recently finished *shefit* (papyrus boat)



Figure 13 – Zay men preparing *mereb* (net)



Figure 14 – Zay youth in Herrera weaving a fishing net



Farming is also a main economic activity of many Zay, albeit mostly those that live on the islands and in the villages such as Bochesa, Herrera, Wayo Gabriel, Giraba, Shibi, and Guabagewe (around the lake). Due to the scarcity of land on the islands, the Zay were forced to develop terraces and various walls around the islands as a means to farm what land they could, especially on the mountainous island of Debra Tsion.

Figure 15 – Terraces on Debra Tsion



Subsistence agriculture is mostly the mode of production, however *tafi* (tef) and *dagussa* (sorghum) from the islands has become very popular in the mainland markets of Zway and Meki as it is said to have a distinct and better taste. Due to the scarcity of land and space, cattle are not kept on the islands. However, most families have at least one ox used to plow the fields. Donkeys are also used when fetching water and transporting grain and agricultural products. Smaller animals such as goats and chickens are kept in place of cattle and used to supplement income by selling them in markets during festival times.

The intensive farming techniques the islanders were forced to develop have resulted in the soil losing its fertility. However, owed to the volcanic and rocky makeup of the islands, the soil has never been extremely rich. Space is another issue the islanders are forced to deal

with. The islands provide a very limited amount of land to use, crops must be carefully considered and chosen, and the land is in constant need of repair (i.e. terraces, storm ways, trenches, walls, and so on).

As a way to cope with the scarcity of land, some Zay have moved to the mainland so they may farm more land. This occurs in areas such as Herrera, Bashira, Mekdella, and Bochesa. Others even managed to keep a home on one of the islands – usually Aysut or Debra Tsion – and have acquired land to farm in places like Herrera or Bashira. It is those who have land on the mainland or who have moved to the villages that come into regular contact with other ethnic groups, especially the Oromo. These Zay have been subject to “Oromoization,” as discussed in the next chapter.

Figure 16 – Tafi (tef) ready for winnowing on Aysut



The most typical crops grown are *tafi*, maize, and sometimes *dagussa* (sorghum) and beans. Closer to the shore more water intensive crops like tomatoes and onions are also grown. After harvest the *tafi* and maize are stored in large earthen and dung containers. In the past cotton was grown in large quantities on the islands and was used to make cloths and

nets. Currently there is very little cotton grown on the islands and when used, cotton is usually imported.

Before fish became more popular in Ethiopia, weaving was a primary source of income for the Zay. When Paul B. Henze visited the islands he noted, “The importance of weaving in the life of the islanders is readily apparent. In sunny weather weaving is also done outside. Large amounts of red-black-and-white cloth are still produced and brought to markets in towns such as Maqi and Alemtena” (Henze 1973a:82). Most weavers have constructed a roof over where they weave so it is even possible to weave when it is raining. Until recently, cloth in the area around Lake Zway came predominately from the Zay. Zway was also one the major cotton producing regions in Ethiopia (Skarnicel 1951). The Zay grew cotton on the islands and shores of Lake Zway, spun it, and wove it into clothing and blankets. Zay weaving is similar to that of the Gamo highlanders in Dorze (cf. Freeman 2004).

Figure 17 – A *gabi* from start to finish on Aysut



Weaving is primarily done in the down time between planting and harvesting and by those men who do not fish, most often older men. It takes about two days to make a *gabi* (large piece of cloth either worn or used as a blanket) working at a leisurely pace, one day to spin the cotton onto wooden or plastic dowels, and another to weave the cloth. Currently much of the cotton thread is imported and those who know the craft are becoming less and less. Only a few weavers can still be found on the islands. The cloth was used to make all types

of clothing for the Zay. One informant said that the Oromo would regularly buy Zay cloths and these eventually replaced the leather clothing typically worn by the Oromo.

In the past most of the clothing worn by the Zay were made by the weavers. Recently imported “modern” clothing has replaced much of the “traditional” forms of Zay clothing. Older men and women still swear *gabi*’s and *natellas* woven by the Zay. Currently the items that are mostly woven are *gabīs*, *bolukos* (larger than a *gabi*), and *natellas* (smaller than the others, typically work in church). However, there is a younger weaver who has started to weave “traditional” Zay style clothing. Although previously a predominantly Zay occupation, the practice of weaving is becoming less and less. As cheaper cloth is imported from abroad and mechanized industry has replaced the hand woven craft, we are finding that the number of weavers is decreasing. Despite this, some Zay, especially elder men, still weave and sell their cloths as a way to supplement their income.

From these three socio-economic practices let us now see what is specifically Zay about them, as they are practiced all over Ethiopia. Beginning with fish, we have seen that the popularity of fish all over Ethiopia is a recent phenomenon. However, the Zay were noted fishermen for a long time and even paid tribute to Emperor Menilek II in the form of dried fish. When trying to find specific moments of Zayness, or what makes these practices and their practitioners identify themselves as Zay, we have historical and situational reasons for this. For fishing, again it deals with the historic nature of the occupation as being Zay, as it was only recently that other ethnic groups in the area began to fish, and the Zay began to fish as a means for food and survival and turned this practice into a livelihood. As for the agricultural practices of the Zay, we have seen that the unique practices of stone terraces (on the islands) were developed due to the type of geography that is present on the islands. Admittedly, agriculture is a practice in which there are few aspects that can be seen as specifically Zay. Some that are Zay relate to the shared difficulties when dealing with the scarcity of land, fertility of the soil, and the transportation of surplus yields to nearby markets. Finally, weaving is also seen as being a historically Zay occupation and is often equated with being partly responsible for introducing cotton clothing to the nearby Arsi Oromo.

5.2.1 FOOD CULTURE

Food, although not an economic practice, is a social practice that merits description. Zay food practices heavily depend on the previously mentioned economic activities. We can

see how their environment and origins have shaped the types of foods considered by the Zay as cultural foods. These cultural foods are most often served on special occasions such as religious festivals and weddings. They are also served when friends and relatives visit. These visits are very important to the Zay, and come in the form of brides or grooms visiting their *wasteña* sometime after the wedding, or the visit of a best friend of a recently married man or women. An older Zay woman from Debra Tsion explained many cultural foods to me.

Table 2 – List of Zay Cultural Food

Food Item	Description
Shana	A type of bread made from bokolo (maize), often eaten for breakfast accompanied by milk or cabbage.
Huthutu	Made from wheat, flour, and butter. It is made like injera. It is made when a guest comes to a home or for a holiday. When a fiancé's family visits. When it is a wedding day they give it to the wedding home as a gift. They cut the <i>huthutu</i> into small pieces and mix it with butter. They then put it in a <i>wachit</i> or a bowl to serve. Often the family eats out of the <i>wachit</i> and the guest eats from the bowl. Previously it was served in a <i>hoydat</i> , a bowl carved out of wood.
Korri	Bread made from barley flour. First they roast the barley and grind it. The flour is mixed with sugar, burberre, and butter. The korri is served in a <i>wachit</i> . It is served on special days. In the past it was served in <i>hoydat</i> (wooden bowl), how it is mostly served in plastic bowls. Special days are wedding ceremony, when a <i>misé</i> or a <i>wasteña</i> comes, they bring this to the wedding home.
Tulumu	Fish eaten at any time of the year, preferably Qorosso or Dube. It can be served as <i>tibs</i> (fried) or <i>shorba</i> (stewed). Sometimes it is served <i>tre</i> (raw fish with berebere or mitmita and arake).
Tubuto	Kita, cut and served with butter
Atomoqu	Made from <i>dagussa</i> (sorghum). A type of ale served on many occasions. Gešo makes alcohol when fermented. They also use the <i>dagussa</i> flour to make a bread
Aydery	Ale made from maize and barley, served year round but especially around holidays. First they roast the gešo, then two days later they make a bread like thing. They let it sit for one day. They wait three days, and then it is ready to drink.
Kurt	Raw meat, most often served during weddings, <i>Meskel</i> , and other holidays
Siher	Made from honey and gesho, <i>tej</i> in Amharic
Tabeta	Prepared from <i>tafi</i> or <i>mashila</i> (maize) and served with <i>wot</i> (sauce) prepared from meat, cabbage, etc.

From this list we can see the simplicity, yet importance of foods served on special occasions. I had the opportunity to be present when a young man, who was recently married, visited his *wasteña* (marital judge) on Aysut. In the early afternoon we could see their small papyrus boats making the journey from Debra Tsion, a few hours later they finally arrived

and were invited into the home. Greetings and salutations were exchanged and the men were seated separate from the women. A sheet was hung from the center pole to one of the walls, so as to create a divider between the men and the women. Immediately the men were served *aydery*, (when drinking this in any Zay home my cup has never been empty). Shortly afterwards we were presented with *korri* and *tulumu tibs*. After eating the young man presented his hosts with a bottle of *arake*. As a way of saying thanks and blessing, the young man sits while his host pours a sip of *arake* into his mouth while saying a blessing for the young man.

Figure 18 – Tulumu tibs (fried fish)



5.3 CULTURAL EVENTS

Now we will look at Zay cultural events, that is, specific events told to me as being integral components of Zay culture. For some of these events, I would like to compare and contrast memory and reality. The differences between how certain cultural events were remembered and relayed to me, and the actual observed practice of these events. By doing this we can see the historical dynamics of how culture changes over time.

5.3.1 THE “TRADITIONAL” WEDDING PROCESS

For Zay weddings, we have both a man’s and a woman’s perspective on the subject. Here the stories of a man and a woman telling about their own wedding processes are presented. They have been combined to show both points of view and to create a better narrative:

Informant #2: The process begins when the child is still in the womb. “If the child is a girl, my son will marry her. If it is a boy, I will be the godfather.” You find a family you want to marry into. If it is a girl, they send an *Atemachit* (male elder used as a middleman for bride inquires) to the family. The elder goes to the girl’s family home in the morning and he tells the girl’s father someone wants to marry the female child. The girl’s father does not respond or say anything to the *Atemachit* at this time. The *Atemachit* comes back another day. He goes to the boy’s family and says he has sent the message and that he will return another day with the answer, then the *Atemachit* goes again to the girl’s house to hear the response of the girl’s family. The father tells him he must discuss this with the family. Now again the *Atemachit* returns to the girl’s home to hear the answer. If the answer is “yes,” then *Atemachit* goes to the boy’s family to tell them the good news. But whenever the *Atemachit* enters the girl’s home he is not offered anything to eat or drink. Then the *Atemachit* makes an appointment with the girl’s family so that the two families can meet.

Informant #8: After the girl’s family discusses, the *Atemachit*, the boy’s father and his *gosa* visit the girl’s home and give a gift, usually 50 kg of tafi. This is divided among the girl’s family and neighbors on another day. The girl still doesn’t know what is going on. They don’t eat the tafi alone, if the girl’s family eats the tafi alone, on the wedding day they will not be given a gift from their family.

After that day the girl must hide from the boy’s family, as a sign of respect. She can only see them after the wedding day. If the boy wants, he may help the girl’s family by harvesting tafi, and getting other people to help harvest tafi. At that time the boy sees her parents as the government. On *Meskel* day the boy gives a large goat to the girl’s family as a sign of respect. The boy could go to the girls home to work, but could not enter the girl’s home; he was fed in another home. The girl hides from the boy during this time. [This process is known as *Fija*, “*Fija yalfija yetfaji*” is a kind of curse that people say meaning that you should stick to the culture. This is said during the process of blessings.]

Informant #2: After this happens the two families are seen as one. The boy helps the girl’s family out. The son doesn’t go to the girl’s house, he sends someone (a friend usually) to ask if they need any help and the friend will tell the boy what work needs to be done. He will do many types of work for them such as harvesting grain and he also sends them food like fish.

Informant #8: Engagement Day

An engagement day is agreed upon and when the boy arrives he is asked, “why did you come here?” and he says “you are our mother and father and we are to be a son of yours” the boy stands while this happens. They ask the boy what he has in his house and the boy names everything he has. He must show he has many things so the girl doesn’t think he is poor.

The boy gives the girl a necklace and a sash. The boy ties a ring around the girl’s neck with a string as a promise. At this time the girl’s family prepares food such as *huthutu*, choco and *iseechi*.

When they begin to eat the food two glasses of *aydery* are given to the mother and father of the groom. The groom kisses them on the knee, shoulder, and head. Before they leave the house the mother of the girl puts *iseechi* in their hair. During that time the boy gives a gift of *birr* to the girls family.

On holidays the groom and his family are invited to eat. There is a problem, as many things are prepared for the boy and his family. If your child has a fiancé you need to have

butter and flour because sometimes the fiancé and his family will show up unexpectedly and you must serve them food, usually porridge.

After the engagement day the boy gives 5 oxen to the girls family, for the two uncles (maternal and paternal), girl's brother, mother and father.

Informant #2: If a girl has a fiancé she cannot see any boy, only her brothers, she can only see her father and mother. She makes *mäsübs*, *mäsübwerk*, and others and doesn't go where the boys are playing.

The boy's mother only sees the girl's family on specific days, the first day, and when the girl's mother has another child. When the girl's mother has another child the boy's family gives a gift such as a big goat, *tafi*, *iseechi*, or milk. This is done every time a new child is born, but some families only give a gift one time if they cannot afford it. For more children, a goat is not given but a gift of *tafi* may be given. An appointment day is made to give gifts to the girl's aunts and uncles, brother, mother and father such as 100 *birr*, less amounts, or a calf. When they are finished giving gifts they discuss when the wedding day will be. Both families decide when the wedding will be. Many weddings are in January or April due to the fact that there is no fasting. The girl's family asks the boy and his family to give money for wedding clothes, 200 *birr* then, 100 for the wedding and 100 for clothes. (*digis* – ceremony-*zeina*)

Informant #8: The groom and his friends gather wood for the girl's family. When they gather wood, the girl's family prepares bread, *aydery*, etc. When they gather wood the girl begins to cultural play, and cries up to the *ertube* day. When they finish playing the girls have a crying ceremony before going to sleep. Up to the *ertube* day the girl's friends play and sleep at the girl's home until the day of the wedding. The girls must come at 12:00; if they are not there before 12:00 the girl's family will not let the friend inside.

On *ertube* day, to make *aydery* it takes one week. So they grind *gešo* and prepare. Her kin invite her to their home and invite her to *genfo* and *doro wot* up to *ertube*. People invite her from when the *gešo* is ground up until *ertube* day. Before the *Ager* elder are called to the girl's home, they bless the girl and the elders are given a drum to bless, the drum is given back to the elders and the mother and father are blessed. Then the girl's go outside and begin to celebrate. After they play the girl is carried and set on a mat in the front of a house. Then the mothers come with a drum and sit in a circle and play with the girl. On *ertube*, they roast barley, make bread and after the girl and her friends are playing outside. Then barley and *kita* are given to the girl. The bread is waved around in a circle and the person who eats the bread carries the girl into the house. When she sits on the mat she is given roasted barley to smell by her sister. They celebrate late into the night.

Saturday

She doesn't eat food until after the wedding, and continues to drink *dowa* on Saturday.

Informant #2: Before the wedding the boy and his friends get together in what is known as a *Mary Group*, which are friends who were born around the same time as the groom. They have a book to register their names for the wedding and help with wedding preparations. This includes grinding *gešo*, gathering wood and fetching water, getting pots, barrels and anything that will be needed for the wedding. Around three weeks before the wedding the boy and his friends begin to gather wood. The mother of the groom prepares *aydery* and bread and gives it to the men. After this they begin to play culturally, like *arasho* (men's playing) and so on. This is the eve of the preparations process; at night they celebrate in his home. Much food is gathered from the land.

The wedding day is usually a Sunday, if there is another wedding scheduled that Sunday it is sometimes moved to Saturday or another Sunday, previously it was mostly held on Thursday. The wedding will sometimes take place in church and sometimes only at home, according to the parties' wishes. One week before the wedding the groom's kin invite him to their home to eat and drink and celebrate. When women are invited by their kin they usually get something for their home and butter is always put on their hair. The inviting goes on until three days before the wedding.

Three days before the wedding a cultural ceremony (*ertube*) takes place. They send a child to call the people to *ertube* and if they are not called they do not come. *Aydery*, bread, *injera* and *wot* are prepared for the guests. The boys and girls have a separate ceremony. Kin

and neighbors are invited, the whole island is invited and there is a ceremony at nighttime (after 6 PM).

At the boy's ceremony, *aydery* is served in a full glass to everyone and the people bless the boy. The boy and his best friends sit together and are blessed; they don't drink or eat anything until they are blessed. "God keep you, whenever you go to the girl's home" "peaceful ceremony" then they eat and drink. At the boys ceremony they stay up all night and the Mary Group prepares *huthutu* and *aydery* and come together and eat and drink do cultural play like *arasho* (men) and *fetasho* (women). Then they join the rest of the ceremony, lasting until morning.

Informant #8: Sunday

The groom goes to the girl's house with his best friends. The girl prepares her things to move. Everyone is crying. When the groom arrives, the mothers greet him. The groom enters the tent and eats food prepared by the girl's family. The boy gives another sash and a silver ring to the girl. [He will promise to take care of her teeth, eyes, legs, and hands. Meaning that the husband will not harm her. He has no rights over these parts of her body.] The groom's best friends take the girl from the house to the tent, near the groom. She still doesn't eat, so she will be tired later. The wasteña reads the agreement "if he breaks her arm or blinds her eye" it will be considered a crime. This can be used to judge them later if they fight; when they fight the agreement is read to them. When they finish the agreement (marriage contract) the groom's two best friends carry the bride to the boy's home. If she is from another island or place they travel by papyrus boat. They bring the gifts as well, and are outside on a mat. The girl arrives and sits on the mat while the groom sits on a chair to show he is greater than her.

They make another drum circle and play cultural music (*zoeira*). Then the groom takes the girl inside and the room is divided with a sheet so no one can see her. The bride stays in the home until she delivers a child. Her family doesn't see her until this happens. An exception to this is two weeks after the wedding when her family (not mother and father) visits. If it is far they will sleep in the girl's new home. Then for two months her family doesn't call, so she may learn her home (*mels*). After this her family invites her to her old home. She gives them a big goat and *huthutu*. Her husband's family joins her and they return that day. The girl stays with her family for up to a week. When she returns home they make *huthutu* in a *wachit*. After her family calls her, another person may invite her, but not until her family invites. Her best friends, wasteña, and kin may then invite her to their home.

Then she is at home until she delivers a child. Her family is given gifts when she has a child, 50 kg tafi, a large goat, flour, arake, etc. The mother will sleep with her daughter when she visits. The mother of the girl will sleep there for up to three days depending on how far away it is. When the mother visits, the groom gives gifts to the girl's mother, dress, shoes, sash, natella, umbrella etc. The mother wears all the new clothes on that day. Then they, bride and groom, may move as they like.

Informant #2: Sunday: the wedding day, the boy prepares himself in a suit etc. and his friends, family and relatives meet in the boy's home. They sit in the mushera's home. The elders come with the family and friends to bless the groom saying "god bless you in your journey" he gives a mat for him and his best friends, the mothers come and stand around the groom, forming a circle, and do cultural playing (*Zoeira Zoe-er-uh*). When they finish he stands and they give him a small pot with dowa and tej (*Chim Zeinya*). The boy's friends come and make a promise and they drink together. The groom and his friends taste the tej one by one. The tej means that to promise through living "god makes our life to be sweet just like the honey until we die, god make us a loving, sweet and peaceful group just like this honey." They promise with this. When they drink the dowa it means "if you have bad thoughts about your friends your life will be sour like dowa" Then they break the pot with dowa and say "our God break our enemy like this pot." Then they go to the girl's home.

When they arrive at the girl's home the women are outside and begin to sing, clap and play (*fetasho*). When the women finish playing (*arasho*) the boys say, "let us have a seat." A tent has been prepared outside the home and the elders ask "why did you come?" the boys answer "you are to be a father to us and we are to be your son" then the elders say "what do you give to the bride?" then the best friends give a gift to the elder representative of the girl, a

scarf and a necklace. Then the best friend goes to the girl and puts on the necklace and scarf, and then they go to the groom and sit with him.

The girl's family serves the boy's family when they finish. The girl is inside her home while everyone is eating in the tent. Before they leave they must have an agreement that they will marry. The boy says everything that he owns to the girls' family. There is one representative for each family, for the boy, the wasteña, for the girl, someone else, and they read an agreement between the couple. The boy's representative tells what the boy owns and the girl's representative tells all the gifts the girl has received. (wul)

When they finish the agreement the representatives give the agreement to each other, they then take this to their home, this will be used in case of a disagreement, then it is finished.

The girl is taken by the boy's best friends outside where the groom is waiting. The best friends take the girl to the tent, they both kiss the families three times, on the knee, the shoulder, and the head, and then they begin the journey to the boy's house. The best friends often carry the bride. At the boys home a mat is prepared for the bride's gifts and they are waiting when the bride arrives.

When the boys arrive they culturally play zoera with the moms. The groom sits in a chair and the bride on a mat to show he is greater than her. The mothers come and sing traditional songs. When they finish the cultural playing they take the girl inside the home. The people continue to celebrate in the tent.

The elders of the boy wait for him outside the home until he takes the girls virginity and he shows the sheet with blood they celebrate. After this they go to the girl's house in the morning with the sheet of blood and shoot a gun to celebrate the virginity. The families give a gift and *birr* for happiness. [Kunbi Cheri and Gemedede Gelcha 2011]

An aspect of the wedding process that I was told is specifically Zay and practiced by no other group is that of the groom promising to take care of the girl and to not harm her teeth, legs, eyes, and hands.

Other informants told this version of the wedding process to me as well. However, there is a discrepancy between how it is remembered to have been practiced, and how it actually is practiced now. Based on contemporary accounts and by speaking to the younger generation we can see that there is a disjunction between how marriages are remembered and how they are actually practiced.

One of my key informants now aged around twenty-two, went through the motions of the traditional marriage process. When she was born an *Atemachit* came to her home and stated that another family had an interest in marrying their son and their newborn daughter. The girl grew up on one of the islands. When she was fourteen she had the engagement ceremony and was supposed to be married after she was sixteen. When she was sixteen and the wedding day approached she decided she did not want to marry in this way and the engagement was broken. This was not without grievances and opposition from both families.

From this we can see that aspects of this process do still linger. However we can also see other accounts of this practice losing importance as more and more Zay move to towns and as inter-ethnic marriages rise. Despite this, some aspect of Zay tradition are kept even in inter-ethnic marriages, as one wedding I attended between a Zay man and an Amhara women

had elements of Zay tradition such as the singing in *Zayña* to thank God before the festivities began.

5.3.2 FUNERALS

Let us look at Zay funerals and see what aspects of identity we can discern. One important linkage we can see here is that the dead are often buried where they were born. This shows that there is an importance given to geography and gives the sense of a “homeland.”

«When someone dies they move the body into a praying position, closing the eyes, tying the arms together as if they person is praying and tying the legs together too. First they wash the person then they lay the on a bed frame made out of wood. After this the people are crying, the women make a circle of 3-4 people and go to the side and mourn. The men come together, crying, calling the name of the person, giving them praise for what they did in their life, if they were male. If it was a woman who died then only the women mourn. The men only do this for men.

The relatives are waited for, usually one day, and other people too. If the person dies in the water, then the funeral is held the same day. All relatives come from far away so the funeral is held one or two days later. After 12 days they also remember the person who died (12, 40, 80 or 6 months). One year and every year following up to 7 years

On the 12th day they make *aydery*, kill a goat, have bread, invite friends and relatives and say “God remember him, God take his soul to heaven.” The priests are also invited and a mass is held. Prayers are said in the person’s Christian name given at baptism.

On the 40th day, *aydery injera*, are made and an ox is killed. They call everyone to come, a mass is held to pray for the dead person. People give money on the day of the funeral to the deceased family saying, “it is for coffee”. It is held after 40 or 80 days, not both. 6 months later a mass is held, bread is eaten saying “God remember him, God take him to heaven.” After this, each year a mass is held and bread is eaten to remember the dead.

When someone dies, the family wears black, the wife of the deceased up to 40 days. The men the same and a white cotton necklace. If the wife of husband died they will shave their head. If the husband dies the wife sits in the center of the home, next to a pillar for up to 5 years. She will sit here whenever she is at home. She may also sleep there for up to 6 months. The reason for this is because the husband is seen as the pillar of the house. She may work and whatnot but when she is at home she sits there. She does this until she takes off her black clothes. Until she does this she does not call on anyone. The wife may wear black clothes for up to one year. The relatives of someone who dies also often shave their head. After one year and 6 months if the woman has not finished mourning her friends will make her take off her black clothes and cut the white cotton necklace and put *iseechi* in her hair and bless her.

If a man’s wife dies he shaves his head and wears a black hat and clothes. The husband may sit anywhere in his home. He may take off his mourning clothes once they begin to rip or fall apart. His neighbors will also tell him it is time to shed his mourning clothes. He does not get *iseechi* in his hair after this.

If a child dies, they are all crying at home, no circle is made and no chanting is done. The people only cry. After the funeral ceremony the people give money to the family. If the guests stop, then they go to the crying ceremony. If it is a child then they wear a black natella (the mother), the father a black hat if it is their child. The father will wear a sheet as a gabi. For a child, only the funeral ceremony is held, there is no remembrance ceremony. If it is a young boy there may be a small ceremony after 40 days. For the females, nothing.» [Informant #9 2011]

For two weeks after the funeral the deceased’s family members will not work. This is a time for mourning. If the deceased was a father, after waiting for about one year, all of his property

is divided between the men of the family, with the eldest son receiving the largest share. If there is a dispute between the sons then it is mediated by elders (discussed below).

I had the opportunity to attend a Zay funeral. The woman died in Zway town, however she was from Aysut. At the jetty in Zway there was a boat for the deceased and her family, and another for other mourners going to Aysut. We made the journey from Zway to Aysut in tandem and at a rather slow pace. When the boat carrying the deceased was in sight of the island, almost all of the islanders were at the shore in their mourning attire. Illations could be heard and people were weeping opening and wailing. The coffin was brought to the home of her son who lived on the island. The women began to prepare food and drinks while the men sat apart and cried, prayed, and paid their respects. Small amounts of money were collected for the family of the deceased, usually from one to twenty *birr*. An interesting observation is that people make a list of who donates what amount. The men erected a tent and people went inside to continue to mourn. Many people also spent the night in the tent. Food, drink, and coffee are served to the guests who stay in the tent. The next day they had the funeral ceremony. Prayers were said and the person was laid into the ground.

In the funeral ceremony we can see the identification and categorization processes at work. One has already identified themselves as Zay and even from a specific location, as to where they wish to be buried, most likely with other members of their family. If we take the example of the funeral that I witnessed, we can see that the woman was identified as being a prominent Zay woman, the wife of the old *balabbat*, and as being from Aysut. She was connected not only to people, but also to a place, as she was brought from Zway town to Aysut to be buried. The people who attended the funeral, both those already on the island and those who came from the mainland, had some sort of connection with the woman, either through family, friendship, or even ethnic solidarity. The event itself created a sense of groupness, not only in the obvious that all were mourning the loss of this woman, but also in cultural and language practices in the funeral ceremony. The commonalities and connections are quite explicit in this ceremony, however I will still elaborate on them here. Participants in the funeral process are all aware of their social location, the men know what jobs they must perform, and the women are also aware of what they must do. Age differences also play a role in what job one should be doing during the ceremony. Through all of this an extremely high sense of groupness is seen and can even be felt.

Within these two cultural events we see various moments of shared understanding between individuals and groups. In the traditional marriage process, individuals and groups – be them a family or a *gosa* – have specific roles to play. There is also a desire to promote and protect a general conceptualization of “Zay” inherent in the marriage process, as the end result of marriage is to have children and begin a family that will presumably be taught and instilled with a sense of “Zayness.” Throughout the process there are various moments when certain roles and aspects of “Zayness” are more prominent. The *gosa* is of obvious importance as when trying to marry into, or receiving an offer from a family, one must take into consideration the standing of the others *gosa* and also make sure it is not too closely related to ones own.

The shared understandings also become more apparent during specific events in the marriage process such as the celebrations beginning with *ertube*. The shared experiences of the individuals create a sense of belonging between the individuals present with again instills and highlights this certain aspect of “Zayness.” Examples of these aspects that may be highlighted during this ceremony are based upon one’s gender or relation to the bride, groom, or their family. Women, men, and family members all have specific duties to carry out during this celebration.

When it comes to the funerals, we again can see shared understandings and roles that inform aspects of “Zayness.” In this, it may be the fact that all are there to mourn for the deceased and pray for them. But we should also not forget that the whole ceremony is a celebration of the deceased’s, we well as the mourners “Zayness.” For we can see that in the example given above, the woman was very important in Zay society as the wife of a former *balabbat* and that there was a connection to the area, and hence to the people, living on the island of Aysut. It is difficult to accurately articulate these feelings that can inform specific aspects of “Zayness,” but moreover, it would be interesting to see when these notions do *not* materialize and the processes that lead to this misfiring.

5.4 RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

As religion plays a major role in the life and history of the Zay, we should take the time to examine the ways in which religion and religious festivals express certain aspects of Zay identity:

«Christian people came to the islands from Axum 842 years ago. All the people on the islands follow Orthodox Religion. The reason the ark of Abraham is on Aysut is because it has three

mountains. The holy trinity has three parts and Aysut has three mountains. So in Abrahams home this is how it had to be. So the Abraham church was built here. When Abraham killed Isaac on the mountain as a sacrifice so the second mountain is Isaac Mountain. The people imagined this is what it was like when Abraham made his sacrifice.

The reason they build churches and give more arks to other islands is to expand Orthodox Christianity. They didn't only build on the islands, but also built in other places after the war ended. After the war ended an orthodox monastery leader came and saw the arks on the islands. They took 44 arks to protect them during the war. After they went to other places to build more churches and spread orthodox Christianity. For example in Golga town the ark of Giorgis was on the islands before, Meki Mikael they also took from the islands as well as Bochesa Mikael.» [Informant #19 2011]

Some of these forty-four arks were distributed to other parts of Ethiopia and used to found churches. Probably the most famous of these is St. Gabriel of Kulubi near Harar, built by the father of Emperor Haile Selassie, Ras Makonnen on 19 December 1885 Eth. cal. (cf. Hiruy Sime). Other churches built with arks from Lake Zway can be seen by Table 3. St. Gabriel and St. Giorgis were built during the reign of Menilek II and the others were built after fascist Italy left Ethiopia.

Table 3 – Churches founded with *tabots* from Zway

Church	Location	Comment
St. Giorgis	Golja Katar Genet in Arsi	Built by Aba Gebremariam, an Amhara who was the head of St. Mary church on Debra Tsion island.
St. Mary	Adami Tullu	Built by <i>balabbat</i> Wake Bedane of Galila, Debra Sina area. The church was requested by Aleka Abebe, Bayleyn Zemedihun, Aba Birhanu (Tura) and Biratu on behalf of Christians living in and around Adami Tullu town.
St. Mikeal	Meki	Built by late Abuna Lucas and Ato Ereano Dembi
St. Mikeal	Bochesa	Built by Balambarus Duga Wake.
St. Tekla Haiminot	Mojo	
St. Selassie	Mekdella	Built by the Zay community living in Mekdella.

Religious festivals are a prime example when one can see certain markers of Zay identity. They also create a heightened sense of groupness or belonging, as Zay will come from great distances to participate in the festivals. It is also a time to see and catch up with old friends and family members. The sense of belonging is as a result of everyone participating in the festivals in some way or another. Most religious festivals revolve around the specific *tabot* of the church. Here I will describe three such festivals that I attended.

Table 4 – Zay Religious Festivals

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September 1 – Addis Amet (New Year) • September 17- Meskel (Finding of the true cross) • November 8 – Funduro Church Day (Arbatu Insesa) The Four Living Creatures • November 12 – St. Mikeal (Bochesa) • November 21 – Debra Sina (Mary Church) • November 24 – Galila Kahinate Semay • December 29 – Gena (Christmas) • January 7 – St. Selassie (Trinity) • January 10 – Epiphany eve • January 11 – Epiphany • January 12 – St. Mikael (arc procession) (Bochesa) • January 21 – Debra Tsion Church Day (Asterio Mariam) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April – Fassika (Easter) • May 1 – Debra Tsion Church Day (St. Mary's birth day) • July 7 – Mekdella Meki • August 1-16 – Filseta (fasting) • August 28 – Aysut Abraham Church Day • 5th of every month is celebrated as Abuna Gebre Menfes Kidus Day • 12th of every month is celebrated as St. Mikael • 19th of every month is celebrated as St. Gabriel • 21st of every month is celebrated as Mary's Day (Mahiber) • 29th of every month is celebrated as Bealwolde (Jesus' Day)
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The preparations for Debra Abraham began a week before the celebration. *Ayder* was brewed and left to ferment. Foodstuffs were also collected in large quantities – *tafi*, *bärbäri*, etc. Through the week the sound of children practicing religious songs could be heard throughout the island. The day before the celebration, relatives and family members began to arrive in large numbers, from Addis Ababa, Adama, Awassa, Meki, Zway, Bochesa, Herrera, Bashira, Famat, and Debra Tsion. Even many non-Zay come to the festivals. Those with family on the islands can sleep in their family home. Others sleep at the church or are invited to sleep where there is space. The night before the mass the celebrations begin. Children from the island put on various plays with religious themes and moral messages. Many songs are sung and prayers are said.

The next morning the celebration mass is held, again prayers are said and songs are sung. Eventually the *tabot* is brought out and the people process around the church three times. A gun is fired when the *tabot* enters the church grounds. After processing around the church three times everyone who can goes inside the church while more prayers were said in the name of Abraham. Songs were sung in *Zayña* with a drum accompanying them. Many of the islanders themselves are deacons so they were helping out with the mass. Near the end of the ceremony there is a time for fundraising. A priest from Assela retold the story of the Zay and how the *tabot* was brought to the islands for safekeeping. Everyone who donated money had their name read with the amount they donated. Forty thousand *birr* was raised on this

day for the church on Aysut and eight thousand more for one in Herrera. The church on Aysut has been under construction for the past ten years, and is finally close to completion.

Figure 19 – Preparing food and a procession around the church for the Abraham celebration on Aysut



After the celebration everyone's home was open for food and drinks. People normally begin at their family home before moving on to neighbors and friends. This goes on for up to a week after the ceremony, depending on how much food and drink is left.

According to some, the reason that *Meskel* became a Zay holiday had to do with the Zay on the mainland and those on the islands wanting to have a holiday to celebrate together:

«After some time, after the Oromo's came, when they surrounded the area, during Meskerem, they are celebrating this, what they are celebrating now, *irreecha* (Oromo holiday of thanksgiving celebrated at the end of September) and all these things, this is celebrated during Meskerem (roughly equivalent to September), mostly, and now, too much, to live together, when this very ceremonial and very, so many people has, so many followers, on the side of the lake and so on, so the Christians, our people, saw that this thing would invade them, so what did they do? With the church and the others, this has done internally and externally, with the church and itself, they did some evangelist things. People would go around and baptize, and *Meskel*, September 16-17, when the number of baptisms increased, *Meskel* became more popular for the outsides, the outsiders and the insiders want to have one holiday together, so it grew together, to diminish *irreecha* and that things. *Meskel* was because of this, still this Geno,

and the others are celebrated, not at the ancient time, it is the celebration of *Ager* people.»
[Informant #1 2011]

Figure 20 – Meskel celebration on Debra Tsion



On another occasion I had the opportunity to spend the *Meskel* week on the island of Debra Tsion. According to one informant, *Meskel* did not used to be a Zay cultural celebration, however in the last century it has been incorporated into Zay culture. Starting the week before *Meskel*, children will begin to sing and play at sunset. On the day eve of *Meskel*, mass is held on the mountain above the church. Wood is gathered and a pyre is built. Prayers and blessings are said and incense is brought around the pyre. The pyre is eventually set on fire and people parade around the pyre while singing. The singing stops a few times and more prayers are said.

I also had the opportunity to be present at the Mary Day (*Mahiber*) celebration on Aysut. This occurs once a month and it changes houses each month. The event is hosted by one of the women, often at great cost as she provides food and drink for the other women. The event begins at the church where the women pray to Mary and ask for her blessing. Then a procession is led to the home of the hostess, and all the while the women are singing and playing a drum. When they arrive at the home there is more singing and more prayer. The

atmosphere begins very somber and works its way to a frenzy. The first songs are very somber and the later ones more exciting, and the women begin to dance. Prayers are also said in the name of the hostess and her family as thanks for hosting the event. Small donations are given for Mary, usually one to five *birr*, which goes to the church.

Figure 21 – Mahiber celebration on Aysut



The Mary celebration has types of identification we have not explicitly touched on yet, gender. The Mary celebration is explicitly for women, and as such, only women celebrate. Here major identification processes are seen in the religious as well as linguistic expressions of the participants. All participants are categorized and identified, both self and other, as female Zay Christians. Self-understanding and social location are seen throughout the ceremony, and even in its preparation. Extended family members will help with the preparation of the food and drink for the ceremony, while guests know their role in not refusing food and drink offered to them. Commonality and connectedness are seen throughout the ceremony insofar as they are all female Zay Christians, living on Aysut, and due to the small population, they all know one another. With the sense of commonality and connectedness the ceremony is an expression of a very high level of groupness. With this it

seems that some other categories are lessened – such as *gosa*, occupation, etc. – in favor of groupness, or a feeling of Zay overall.

Religious festivals lead to extremely high levels of groupness. We can also see extremely high instances of identification and categorization. We first see identification explicitly when one categorizes themselves as being Orthodox Christians. Secondly, especially for the festivals held on the islands, we can see people being categorized into Zay speakers and non-Zay speakers. Self-understanding is also present here insofar as people know what is expected of them during the ceremony. Here you can identify yourself as either a Christian or a Zay, as the two are essentially the same in this setting. Commonality and connectedness are felt, seen and expressed which lead to high levels of groupness, Zay groupness.

As for the Abraham and Meskel celebrations, the identity markers here can be seen in various forms. One strong marker is that so many people who no longer live in the islands come back for the festivals. Within this we can see two things. One is that Orthodox Christianity is very important for them, and most Zay are Orthodox. Another is the connection they have with the islands and more importantly, the churches there. These outsiders could celebrate closer to their home, however they choose to return to the islands – the birthplace of most of them – to celebrate and spend time with family. Another thing we see is the language, whenever a Zay priest is saying a blessing they will give it in Zay, other times during songs and dancing, these are also done in Zay. It is a beautiful thing to hear the progression of a Zay song along with the drumming.

5.5 ZAY SENTIMENTS

During the research period I administered surveys, some of the questions on the surveys related to Zay identity and “Zayness.” Some of the results are discussed here.

Spousal preference is another variable we should examine, and here we have the data for both married and unmarried Zay. The married data shows the ethnic group of their spouse while the unmarried data shows whether or not the respondent prefers a Zay spouse for the future. Of the unmarried Zay, 75% indicated they would like a Zay spouse for the future. The main reason for those who indicated they did not want a Zay spouse is that they wanted to marry into another ethnic group to have a bit of a change in culture and customs. Out of the married respondents, 82.6% indicated that they had a Zay spouse while 9.6% indicated an Oromo spouse. From this we can conclude that there is a strong tendency for

Zay to marry Zay and also that among the unmarried Zay, there is a desire to marry within the Zay ethnic group.

Dealing with the psychological make up of the Zay and the creation of a common Zay identity is yet another indicator to examine. Here statements were read and respondents were asked to indicate how they felt about the statement using the following scale: (1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neutral (4) Agree or (5) Strongly Agree.

When it came to the statement “I feel good about the Zay culture and background” we have the following results. 76.1% of the respondents indicated that they “strongly agree” with the statement while 23.3% said they “agree.” This give a total positive response for this statement of 99.4%, only one person or 0.6% said they “strongly disagree.”

Responses to the statement “I have a strong sense of attachment to the Zay ethnic group” yielded similar responses with 67.5% saying they “strongly agree” and 32.5% saying they “agree.” No one disagreed or felt neutral about this statement.

For the statement “I participate in Zay cultural activities” we again have a similar positive response but with also some disagreement and neutral feelings. The results are as follows: 32.7% “strongly agree,” 51.2% “agree,” 8.6% “neutral,” 4.3% “disagree,” and 3.1% “strongly disagree.” Despite a slightly higher number of responses expressing disagreement, overall we still have still have 83.9% of respondents giving a positive response.

For the statement “I am proud to be Zay” we have the following responses: 71.2% “strongly agree,” 27.6% “agree,” and 1.2% “strongly disagree.” From these responses we see an overall sense of belonging and attachment among the Zay. We also see that there is a feeling of pride and an effort to participate in Zay cultural activities.

From these results we can see that there is a strong attachment to the ethnic group as well as a sense of “Zayness.”

5.6 CONCLUSION

The socio-economic and socio-cultural practices of the Zay inherently create a sense of belonging among community members. Whether gendered, age based, group based, or occupationally based, in different moments we can see different aspects of Zayness articulated and expressed. We can also see how certain historical notions of Zayness are made visible through these practices and processes. Building upon their oral traditions, the religious

festivals are especially good examples of this, as they often remember their past at the opening of such festivals through prayers.

How does one belong to the Zay ethnic group? Is it a choice? Or is it something inescapable? Moreover, what does it mean to belong to, and be a part of the Zay? It seems that one should have a sense of their history, and to an extent, believe in it and be proud of it. The foundation of Zayness is seen through the current understandings of Zay oral traditions (as seen in the previous chapter). Current expressions and understandings of Zayness are built upon this historical foundation. Farming and fishing are both necessary and essential outcomes of their historical situation. Given a lake teeming with fish, rocky mountainous islands, and mounting outside pressure forcing and keeping you on these islands, these practices were likely outcomes. That is not to say that their historical experiences *determined* their current situation, but surely they have greatly influenced them.

Christianity is yet an ever-present theme in Zay everyday life. History has also laid the foundation for this, through traditions, relics, and religious items. The festivals are celebrations of the past *and* the present, through remembering their struggle and celebrating specific days, the sense of belonging and groupness is extremely prevalent during these festivals.

6 POLITICAL TRAJECTORIES

The relationship between the Zay and both the federal and regional state is almost exactly opposed to the concept of *metis* (the ability to use local knowledge to create local solutions). With the federal scheme of ethnic-federalism, it seems that no local knowledge was incorporated in the creation of the *woredas* and zones. We may conclude that indeed this state scheme of ethnic-federalism has failed here, but also move on to the questions posed by Ferguson (2005) such as: What do these schemes do? And what are their messy, contradictory, multilayered, and conjunctural effects? The following chapter deals with these questions.

The Zay have a long history of self-rule under a political system known as the *balabbat* system. This system was based on an imperial dynasty that appointed rulers to see to the administration of the other islands and lands surrounding the lake. The Zay ruled themselves under the *balabbat* system until the Derg forced them to abandon it in favor of collectivization and organization at the *kebele* level. Under the Derg, the Zay were still self-ruled, and each island had its own representative. With the overthrow of the Derg and the advent of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front/Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (TPLF/EPRDF), the Zay were still able to rule themselves at the *kebele* level until the elections of 1995, when they were forced to merge with Oromo dominated areas on the mainland. With this the Oromo are always the Chairman of the *kebele*, while the Zay are relegated to Vice-Chairman. Under the federal Constitution the Zay have a claim for ethnic representation; however, when it comes to the regional level, their status is ambiguous. In the subsequent sections I will present an overview of ethnic-federalism, the state and the Zay, Zay political traditions, Zay self-reliance and promotion, and issues dealing with internal skirmishes and recognition. Thematically, the main issues that we will deal with herein are those of domination, recognition, participation, and promotion. Moreover, we can see various relationships that have developed based on groups (both ethnic and *gosa*) as well as between the Zay and various levels of government, namely the Federal and Regional governments.

6.1 ETHNIC-FEDERALISM

The current Ethiopian political system is based on ethnic federalism, which was allegedly engineered as a way to mitigate the various ethnic grievances that had brewed since

the end of the 19th century, through the reign of Haile Selassie, and during the Derg regime. During the reigns of Menilek II and Haile Selassie, the Amhara ethnic group was the dominant group. With the advent of the Derg regime – despite programs to promote it – ethnicity was relegated to a tertiary status in favor of attempting to build an “Ethiopian identity” through the policy of “*Ethiopia Tikdem*” (Ethiopia first). When the Derg was toppled in 1991 by the TPLF/EPRDF, ethnic claims had already turned into various ethno-regional rebel groups and ethnic federalism was seen as a way of accommodating these various claims.

6.1.1 THE PERCEIVED NEED FOR ETHNIC-FEDERALISM

The necessity for ethnic federalism, as presented by the TPLF/EPRDF arose from the historical suppression of ethnic groups and the societal stratum that was created by this. The making of the modern Ethiopian state was accomplished in the last quarter of the 19th century. During this time, Menilek II, an Amhara, doubled the size and population of Ethiopia by conquering the southern regions. These southern regions were extremely heterogeneous, as opposed to the largely homogeneous northern regions. As Menilek conquered the area, newly acquired land was often bestowed upon Amhara and sometimes Oromo generals who ruled the vast areas in a feudal way. Indeed, by end of the 19th century it was the Amhara who were seen as the ruling group of Ethiopia. The manner of conquest was often violent, and up to two-thirds of the land in the south was taken; with this many people were either enslaved or forced to work as feudal serfs (Markakis 1989:119). We are told that “The areas that were spared this imposition were those that had peacefully submitted to Menilek and had thus managed to retain some degree of autonomy” (Bahru Zewde 2001:87). The Zay were one of these groups to peacefully submit to Menilek and thus retained “some degree of autonomy.”

According to Aalen (2006) “during both Emperor Haile Selassie (1931–1974) and the military Marxist regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam and the Derg (1974–1991), ethnic groups, cultures and languages were clearly ranked and ethnic movements oppressed” (Aalen 2006:246). Markakis (1989) states that “under Haile Selassie all Ethiopian languages other than Amharic were banned from print and broadcast while the aristocracy continued to rule the countryside, both north and south, where more than ninety percent of the population lived” (119). However, an informant who lived during that time claims that there were in fact

radio broadcasts in other languages such as a radio station in Harar that broadcast in Oromo, in Asmara there was a broadcast in Tigrigna, and the state run radio station broadcast in Somali besides the official Amharic and even initiated printing in Tigrigna, Oromo, and Gurage.

After the overthrow of Haile Selassie and the advent of the Derg, a policy of ‘Ethiopianization’ took place as a means to create a national identity. Despite this, there were also attempts to promote ethnicity and ethnic diversity. We can see that “under the Derg [a] process of recognition had already started, as evident in the literacy programmes in more than a dozen languages and the work of the Institute for the Study of Ethiopian Nationalities (ISEN) and its political role in mobilising minority representatives” (Abbink 2006:395). Despite allowing the print and broadcast in languages other than Amharic and the establishment of the ISEN, ethnic struggles persisted. These struggles led to the establishment of various armed ethnic based movements.²⁵ It was the TPLF dominated EPRDF that finally ousted Mengistu in 1991. With these various groups and different claims, there was a perceived need to engineer a novel ethnic-federal system as a means to accommodate the various groups and claims.

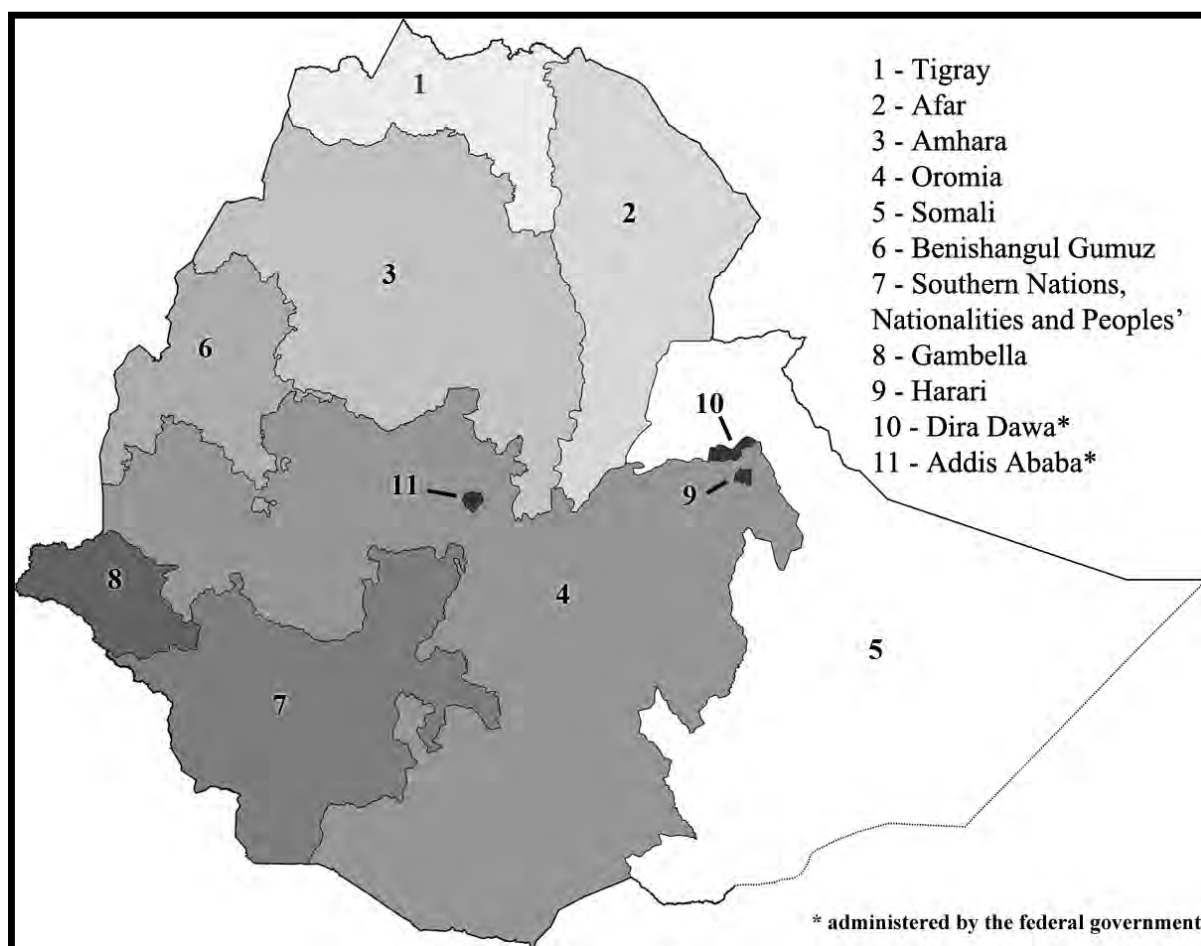
6.1.2 AN OVERVIEW OF ETHNIC-FEDERALISM

In the formation of the new ethno-regional boundaries, representatives from the largest ethnic groups were supposed to argue for their historical boundaries. These various claims were then negotiated until a consensus was built – of course, with the TPLF/EPRDF having the last word. In the new Constitution,²⁶ nine regional states were created (Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somalia, Benishangul-Gumuz, the state of Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNPRS), Gambella, and Harar) and two federal city-states (Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa) (see Figure 22). The nine regional states have Constitutional autonomy while the two city-states are subject to the federal government (Van der Beken 2010:251). The SNNPRS was created to accommodate the various small ethnic groups in the area, and thus has many zones divided roughly along ethnic lines.

²⁵ Some of these groups were: The Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front, The Oromo Liberation Front, The Western Somali Liberation Front, The Afar Liberation Front, and The Ogaden National Liberation Front.

²⁶ The federal Constitution of 8 December 1994 came into effect in August 1995.

Figure 22 – Map of regions in Ethiopia



With this new model, Ethiopia embarked on a mission to empower ethnicity and this is clearly seen in the Constitution. The sovereignty of all ethnic groups, termed “nations, nationalities and peoples” in the Constitution is striking. In the Constitution we can see that:

Sovereignty is not given to the member states of the federation, as is common in other federal systems, but “[a]ll sovereign powers resides in the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia” (Article 8.1). All languages are given equal state recognition (Article 5.1), and every national group has the right to develop and promote its own culture and preserve its own history (Article 39.2). Finally, they are entitled to a full measure of self-government including their own institutions within their territories and representation in regional and federal governments (Article 39.3). [Aalen 2006:243]

The idea of “nations, nationalities, and peoples” is something to expand upon here, we can see that Article 39.5 treats them as one and the same, stating that “A Nation, Nationality or People . . . is a group of people who have or share large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory.” By defining people by their ethnic group, and making them choose their ethnic

group, this model is forcing people to become members of certain groups, even if they do not feel like they are members of a particular ethnic group or have parents from two different ethnic groups. It also does not account for ethnic group identification that can change depending on socioeconomic or political circumstances. Despite this novel attempt to empower ethnicity, it has not had the same outcome for all ethnic groups due to its inherent flaws.

6.1.3 MINORITIES AND ETHNIC-FEDERALISM

Ethnic-federalism is supposed to accommodate for minority groups, and has two such mechanisms for this. The first of these mechanisms is an automatic seat in the Council of People's Representatives. We can see:

[An] interesting aspect of the reflection of ethnicity in the Constitution is that of a bypassing of the constituency voting system outlined briefly in Article 54, by some “minority nationalities and peoples”: they were given a representative in the Council of People's Representatives (parliament) without elections. In subsequent legislation, 22 such groups were given such a free seat, all with a population of under 100,000 (which is the size of a constituency). [Abbink 1997:167]

This idea is fair enough with the end goal of giving representation to all ethnic groups in Ethiopia, whether large or small. However theory and practice are two different things, and many small ethnic groups have been left even further disenfranchised. Below is a list of the ‘minority’ ethnic groups that have been given an automatic seat in the Council of People's Representatives. It seems that now there are 22 groups that have been given a minority seat.

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------|
| 1. Dizi ²⁷ | 13. Maale |
| 2. Surma | 14. Majangir |
| 3. Burji | 15. Oyda |
| 4. Nyangatom | 16. Mao-Komo |
| 5. Me'en | 17. Ts'amai |
| 6. Dasanech | 18. Gidole |
| 7. Shekacho | 19. Zaysse |
| 8. Sheko | 20. Basketo |
| 9. Shinasha | 21. Erob |
| 10. Hamar | 22. Yem |
| 11. Dirashe | 23. Argobba |
| 12. Gawwada | |

²⁷ The source for these 23 ethnic groups is Jon Abbink, 'Personal Communication, 29 July 2012'.

The second mechanism that benefits minority ethnic groups is that of the special *woreda*, known as *liyyu woreda* in Amharic (Abbink 1997:167). These *liyyu woredas* seek to enable minority groups to administer themselves, manage their own funds, and teach in their own language. With these insights in mind, we might conclude that the status of minority ethnic groups in Ethiopia might not be too bad. Abbink (2006) notes that this is an advantage to the ethno-political dispensation in Ethiopia since 1991 stating, “minority groups have acquired visibility and can have their grievances and demands heard. They can use their languages for educational purposes, and educated members of their community function in the administrations and political institutions, even up to the parliament (House of People’s Representatives) (Abbink 2006:395). A definite advantage, yes, but we are missing a key element here, what of the ethnic groups that are not officially recognized, such as the Zay?

6.1.4 CRITIQUES OF ETHNIC-FEDERALISM

There has been ever increasing critical literature on ethnic-federalism in Ethiopia since its implementation (Abbink 2011; International Crisis Group 2009; L. Smith 2007; Teshome-Bahiru and Zahorik 2008; Vaughan 2003). An increase in conflict deemed ethnic is one of the major drawbacks of the system, and indeed, there have been several ethnic conflicts that originated out of group claims over land (cf. Abbink 2006; Abbink 2009). One of the main critiques relevant to this paper is that ethnic-federalism creates minority groups subject to the dominant group in the regional state. With the Zay, they are subject to the Oromo, and as we have seen, despite currently living in relative peace, the Zay and the Oromo have a history of conflict. Let us now turn to Zay political traditions and see how they developed over time and examine the current political situation of the Zay.

6.2 THE STATE VIS-A-VIS THE ZAY

The treatment of the Zay by the central state has varied depending on the situation and circumstances since the time of emperor Menilek II. Under Menilek, the Zay were granted status as an independent ‘tribal’ entity with their own ruler and given land around Lake Zway. This continued under Haile Selassie where land, goats, and chickens were given to the Zay. Under the military council of Haile Mariam Mengistu and the Derg, their treatment fluctuated between asking to try and merge with the surrounding Oromo and supporting their right to be an independent people. These policies however, led to clashes over land. During this period the Zay did have political representation in the government and Derg

policies seemed to only negatively affect Zay elites i.e., the ruling class, when land was confiscated and redistributed. This changed with the new regime.

With the new Constitution we have seen that various rights were given to the Nations, Nationalities and People of Ethiopia. It seems that when dealing with recognition and the creation of *liyyu woredas*, it is not a federal issue but a regional issue that we are dealing with, as it is the regional government who has the power to grant the Zay their own *woreda*. However, it is the federal government that could give the Zay a representative in the Council of People's Representatives, but has so far done nothing. The Zay have sent various letters to the House of Federation and even to the office of Meles Zenawi, the current Prime Minister, asking for a representative in the Council of People's Representatives. The federal government responded but told the Zay that they need to take this issue up with the Oromia Regional State. Let us now turn to this relationship.

6.2.1 THE OROMIA REGIONAL STATE AND THE ZAY

The Oromia Regional State was officially created in 1994 with the approval of the Ethiopian Constitution. Shortly afterwards different policies were created to make the Oromo ethnic group more distinct from the others. One of these policies focused heavily on language. As a newly autonomous regional state, the Oromia Regional State decided that *Afaan Oromo* would be the primary language taught in schools. *Afaan Oromo* was standardized and switched from using *fidel* (the Amharic script, for example: ኦሮሞ (Oromo)) to Latin characters. This is an understandable policy if the area were homogeneously Oromo; however, the Oromia Regional State has sizable minority groups.²⁸ Before delving into education and language policy, let us examine the Constitutional basis for these rights in the Constitution of the Oromia Region.²⁹

From the preamble of the Constitution, we can see that it is geared toward the Oromo people. It does not state that power resides in the peoples of the region, but in the “Oromo people” and Article 8 states that “Sovereign power in the region resides in the people of the Oromo Nation . . .” in fact, a reading of the Constitution leads one to believe that it was created solely and exclusively for the Oromo people (cf. Van der Beken 2007:122-124).

²⁸ The Oromo make up about 85% of the population in the region; the second largest group is the Amhara with around 10%.

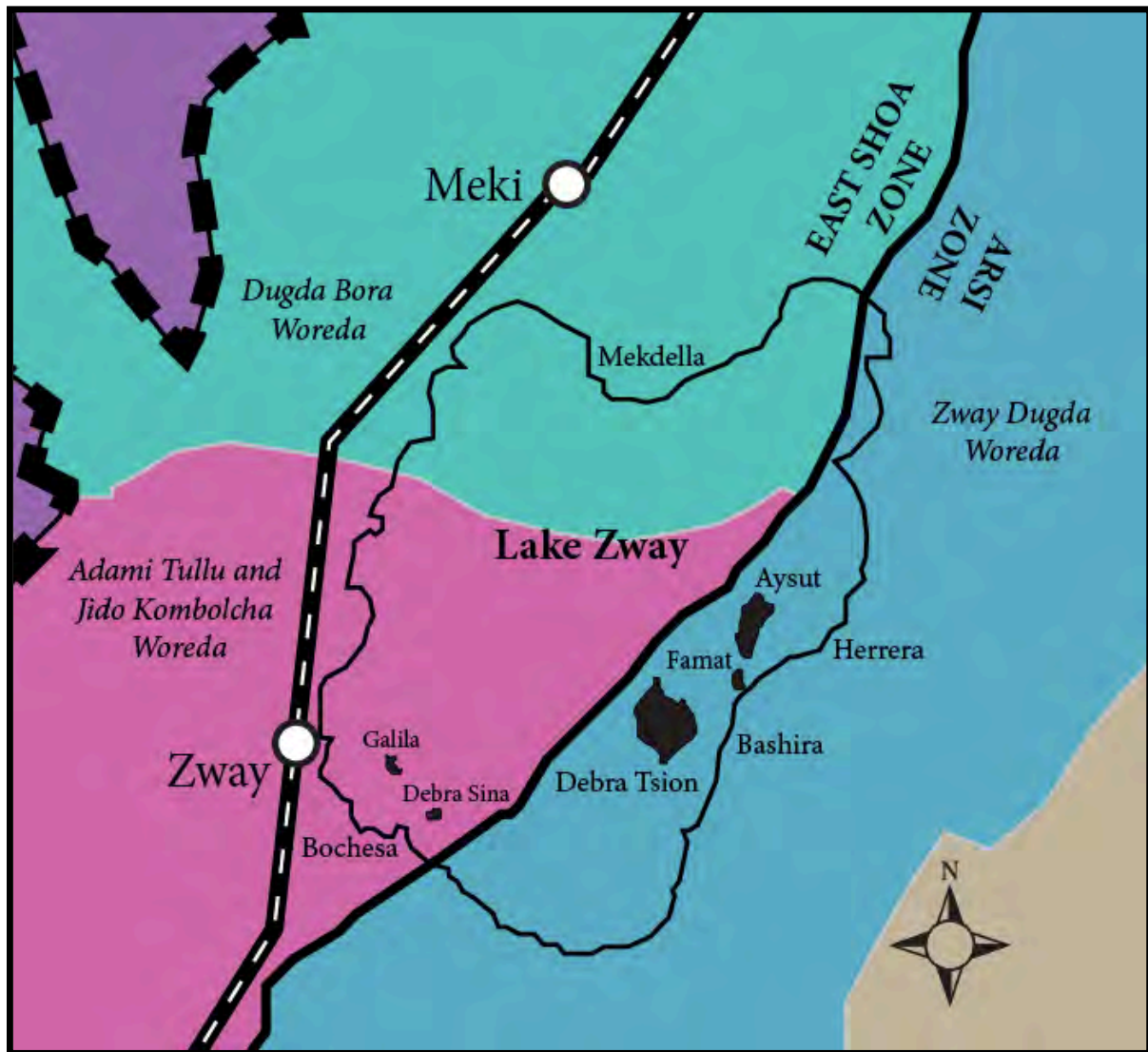
²⁹ The Oromia Regional Constitution was approved by the regional parliament on 21 August 1995 and then amended in October 2001.

A striking feature of the Oromia Constitution is that the zone – the administrative level under the region – was not created for minority groups, as it was, for example, in the Amhara Regional State or the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State (Van der Beken 2007:122). Furthermore, the *Caffee Oromia* (regional parliament) has no guarantee of representation for minority groups and only elects Oromo's to the House of Federation.

Previously, all five islands in Lake Zway were under one *kebele* in the Arsi zone, but this changed after the elections in 1995 when Aysut merged with Herrera and Famat and Debra Tsion merged with Bashira in the Arsi zone. Galila and Debra Sina were also merged with Bochesa and incorporated into the East Shoa zone. The *kebeles* they merged with are predominantly Oromo. According to some, this was done as a way of preventing land theft, because if you live in one *woreda* and own land in another, it can be confiscated by the government, and many Zay living on Aysut, Famat, and Debra Tsion own land in Herrera and Bashira owed to the scarcity of land on the islands. I was told that there is however, a Constitutional basis to the Zay claim for a *kebele*, and that in the Constitution it states that land separated by water should be in another *kebele*. With the current configuration an Oromo is always the chairman of the *kebele* and a Zay is always the vice-chairman.

As we can see from Figure 23, Lake Zway is divided between three *woredas*, Dugda Bora to the north, Adami Tullu and Jido Kombolcha to the south-west, and Zway Dugda to the east. Moreover, it is divided into two different zones, the Arsi zone to the east, and the East Shoa zone to the west. This creates difficulties for the Zay when it comes to elections, as the Zay have sizable populations in Herrera, Bashira, Aysut, Debra Tsion, Bochesa, Zway, Mekdella, and Meki. With the Zay population already very small – estimated between twenty and twenty-five thousand – having the population split between these two zones and three *woredas*, has proved difficult for the Zay to gain a majority in any of the areas. The small population of the Zay is no match for the nineteen million Oromo in the region.

Figure 23 – Map showing zones and woredas around Lake Zway



During this research I attempted to speak with government officials regarding Zay political aspirations, rights, and especially regarding representation and self-administration. I first traveled to Adama in an attempt to get information from the zonal administration office. I asked about a Zay “special woreda” and was completely misunderstood and was told that yes, indeed the *woreda* there was “special” as it has an interesting history, beautiful landscapes, and nice tourist destinations. After making myself more clear and stating that I was interested in a *liyyu woreda* and not just a “special” *woreda* I was told that I could not be helped and would need to travel to Assela and speak to the Arsi Zone office there, as it administered one of the main Zay *woredas*. At the Arsi zone administration in Assela I enquired for information regarding the possibility of a *liyyu woreda* for the Zay and if anything was being done about it. I was first told that the three major islands (Debra Tsion,

Famat, and Aysut) were not even in Arsi zone and I would need to go to another town. I pressed that they were in fact in Arsi zone and that there were also sizable Zay populations in Herrera, Bashira, and even Assela. I was told to return the next morning as he had to speak with a political consultant (assumably the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO)) and he would contact a "Zay representative."

I returned the next day and was greeted by the zone administer from the day before. He first told us about *liyyu woredas* and how they function and the criteria for having one. We were told they are for ethnic groups that have their own language, culture, and identity and are administered by their own representatives with a budget coming from the regional state. There are currently no *liyyu woredas* in the Oromia Regional State despite having sizable minorities of groups such as the Gurage and the Amhara. We were also told that that the Zay had not asked for a *liyyu woreda*. We were also again told that the three islands belonged to the East Shoa Zone, and not the Arsi Zone. Furthermore, we were given the name of the "Zay representative" who was working in the OPDO offices just down the street. Upon leaving his office we were offered some maps of the zones in the Oromia Regional State by a young man working there. Lo and behold as I flipped to a map of the Arsi zone I could clearly see the islands of Debra Tsion and Aysut belonging to the Arsi Zone (presumably Famat was left out of the map due to its small size and population).

So we went down the street to the OPDO offices to speak to this "Zay representative," who he claimed to have been born on Debra Tsion. We asked him about the Zay, a *liyyu woreda*, and political representation and we were told again that the Zay had never asked for a *liyyu woreda* or representation. We then asked hypothetically *if* the Zay asked for a *liyyu woreda* would they be granted one? He reluctantly answered, saying probably not, due to a number of reasons. He first stated that the number of Zay living on the islands is quite small and that the Zay have been mixed with different groups like the Oromo, Gurage, etc. We were told that the Zay *need* to live with the Oromo (whether this was an observation or a prescription I am not sure) and that they currently use Oromo and Amharic in school; true, but the language of school instruction is not a choice and is forced on the Zay by the Oromia Regional State, and many Zay I spoke to expressed desires to learn or have their children learn in Zay along with Oromo and Amharic. We were also told that the Zay are very scattered and this is another factor that would influence them being granted a *liyyu woreda*.

These reasons he stated were why the Zay had not yet asked for a *liyyu woreda* or political representation.

In fact the Zay have asked for representation at all levels on a number of occasions. They have asked in 1987, 1998, 2001, 2002, and again in 2004. Applications were submitted to the House of Federation and responses (neither affirmative nor negative) were given saying that they wanted to do a study of the area to determine whether or not representation or a *liyyu woreda* could be granted to the Zay. The House of Federation even sent a letter to the Oromia Regional State telling them to help the Zay with these issues, however no such help was given (see Appendix III).

6.3 A HISTORY OF CONFLICT AND DEALING WITH “OROMOIZATION”

During the late 16th century the Oromo swept up from southwestern Ethiopia and the Zay were subsequently engulfed in a “sea of Oromo” – predominantly Muslim or pagan. Through a series of conflicts the Zay were eventually pushed onto the islands. They were allowed peacefully on the mainland only at certain times to go to the market. This continued until emperor Menilek II came and ‘liberated’ the Zay and gave them land in Herrera and Bochesa (cf. Gabra Sëlläse 1930b:335-338). The action taken by Menilek seems to have been an attempt to help the Zay regain some of their ancestral lands, which – before the arrival of the Oromo – stretched from the Awash to Assela and from Alem Tena to Sheshamene.

The Zay seem to have tried to avoid conflict when they could. They were a very small group when compared to the vast numbers of the surrounding Oromo. Despite this, the Zay did occasionally have major conflicts with the Oromo.³⁰ The causes for conflict can be divided into three categories: land conflict (most notable conflicts with deaths in Herrera and Bochesa), conflict over access to drinking water for cattle (as occurred in Zway), and because of the claimed Oromo right of *mirga* – the killing or capture of a man or dangerous beast such as a lion, elephant, buffalo, rhinoceros or even another person (cf. Taddesse Berisso 2009). The majority of these conflicts stemmed from disputes over land. This land was bestowed upon the Zay after Menilek II came to the area and liberated the Zay from the hostile Oromo, so that once again, the Zay could expand onto the mainland shores of Lake Zway to farm and keep some cattle. The shore areas around the lake are important for the Zay

³⁰ For detailed descriptions of these conflicts see: Tuma Nadamo, 'A History of the Zay in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries', *Unpublished B.A. Thesis* (Addis Ababa University, Department of History, 1982).

in maintaining contact and transportation between the mainland and island Zay. Recently, the Oromia Regional State has began charging visitors (albeit mostly foreigners) who wish to walk down the two hundred meter jetty in Zway town, which happens to also be where the boats to and from the islands are located.

Despite these three examples of conflict between the Zay and the Oromo, they currently live in relative peace. Zway has grown into a large market town along the main highway and is inhabited by people from many different ethnic groups. Herrera and Bochesa are both heavily mixed with Zay and Oromo, and the two have lived side by side for some time now. In some areas, Zay have adopted Oromo as their main language and marriages between the two groups are not uncommon. The Zay are known to have given safe haven to many Oromo who fled to the islands during the occupation of Ethiopia by fascist Italy and when, during the 1970s, a civil war almost broke out in the area.

With the Oromo dominating the Oromia Regional State, we can see various aspects of what we can term “Oromoization.” Whether this is occurring intentionally or not could both be argued. We can see that in the names this process is taking place. If we take Abora, the *woreda* administration center, the name has been changed from Abora to Ogolcho, as a means to make the Oromo claim on the area stronger. The same has occurred for the town of Zway, as the official name is now Battu. Despite the official name change, most of their towns are still known by their original names. We can see historical moments where the Oromo tried to incorporate the Zay into the *Gadaa* system (Oromo traditional governance structure) as an Oromo *gosa*. I was told that just before the arrival of Menilek in the area the Zay were contemplating integrating themselves with the Oromo. The reason for this was that the Zay wanted to be able to spread to the lakeshores and mainland to be able to farm more land and to stop further conflicts. Inter-ethnic marriages were proposed between the Zay and the Oromo; however, due to differences in religion the Zay could not accept this. Shortly thereafter Menilek came to the area and pacified relations between the two groups.

When dealing with education, the two largest islands – Aysut and Debra Tsion – have schools. With the Oromia Regional State controlling education policy for the schools, the region assigns teachers to the schools. These teachers are almost always Oromo and do not speak *Zayña* (the Zay language). They also teach only in Oromo. This creates difficulties for the children as in the home they speak *Zayña* and in school they must switch to Oromo. The

Zay community has petitioned the State government asking for permission to the students to learn in both *Zayña* and Afaan Oromo. A priest tells us:

«Because we are in the Oromo region, we learn in Oromo, to learn in our language we have to prepare books and to do that we don't have the power. Many Zay were not literate at that time so they use Oromo now. The Arsi government sends us Oromo teachers. The Zay people [tried to] participate at the federal level, the ZPDO. Now they are trying to be involved in the minority level. If this happens we will be able to learn in Zay and print books in Zay.» [Informant #6 2011]

The change in language seems to be happening mostly in the village of Bochesa. Here Oromo is replacing *Zayña* as both a mother tongue as well as a home language. This can be attributed to the regular contact with the Oromo, the education system, and new marriages between Zay and Orthodox Christian Oromo's that are occurring, especially in Bochesa.

When it comes to employment, we can see changes in the relations between the Zay and the Oromo, as many jobs in the region are with the government. One Zay commented about this change:

«Our students, when there is a vacancy, the Zay are equal with the Oromo; they are not denied jobs because they are Zay. But there was, maybe fifteen years ago, they asked your name and saw that you were not Oromo and they gave you a funny look, now that has stopped. Many [Zay] names now sound Oromo, you can see the domination.» [Informant #11 2011]

Oromo domination of the Zay is a common theme we have seen here. Whether it is a purposeful domination or the result of specific policies aimed at promoting the Oromo remains to be seen. Due to these policies there is a degree of Oromoization that is taking place. Despite these detrimental policies, the Zay are attempting to preserve their identity, culture, and language. They first attempted to use political means, and when this did not succeed they changed to a type of self-help and self-promotion organization.

6.4 ZAY POLITICAL TRADITIONS

When we speak about Zay political traditions it is important to know what we are referring to. Here, Zay political traditions refer to the ways in which the Zay have ruled themselves, both independently and co-dependently of the state. Since the Zay were “rediscovered” by the Ethiopian State under Menilek II, they have gone through three different types of political systems. Before the arrival of Atque Selassie, the Zay are said to have been ruled by a council of *bekur* (elders). After Atque Selassie, the Zay were ruled by the *balabbat* system. We have a story as to how Atque Selassie became the leader of the Zay:

«The *balabbat* system began with Atque Selassie. When he arrived there were already people on the islands. Before he arrived the people were ruled by the elders who were said to be the descendants of the Levite priests exiled from Aksum during the time of Yodit. Then the

people who lived there and Atque Selassie came together to discuss how the island should be governed. Some said they needed to be elders, others said by experience. Atque Selassie made a bet that if his one grain of millet weighed more than their ear of millet then he would rule. The one grain weighed more so Atque Selassie took the leadership of that area with God's help.

With this Atque Selassie took over the leadership of all five islands. He appointed five men to rule each of the islands. The people called Atque Selassie *goyto* (a Tigrigna word meaning "master," this title is sometimes also given to respected *gosa* leaders in accordance to their position in the community) meaning you are more superior to me. Each of the five rulers appointed twenty-five people under them to help rule. They helped make decisions about the islands, people, and problems. At that time the oldest island was Famat and all the men would meet there to make decisions.

At that time if anyone committed a crime they met on Famat to discuss the crime. If it was a bad crime, murder, theft, or fighting, they first call the accused and advise them that they should change their ways. If the person does not change they would decide to kill them. To kill them they would tie a large stone to them and throw them in the lake. At that time this is how people were punished.» [Informant #5 2011]

The Zay were ruled by *Fit Dagna* (a code of law) passed by a *Zay Shengo* (a meeting of Zay) held on Famat by the *Bekur* (elders) elected from different *gosas*. The number of representatives varied according to the population of ones extended *gosa* group. *Fit Dagna* deals with: crimes (the killing of people, burning of houses, theft, assault, etc.), land administration, weddings and engagements (known as *Fija*), funeral ceremonies, inheritance, attacks on farms (if grazed by another persons cattle, goats, sheep, etc.), and abusing, blaming, and insulting individuals. They implemented the *Fit Dagna* passed by the *Zay Shengo*, a much smaller version of a modern parliament.

When Atque Selassie took power he exercised this power with his advisors and *Dagna* appointed by him. The elected elders brought cases to him if they could not be solved by themselves. As a result, the people's representatives solved almost every case at the lowest level. This was true until Menilek II. During this time the *balabbat* feudal system was introduced and the electoral system of the Zay was weakened and finally abolished during Haile Selassie's reign. Though very weak, this system still exists as a form of self-governance among the Zay.

This *balabbat* system also has a conflict resolution mechanism known as *Bekur*. It is quite similar to the Oromo conflict resolution known as *Jarsa Biyaa*:

«When someone had a fight with another, the people called for a judgment place and came together there. Then, after they elect a judge to make a resolution of the conflict, usually 3-5 elders. After the elders are elected they go to the quarreling parties individually. Then they make a resolution to the conflict. If the person who committed the crime, when one person insults another, the payment for this is clothes. If one person assaults another person, the elders will decide to resolve the conflict they have to kill a sheep for the person. After this the conflict is supposed to be solved. Both parties buy *tella* for the *Bekur* as thanks for restoring peace. It is still used today.

When they elect the Bekur, they don't have to be older, but must have good qualities such as a good speaker, fair, just, etc. An example of a case is two men insulted each other and we told them this was not good. When someone hit someone with a stick we resolved the people who spilt blood. A person who fights by spear, etc. When they want to resolve a conflict, some want to call the police then the case will be judged in court. The Zay have always used Bekur, from Atque Selassie to now.» [Informant #3 2011]

Under this system, someone could also be tied to a rock for a few days if they were too drunk, or were being punished for a crime under *Bekur*. The person to be punished had one leg inserted through a hole in the rock and the other leg went around the rock. The ankles were then tied together so the person could not escape.

During Menilek's southern campaign he passed by Lake Zway, and as we have seen in the previous chapters, after Alibu (then *balabbat* of the Zay) convinced him of his royal ancestry, was reconfirmed as leader and given the title of *Balambaras*. A member of the former ruling dynasty gives us a story of this event:

«Menilek was moving to subdue the Arsi Oromo. He went to Bochesa and a place called Wamicha near the shore. Then he saw Bochesa, from there he only saw Galila and Debra Sina, he couldn't see Aysut or Debra Tsion. The elders with him told him that there were other islands. After this he walked around the lake to Herrera. After he arrived in Herrera he discussed with his people about the islands and the island people. Menilek called Alibu, then *balabbat*, and discussed with him. Menilek and Alibu discussed problems facing the Zay such as they had little land to plough and they had a conflict with the Oromo, who would not let the Zay to the market. Menilek found a resolution between the Zay and the Oromo. They let them go in peace to the market area. The Oromo gave the Zay land to plough on the mainland (at the behest of Menilek). When Menilek left the area he [reconfirmed] Alibu [as] *balabbat*. The Zay gave Menilek dried fish as tribute as well as money and bolukos (large cotton cloths). At that time the journey to Addis Ababa was by foot.

This functioned the same as with Atque Selassie. The *balabbat* appointed one person on each island to lead. An amakari, or arbitrator, was also appointed and this passed from father to son. On each island if a person committed a crime they were put in iron cuffs. If it was a bad crime their hands and legs were tied usually for one to three days. During this time people were not thrown into the lake anymore. During that time Menilek helped Zay people, giving each one a cow.

Alibu controlled from Sheshamene in the south, Gurage Sodo to the, Alem Tena in the north, and Golga (Assela) to the east. He controlled all this area; it was given to him by Menilek. Alibu had many slaves from Sheshamene. At that time some people didn't accept Alibu's rule, if this happened he would have them tied for a few days, after this they usually accepted his rule. He had people living in the area under his control to report back to him.

After this his son, Machigne, succeeded Alibu. Machigne ruled during Haile Selassie/Iyasus or Empress Zewditu. At this time Machigne and Haile Selassie had a relationship. When Machigne became elder he passed his power to Balambaras Biru. He has representatives on each island called Shanacha then Chickasha. Biru sent Chickasha as a messenger, he also gave them instructions. Biru and Haile Selassie were in contact by letters, they only met one time.»

[Informant #5 2011]

The area given to Alibu to rule is said to be the traditional settlement area of *Ager* – the first three migrations – and seems to reaffirm this area as being historically Zay before the invasion of the Imam and the arrival of the Oromo. Still today we can find small pockets of Zay (known locally as Laki), around Sheshamene and lakes Langano and Shala. These Zay are

said to be from the *Ager* migrations and belong to various *gosas* such as Worre, Degoy, Akakle, and Ertube. Despite being given this area to rule, it seemed that the Zay ruled in name only, due to small numbers and a lack of political resources it was simply not feasible to control the vast area. The emperor Haile Selassie also gave land to the Zay in Mekdella and around Meki as part of a *sefera* (resettlement) program (cf. A. Pankhurst 1992).

With the advent of the Derg, the *balabbat* system was dismantled in favor of a policy of creating *kebeles*.³¹ The same informant notes the changes that came with the Derg:

«After this Biru and Duga Wake controlled until 1966 Eth. cal. The Derg regime came and took power. With the Derg each island elected its own leader through the *kebele*. Each island was ruled independently. They elected someone who was talented. They elected a chairman for two years, and if they were good they would be reelected.» [Informant #5 2011]

Figure 24 – Balambaras Biru, the last Zay Balambaras (Photo by Paul B. Henze)



³¹ *Kebeles* were created to administer Urban Dwellers Associations and Rural Dwellers Associations.

At first the government tried to have the Zay merge with the nearby Oromo, especially in Herrera. However, because of protests from the Zay, they were given their own *kebele*. The Zay were also given land by the Derg, and informants note that land was given in Mekdella, Meki, and Herrera. By giving the Zay land in Herrera old tensions again arose and erupted in conflict where one Zay named Hamda Tola was killed.³² Zay men elected from their respective islands ran these *kebeles*. The Zay administered their own *kebeles* until 1995 and the change of the political system. So at the federal level the Zay were “represented” by a member of the Zay community who was chosen solely because he was Zay. However, despite having a community member in the *Shengo*, it seems that nothing could be done to promote the Zay in any way.

When showing a draft of this thesis to a Zay elder I was surprised to learn that I was missing important Zay figures who are seen as being extremely diplomatic and helpful in creating bridges between different ethnic groups in the area. He wrote that:

The Zay history is incomplete without the following leaders and *balabbats* who served as a bridge between other [ethnic groups], the central Ethiopian government, and internally between the Zay *gosas*. They stood with the Zay people and lead them in all events good and bad so that they could stand united to tackle, overcome, and give solutions to problems facing the Zay. These men are: Wodele Huluka (Debra Tsion), Seren Sade (Aysut), Bonso Horo (Aysut), Wake Bedane (Galila, Debra Sina, Bochesa area), Ereano Dembi (Meki, Mekdella, Debra Tsion), Kefani Bira (Were, Embole, Alemtena area), Ayano Tessiso (Were, Senbete Shala), Barago Dube (Weyo, Arsi Negelle), Fikremariam Dembi (Golja, Ketar Gent), Balambaras Duga Wake (Galila, Debra Sina), and Fello Ayano (Gelila, Debra Sina). All of these men are from *Ager*, of these Wodele Huluka, Seren Sade, Bonso Horo, Wake Bedane, and Ereano Dembi are famous in their good deeds to coordinate between the Zay *gosas* and with other [ethnic groups] such as the the Oromo, Gurage, Mareko, Amhara, Silt’e, Alaba etc. No good is remembered from the ruling *Wayzaro* (*balabbat*) *gosa*. They are remembered for their evil deeds and their feudal and serf style of government.

6.5 ATTEMPTS AT POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Under the current political configuration the Zay have attempted to form a political party and participate in elections. Despite the want and need for such political representation, the Zay have been unable to win elections at any level. This can mostly be attributed to the small number and geographic dispersion of Zay. A lack of funding and organization also seem to be problems. Let us now turn to the Zay political party, known as the Zay People’s

³² Informants claim that after the conflict the Zay land in Herrera was returned to the Oromo.

Democratic Organization (ZPDO)³³ and then the Zay Development Association (ZDA), which grew out of the political party. An overview of the ZPDO is given by one of the founding members:

«Our political party was created in 1984 Eth. cal., and since then we are trying to organize ourselves and we did a lot to educate, to raise the political consciousness of the community. To teach them how to live peacefully because of these ethnic diversities, with the surrounding mainland Oromo's, because in the past we have lived in peace as well as in conflict . . . so we are also presenting applications to the government, to the OPDO, and to the Oromia Regional government and at the same time to the federal government, to the House of Federation, so we have struggled at various phases to get some response. We have been involved in elections in the House of People's Representatives in three *woredas*, but we didn't win.» [Informant #12 2011]

In September 1984 Eth. cal. (1991) just after the Mengistu Haile Mariam fled to Zimbabwe, the Zay called a Zay *Shengo* (a meeting for the Zay people) in Zway town. During this meeting the ZPDO elected its first chairman, Ato Irgetekal Haile Selassie Hirpaye (who left shortly thereafter due to personal reasons). After the failed elections, the ZPDO appealed to the federal government. It is said that they appealed stating “we want a representative in the Council of People's Representatives for the minority ethnic group, we were asking for a representative for the Zay people” but the federal government “said to us ‘wait’” (Informant #13 2011). Until this time it is not known what the reason for having them wait is; we can only speculate that there is pressure from the Oromia Regional State to delay their admittance.

The main goals of the ZPDO were to help solve economic problems for the Zay and to help protect the Zay identity – that is, preserve and promote the Zay language and culture. In the political sphere they sought to do this by trying to participate in politics at the *woreda* level. If they won, the ZPDO would have then been able to try and influence policy from within and direct funds and projects that would have benefited the Zay community. Currently the ZPDO is a registered political party; however, it is inactive.

As the Zay have been unsuccessful and disenfranchised in the political arena, they have tried to help themselves outside of the political sphere through the Zay Development Association (ZDA). The ZDA has more or less the same goals as the ZPDO; however, they are

³³ Not to be confused with the “Zeisei People's Democratic Organization”, also abbreviated as ZPDO. The “Zai People's Democratic Organization” was registered 10/18/1996. For a list of all registered political parties in Ethiopia see: Eprdf, 'List of Registered Political Parties by the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia', <www.eprdf.org.et/EPRDFE/document/contending%20parties.pdf>, accessed 4 April 2012, Eprdf, 'Political Parties That Are Actively Participating in the Election', <<http://www.ethemb.se/TEXT%20files/Political%20Parties%20that%20are%20Actively%20Participating%20in%20the.pdf>>, accessed 4 April 2012.

seeking to achieve these goals without government assistance or political representation. Activities of the ZDA include raising funds for projects that benefit the Zay community, mostly on the islands. Past projects include building a clinic on Debra Tsion and a water pump on Aysut. The ZDA also often donates money to the churches on the islands, which is necessary for their upkeep.

The members of the ZDA are mostly middle aged and older men; however, some younger men are also beginning to attend meetings. An interesting aspect of the ZDA is that it is mostly composed of Zay who live in cities, as its core members live in Addis Ababa, Adama, Awassa, Zway, and Meki. These members meet monthly and discuss issues relevant to the Zay community. Dues are collected each month and saved for upcoming projects. A particular meeting I was invited to in Addis Ababa discussed the issue of political representation, ethnic representation, and language protection and promotion. Again, the ZDA is weak due to the lack of donors. In the end the goals are the same as the ZPDO, for “The identity of the Zay people to be accepted, our first aim is this, after that the language, and the culture of the people must be protected. With the ZDA we want to upgrade on all sides, especially economically and after that we want to help our people, this is our great aim” (Informant #13 2011). With protection of the language and culture the main issues along with economic improvements, we can see that the Zay do not have outrageous claims.

As the generation that has led these attempts begins to gentrify, there is a push to get more young people involved in Zay affairs, be they political, developmental, or cultural. A member of the ZDA in Addis Ababa told me of the difficulties faced in trying to organize and how he tries to involve the younger generation:

«Now the youngsters, I support them, for example when they have meetings or other things, I go and give them support and give them advice and like that, for example every month here we have meetings. I am one of the organizers, so now because I am becoming old, they have to catch up, the younger generation, they have to go by themselves, I left them now because every time we are the chief and chairman the young will disappear, so I am going less now, they must catch up. That is why.

One problem for the people is that we are scattered. People are inside, only when you ask, otherwise they are sitting there only in one place, the Oromo people don't like them, so they don't get work or things like that, so because of that, they go to Jimma, and work, another place and work, so we are scattered, but we don't leave that, it comes one day – “I have a dream” he says – it comes one day this thing, so now they only find food, work, to support their family, not politics, first injera.» [Informant #7 2011]

Participation is a major issue for the Zay, but it seems that there are other needs that they would like to fulfill as well. Previously, the political realm was (and is still seen as) a viable

option for the Zay to help preserve and promote their culture, identity, language, and socio-economic well-being.

6.6 RECOGNITION

The idea of being officially recognized by the Ethiopian government is something that is very important to the Zay community. With recognition, the Zay would be able to have a representative in the Council of People's Representatives, be given a *liyyu woreda* so that they could administer themselves, teach their children in *Zayña*, and participate in the Nations Nationalities and Peoples Day celebration. In the past the current regime used notions of nationality from the Derg era to establish whether groups could be considered independent ethnic groups or not (L. Smith 2007). It seems that even this system is breaking down, as on the 2007 census some groups, such as the Zergulla, have disappeared.

The Zay do not appear on any of the censuses carried out in Ethiopia in 1984, 1994, or 2007. It is not clear what the Zay are seen as then, as on the enumerators' manual for both the 1994 and 2007 censuses there is a space to fill in "ethnic group." However, there is no code designated for "Zay." At least linguistically, it seems that the Zay are counted as "Gurage" on the census, but the census does not break the Gurage language family into any of its subgroups. We can see that:

A case of different Ethiopian languages treated as a single language concerns "Gurage." What the census and also much traditional usage terms Gurage is not a single language but at least five languages. Indeed, there are more than 15 identified varieties of speech commonly known as Gurage, many of them mutually intelligible and hence more correctly categorized as dialects. When these dialects are subsumed under the name of a prominent dialect, which is assigned as the language name of the group, Gurage languages are at least five—Soddo (Kestane), Chaha, Inor, Silte, and Zay. Vol. 1 of the census, however, gives numbers only for "Gurage." [Hudson 1999:95]

This shows the erratic actions of the government where at one time it is promoting ethnic diversity and recognition but at the same time lumping different ethnic groups together.

For the Zay, the lack of recognition is always an issue to be discussed among them, especially, as we have seen, for the ZPDO and ZDA. It is not known exactly why the Zay have been denied recognition. According to one Zay, a response from the Oromia Regional State would go something like this: "Okay [the Zay] people, how did they come to the islands? From the north? Then you are Tigrayans." It is a blatant double standard to say the Zay should be with the Tigrayans for a few reasons. The Zay are not all of Tigray descent, as we have seen, the Zay are made up of different waves of peoples that originated in different places in Tigray and Amhara, not the mention the fact that they also intermixed with those

already in the area, namely the Wege and Areñ.³⁴ Moreover, if it is an issue of “who was there first?,” the Zay have a stronger claim to the area than the Oromo, who only came in the 15th century, while the Zay have a claim beginning in the 9th century.

Even if we look at the Constitutional criteria for the definition of an ethnic group, Article 39.5 states that “A Nation, Nationality or People . . . is a group of people who have or share large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory.” Based on this definition, the Zay, without a doubt, are a “Nation, Nationality or People” and should be recognized as such. They are a group of people who call themselves Zay, they share both common cultures and customs, share a common language (*Zayña*), are predominantly Orthodox Christians, and inhabit an identifiable territory – the islands and shores around Lake Zway.

So yet again we can see domination from the State insofar as they refuse to recognize the Zay as a viable ethnic group. Politically, linguistically, numerically, and economically, the Oromo are able to dominate the Zay in all arenas. It is true that the Zay are small in number, but this has not stopped other groups from being recognized.

6.7 INTERNAL SKIRMISHES

Internally, there are some disagreements as to the direction the ZPDO and the ZDA should go, and what their ultimate goals should be. In the beginning it was thought that the Zay people were not organized enough to be able to be a legitimate political party. The lack of organization has also been said to be a reason why the Zay should have waited before submitting an application to the House of Federation. Some of these skirmishes deal with the *Wayzaro gosa*.

An informant has noted that despite the Zay want and need for political representation, the elites that currently have power within the community are predominantly from *Wayzaro*. Most of the Zay who ran in the elections and who currently hold high posts within the ZPDO and ZDA are also from *Wayzaro*. With their hold on power, some see this as them trying to restore the old order, with *Wayzaro* as the ruling elite. Coincidentally sitting next to a Zay man on a bus trip he remarked, “*Wayzaro* are like foreigners, but they are still

³⁴ The Wege and the Areñ are groups that are said to have been living on the islands and around Lake Zway before any northern migrations.

trying to rule us.” We can see that old tensions and rivalries still exist within the Zay community and that they still debate when *Wayzaro* came to the islands. As seen by the remark, calling them foreigners equates them with the last wave of migration to the area.

Despite these skirmishes, the leading members of the Zay community, whether from *Wayzaro* or not, are still very well respected within the community, as they often are present at religious festivals and other events with many Zay present. They do illustrate, however, that despite putting up a relatively unified outward front, the Zay community does have internal divisions.

6.8 LANGUAGE USE AND THE QUEST TO DEVELOP ZAY

As we have seen, language is one of the criteria that define an ethnic group in Ethiopia. For the Zay, it is Zay (locally known as “*ya’-zāy ’af*” or “*Zayña*”) that they are trying to promote and protect. *Zayña* is a very important part of Zay identity that they wish to protect. The two major works on *Zayña* are by Leslau (1999) and Meyer (2005). These studies found that Zay is closely related to other “Gurage” languages such as Silt’e. Prior to this, Bender (1971) noted that Zay has a 61% lexical similarity with Harari and a 70% similarity with Silt’e. Rubin (2012) states that:

‘Gurage languages’ is a cover term for more than a dozen Ethiopian Semitic languages, though this designation is an ethnic-social one, rather than a strictly linguistic one. That is to say, the Gurage languages do not form a real linguistic unit in genetic terms. According to the classification of Hetzron (Robert Hetzron, *Ethiopian Semitic: Studies in Classification* [Manchester 1972]), the East Gurage languages, which include Zay, Wolane, and Səlt’i, share a linguistic ancestor more closely related to Harari, Amharic, and Argobba, than to the other so-called Gurage languages. [Rubin 2012:186-187]

Journalists to the islands have even confused *Zayña* with Tigrigna (cf. Hancock 1992). Other works related to the language are the various language reports that have been published (Gardner and Siebert 2001; Jordan et al. 2011; Wedekind and Wedekind 2002). However, these reports have very low sample sizes. The first report in 2001 had only 14 respondents and the larger report from 2011 had a similarly low number.

During my research I administered 163 questionnaires in 7 locations: two towns (Zway and Meki), two villages (Herrera and Bochesa), two islands (Aysut and Debra Tsion), and Addis Ababa. Here I have broken down the data by location so that we may compare language use patterns. The use of *Zayña* is important for members of the Zay community. Exact figures on the number of *Zayña* speakers are difficult to come by, and estimates vary widely from only a few hundred (Endeshaw Woldemariam 2005) to fifteen thousand speakers

(Rubin 2012:187). On the islands, the primary mode of communication is in *Zayña*. Below we have the figures on the respondents' mother tongue.

From this we can see that 135 (82.8%) of the respondents indicated Zay as their mother tongue. Oromo was the second most indicated with 25 (15.3%) of the respondents. Of those indicating Oromo as their mother tongue, 84% of that group was surveyed in Bochesa.

Table 5 – Mother Tongue by Location

			Mother Tongue			Total
			Zay	Oromo	Amharic	
Location	Zway	Count (% of Total)	24 (14.7%)	1 (.6%)	0 (0.0%)	25 (15.3%)
	Meki	Count (% of Total)	20 (12.3%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (1.8%)	23 (14.1%)
	Aysut	Count (% of Total)	23(14.1%)	2 (1.2%)	0 (0.0%)	25 (15.3%)
	Debra Tsion	Count (% of Total)	26 (16.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	26 (16.0%)
	Herrera	Count (% of Total)	25 (15.3%)	1 (.6%)	0 (0.0%)	26 (16.0%)
	Bochesa	Count (% of Total)	5 (3.1%)	21 (12.9%)	0 (0.0%)	26 (16.0%)
	Addis Ababa	Count (% of Total)	12 (7.4%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	12 (7.4%)
Total		Count (% of Total)	135 (82.8%)	25 (15.3%)	3 (1.8%)	163 (100.0%)

When it comes to language use in the home we can see that Zay again is the most prevalent with 98 (60.1%) indicating Zay was the language used in the home and 22 (13.5%) indicated a mixture of Zay and Amharic. Oromo was indicated to be used by 17 (10.4%) of the respondents while a mixture of Zay and Oromo was indicated by 12 (7.4%) of the respondents. A mixture of all Zay, Amharic, and Oromo was reported by 3 (1.8%) people. From this we can see that Zay is used by itself or in conjunction with Amharic or Oromo 82.8% of the time among these respondents. These results are similar to those reported by Jordan et al. (2011)

Table 6 – Home Language by Location

			Home Language								Total
			Zay	Oromo	Amharic	Amharic /Gurage	Zay /Amharic	Zay /Amharic /Oromo	Oromo /Amharic	Zay /Oromo	
Location	Zway	Count	17	0	1	0	6	0	0	1	25
		% of Total	10.4%	0.0%	.6%	0.0%	3.7%	0.0%	0.0%	.6%	15.3%
	Meki	Count	11	0	3	1	8	0	0	0	23
		% of Total	6.7%	0.0%	1.8%	.6%	4.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	14.1%
	Aysut	Count	24	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	25
		% of Total	14.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	.6%	0.0%	0.0%	15.3%
	Debra Tsion	Count	22	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	26
		% of Total	13.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	16.0%
	Herrera	Count	23	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	26
		% of Total	14.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	.6%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	16.0%
	Bochesa	Count	0	17	0	0	0	0	2	7	26
		% of Total	0.0%	10.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	4.3%	16.0%
	Addis Ababa	Count	1	0	4	0	5	2	0	0	12
		% of Total	.6%	0.0%	2.5%	0.0%	3.1%	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	7.4%
Total		Count	98	17	8	1	22	3	2	12	163
		% of Total	60.1%	10.4%	4.9%	.6%	13.5%	1.8%	1.2%	7.4%	100.0%

Zayña is still important for the community, and this is supported by the wish to develop the language. Currently there are individual efforts to create a standardized form of *Zayña*, which would be written in *fidel*, the Amharic script.

Despite not living on the islands, many Zay who have moved to the larger cities also still speak *Zayña*. During various festivals and celebrations on the island that brought Zay family members back to the islands I noted that most could still speak in *Zayña* with their family members who lived on the islands. There were few exceptions (mostly young children) who did not know *Zayña* or who had difficulties communicating in *Zayña*.

There is a desire among many Zay that their children have the opportunity to learn in Zay along with Oromo and Amharic, as the latter two languages are used when communicating with the Oromo or in the larger towns such as Zway and Meki. Moreover, most Zay already speak these three languages, although Zay seems to be in decline, especially among the younger generation and in Bochesa, where “Oromoization” is most visible.

6.9 CONCLUSION

Domination, recognition, participation, and promotion. These are four interrelated concepts that characterize Zay life and have been discussed in this chapter. They can be found in all of the previous sections and they will be synthesized here. The goal of this chapter has been to stress a few key ideas. First, that the current political configuration is the outcome of years of ethnic suppression and ranking. Second, that the Zay have a long history of self-governance and administration, and it was only with the advent of the new administration that they have been made subject to the Oromo. Lastly, Zay cultural promotion and economic advancement are the main political goals of the Zay.

Domination is seen in four main areas. Ethnic domination is not a new reality in Ethiopia; in the past it was mostly Amhara domination of other groups. Ethnic domination has been intertwined with political domination, as it was the ethnic elites who captured political power. Currently this domination characterizes both the federal and regional governments. The TPLF/EPRDF dominates the federal government, while the Oromia Regional State is dominated by the Oromo, and the Regional State dominates the Zay, both linguistically and politically. Moreover, the Zay political and development organizations are dominated by the *Wayzaro gosa*. The recognition of all ethnic groups in Ethiopia has been a policy of the federal government. Owing to the historical ethnic grievances in Ethiopia many groups have been recognized. Despite this, we have seen the failure of recognition when it comes to the Zay from both the federal and regional governments. Moreover, recognition is a key element of both the ZPDO and ZDA. Participation has been promoted by the federal government and sought out by the Zay. The federal government tried to enable all ethnic groups to participate politically. Indeed it has worked to an extent, but it has also left many groups disenfranchised. The Zay have sought to gain recognition through participation, but as we have seen, this was unsuccessful. The framework is in place, however, the functioning is something that needs to be realized. Finally, the promotion, of ethnic groups by the federal government, and self-promotion by the Zay sheds light on the continuing ethnic tensions. The federal government has only allocated twenty seats in the parliament for minority ethnic groups. At the regional level all the seats are held by the Oromo. Therefore the Zay have been forced to promote their ethnic group themselves. Despite the want and need for this promotion – linguistically, culturally, and politically – the Zay have found it difficult to achieve any of these goals. The four concepts of domination, recognition, participation, and

promotion of ethnic groups, especially the Zay have helped us to better understand the political situation in Ethiopia and of the Zay.

The government's political engineering has the potential to benefit the Zay and other such minority groups. However, due to reservations on the federal government side, such a benefit has not yet reached the Zay. When it comes to the Oromia Regional State, we have seen a few reasons for the denial of minority status and rights to the Zay. Most reasons are based on a reading of the Constitution that leads one to believe that the Oromia Regional State is only there to benefit the Oromo people, not any minority groups living in the region.

We have also seen Zay political traditions, from the time of Atque Selassie to the present. More importantly, we have seen that the Zay have realized that both the federal and regional governments have failed them and the Zay have thus turned inward. By trying to help themselves, with little outside assistance, the Zay also seek to reinforce their identity. By creating the Zay Development Association, the Zay seek to promote their language, culture, economic welfare, and identity. This self-reliance is also a way of reinforcing Zay identity. Meetings create even more opportunities for the Zay to meet and converse with one another about problems and challenges facing the community. It will be interesting to see what the future holds for Zay ethnic recognition and political participation.

In this thesis we have seen several notions worth noting. First we have seen Zay oral traditions and how they play out in their current identification processes. They are also inherent in certain aspects of Zay culture. Oral traditions and the memories they conjur up are also inherent in the current political setting of the Zay.

When it comes to issues dealing with identity we have seen how there are certain moments when "Zayness" may become heightened or more sensitive. This is owed to the fact that participating in Zay everyday life will inevitably create a sense of groupness among the participants and this becomes even more sensitized when one is in the presense of others (during such times as religious festivals or weddings where members of other ethnic groups are present).

Being Zay is not just one thing or moment. It is also the constant flux between specific moments of "Zayness" coupled with the processes and unnoticed psychological occurrences that resonates with the Zay. During these fluxes ideas and premonitions are created and distorted as to what the previous moment of "Zayness" meant and how the next moment should properly play out. These moments can never be the same though, and because of this,

“Zayness” is constantly being reinvented within and opposed to ones gender, *gosa*, occupation, location, socio-economic status, political opportunities and other groups and people.

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Appendix I – Tables from Zerihun 2009

Table 7 – Previous Sentiments about the Zay and Fishing

Derogatory Expression	Literal Meaning	Interpretation
Laqqi	“The rowers”	Implies the islander’s use of the rower to sail on the water. The Zay are still known by this name among their Oromo neighbors. Although their proper name is Zay, there are still even some Zay who use this name to refer to themselves.
Ramo bishani	“The water worm”	The terms are Oromic; ramo (worm), bishani (water). Fish was regarded as a kind of worm living in the water. Worms are repulsive generally to the sight let alone to eat.
Til Belitawoch	“Those who eat worm”	Amharic expression, translated by informants from its Oromic expression. The term suggests eating fish is like eating worms.
Inazeh gimatamoch	“These stinkers”	Amharic expression. Fishers were despised for their peculiar scent of fish following them wherever they went. Stinkers are not welcome
Yenesu fares yebela naw	“Yebela is their horse”	Yebela is Zay traditional boat. The Oromo regarded the Zay as those saddling the boat, who do not know anything about horse. Horse riders are commonly respected.

Table 8 – Change in feelings towards Fishing

Local Expression	Literal Rendering	Interpretation
Inde bunna yishetaal	“It is now sold as coffee”	Coffee is the pearl of Ethiopia. Fish is now gaining the highly esteemed status of coffee as the number one cash crop.
Assa yeyazee beiju worq indeyazee yiqoteral	“He who holds fish is like one who holds gold”	Gold is a highly esteemed object. A minuscule of gold will accrue a good income. Similarly, fish is now glittering as gold and accruing good cash to the actors.
Ahuun assa bekisachew yizaw yizorallu	“They now go around carrying fish in their pockets”	The former detesters of fish, who even did not dare to touch it with their hands, are now “carrying it in their pockets”, as one would carry a precious object with care.
Beye tigatigu beye shaybetu yishetal	“Fish is being sold at every corner at every small tea room”	The widespread demand and acceptance of fish as a valued edible item.
Tigemmalachu yilu yeneberu ahun yegema assa yimegebaluu	“Those who despised us saying, ‘You stinkers’, are now themselves eating stinking fish”	This suggests the possible practice of scrupulous fish vendors who sell spoiled fish to meet the widespread demand. Getting fresh fish is very difficult. People then opt for eating mildly spoiled fish

Appendix II – Tabulation of Zay Identity

			Prefers Zay Spouse		Total
			Yes	No	
Location	Zway	Count	8	5	13
		% within Location	61.5%	38.5%	100.0%
		% within Prefers Zay Spouse	24.2%	45.5%	29.5%
		% of Total	18.2%	11.4%	29.5%
	Meki	Count	4	3	7
		% within Location	57.1%	42.9%	100.0%
		% within Prefers Zay Spouse	12.1%	27.3%	15.9%
		% of Total	9.1%	6.8%	15.9%
	Aysut	Count	4	0	4
		% within Location	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Prefers Zay Spouse	12.1%	0.0%	9.1%
		% of Total	9.1%	0.0%	9.1%
	Debra Tsion	Count	2	0	2
		% within Location	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Prefers Zay Spouse	6.1%	0.0%	4.5%
		% of Total	4.5%	0.0%	4.5%
	Herrera	Count	6	0	6
		% within Location	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Prefers Zay Spouse	18.2%	0.0%	13.6%
		% of Total	13.6%	0.0%	13.6%
	Bochesa	Count	4	2	6
		% within Location	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
		% within Prefers Zay Spouse	12.1%	18.2%	13.6%
		% of Total	9.1%	4.5%	13.6%
	Addis Ababa	Count	5	1	6
		% within Location	83.3%	16.7%	100.0%
		% within Prefers Zay Spouse	15.2%	9.1%	13.6%
		% of Total	11.4%	2.3%	13.6%
Total		Count	33	11	44
		% within Location	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
		% within Prefers Zay Spouse	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%

			Ethnicity of Spouse							Total
			Zay	Oromo	Amhara	Amhara /Gurage	Gurage	Hadiya	Zay /Oromo	
Location	Zway	Count	8	0	0	1	0	0	0	9
		% within Location	88.9%	0.0%	0.0%	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within SpouseEth	8.4%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	7.8%
		% of Total	7.0%	0.0%	0.0%	.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	7.8%
	Meki	Count	13	0	1	0	2	0	0	16
		% within Location	81.3%	0.0%	6.3%	0.0%	12.5%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within SpouseEth	13.7%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	13.9%
		% of Total	11.3%	0.0%	.9%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	13.9%
	Aysut	Count	19	2	0	0	0	0	0	21
		% within Location	90.5%	9.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within SpouseEth	20.0%	18.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	18.3%
		% of Total	16.5%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	18.3%
	Debra Tsion	Count	23	1	0	0	0	0	0	24
		% within Location	95.8%	4.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within SpouseEth	24.2%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	20.9%
		% of Total	20.0%	.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	20.9%
	Herrera	Count	13	5	0	0	0	1	1	20
		% within Location	65.0%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.0%	5.0%	100.0%
		% within SpouseEth	13.7%	45.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	50.0%	17.4%
		% of Total	11.3%	4.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	.9%	.9%	17.4%
	Bochesa	Count	14	3	1	0	0	0	1	19
		% within Location	73.7%	15.8%	5.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.3%	100.0%
		% within SpouseEth	14.7%	27.3%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	16.5%
		% of Total	12.2%	2.6%	.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	.9%	16.5%
	Addis Ababa	Count	5	0	1	0	0	0	0	6
		% within Location	83.3%	0.0%	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Spouse Et	5.3%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.2%
		% of Total	4.3%	0.0%	.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.2%
Total		Count	95	11	3	1	2	1	2	115
		% within Location	82.6%	9.6%	2.6%	.9%	1.7%	.9%	1.7%	100.0%
		% within SpouseEth	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	82.6%	9.6%	2.6%	.9%	1.7%	.9%	1.7%	100.0%

			Home Language								Total
			Zay	Oromo	Amharic	Amharic /Gurage	Zay /Amharic	Zay /Amharic /Oromo	Oromo /Amharic	Zay /Oromo	
Location	Zway	Count	17	0	1	0	6	0	0	1	25
		% within Location	68.0%	0.0%	4.0%	0.0%	24.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.0%	100.0%
		% within HomeLan	17.3%	0.0%	12.5%	0.0%	27.3%	0.0%	0.0%	8.3%	15.3%
		% of Total	10.4%	0.0%	.6%	0.0%	3.7%	0.0%	0.0%	.6%	15.3%
	Meki	Count	11	0	3	1	8	0	0	0	23
		% within Location	47.8%	0.0%	13.0%	4.3%	34.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within HomeLan	11.2%	0.0%	37.5%	100.0%	36.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	14.1%
		% of Total	6.7%	0.0%	1.8%	.6%	4.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	14.1%
	Aysut	Count	24	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	25
		% within Location	96.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within HomeLan	24.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	15.3%
		% of Total	14.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	.6%	0.0%	0.0%	15.3%
	Debra Tsion	Count	22	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	26
		% within Location	84.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	7.7%	0.0%	0.0%	7.7%	100.0%
		% within HomeLan	22.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	16.0%
		% of Total	13.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	16.0%
	Herrera	Count	23	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	26
		% within Location	88.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.8%	0.0%	0.0%	7.7%	100.0%
		% within HomeLan	23.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.5%	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	16.0%
		% of Total	14.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	.6%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	16.0%
	Bochesa	Count	0	17	0	0	0	0	2	7	26
		% within Location	0.0%	65.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	7.7%	26.9%	100.0%
		% within HomeLan	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	58.3%	16.0%
		% of Total	0.0%	10.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	4.3%	16.0%
	Addis Ababa	Count	1	0	4	0	5	2	0	0	12
		% within Location	8.3%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	41.7%	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within HomeLan	1.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	22.7%	66.7%	0.0%	0.0%	7.4%
		% of Total	.6%	0.0%	2.5%	0.0%	3.1%	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	7.4%
Total		Count	98	17	8	1	22	3	2	12	163
		% within Location	60.1%	10.4%	4.9%	.6%	13.5%	1.8%	1.2%	7.4%	100.0%
		% within HomeLan	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	60.1%	10.4%	4.9%	.6%	13.5%	1.8%	1.2%	7.4%	100.0%

			Mother Tongue			Total
			Zay	Oromo	Amharic	
Location	Zway	Count	24	1	0	25
		% within Location	96.0%	4.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Mother Tongue	17.8%	4.0%	0.0%	15.3%
		% of Total	14.7%	.6%	0.0%	15.3%
	Meki	Count	20	0	3	23
		% within Location	87.0%	0.0%	13.0%	100.0%
		% within Mother Tongue	14.8%	0.0%	100.0%	14.1%
		% of Total	12.3%	0.0%	1.8%	14.1%
	Aysut	Count	23	2	0	25
		% within Location	92.0%	8.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Mother Tongue	17.0%	8.0%	0.0%	15.3%
		% of Total	14.1%	1.2%	0.0%	15.3%
	Debra Tsion	Count	26	0	0	26
		% within Location	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Mother Tongue	19.3%	0.0%	0.0%	16.0%
		% of Total	16.0%	0.0%	0.0%	16.0%
	Herrera	Count	25	1	0	26
		% within Location	96.2%	3.8%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Mother Tongue	18.5%	4.0%	0.0%	16.0%
		% of Total	15.3%	.6%	0.0%	16.0%
	Bochesa	Count	5	21	0	26
		% within Location	19.2%	80.8%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Mother Tongue	3.7%	84.0%	0.0%	16.0%
		% of Total	3.1%	12.9%	0.0%	16.0%
	Addis Ababa	Count	12	0	0	12
		% within Location	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Mother Tongue	8.9%	0.0%	0.0%	7.4%
		% of Total	7.4%	0.0%	0.0%	7.4%
Total		Count	135	25	3	163
		% within Location	82.8%	15.3%	1.8%	100.0%
		% within Mother Tongue	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	82.8%	15.3%	1.8%	100.0%

			Feel good about Zay culture/background			Total
			Strongly Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Location	Zway	Count	0	6	19	25
		% within Location	0.0%	24.0%	76.0%	100.0%
		% within Feel good about Zay culture/background	0.0%	15.8%	15.3%	15.3%
		% of Total	0.0%	3.7%	11.7%	15.3%
	Meki	Count	0	3	20	23
		% within Location	0.0%	13.0%	87.0%	100.0%
		% within Feel good about Zay culture/background	0.0%	7.9%	16.1%	14.1%
		% of Total	0.0%	1.8%	12.3%	14.1%
	Aysut	Count	0	18	7	25
		% within Location	0.0%	72.0%	28.0%	100.0%
		% within Feel good about Zay culture/background	0.0%	47.4%	5.6%	15.3%
		% of Total	0.0%	11.0%	4.3%	15.3%
	Debra Tsion	Count	0	0	26	26
		% within Location	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% within Feel good about Zay culture/background	0.0%	0.0%	21.0%	16.0%
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	16.0%	16.0%
	Herrera	Count	1	1	24	26
		% within Location	3.8%	3.8%	92.3%	100.0%
		% within Feel good about Zay culture/background	100.0%	2.6%	19.4%	16.0%
		% of Total	.6%	.6%	14.7%	16.0%
	Bochesa	Count	0	7	19	26
		% within Location	0.0%	26.9%	73.1%	100.0%
		% within Feel good about Zay culture/background	0.0%	18.4%	15.3%	16.0%
		% of Total	0.0%	4.3%	11.7%	16.0%
	Addis Ababa	Count	0	3	9	12
		% within Location	0.0%	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
		% within Feel good about Zay culture/background	0.0%	7.9%	7.3%	7.4%
		% of Total	0.0%	1.8%	5.5%	7.4%
Total		Count	1	38	124	163
		% within Location	.6%	23.3%	76.1%	100.0%
		% within Feel good about Zay culture/background	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	.6%	23.3%	76.1%	100.0%

			Strong Zay Attachment		Total
			Agree	Strongly Agree	
Location	Zway	Count	11	14	25
		% within Location	44.0%	56.0%	100.0%
		% within Strong Zay Attachment	20.8%	12.7%	15.3%
		% of Total	6.7%	8.6%	15.3%
	Meki	Count	2	21	23
		% within Location	8.7%	91.3%	100.0%
		% within Strong Zay Attachment	3.8%	19.1%	14.1%
		% of Total	1.2%	12.9%	14.1%
	Aysut	Count	17	8	25
		% within Location	68.0%	32.0%	100.0%
		% within Strong Zay Attachment	32.1%	7.3%	15.3%
		% of Total	10.4%	4.9%	15.3%
	Debra Tsion	Count	1	25	26
		% within Location	3.8%	96.2%	100.0%
		% within Strong Zay Attachment	1.9%	22.7%	16.0%
		% of Total	.6%	15.3%	16.0%
	Herrera	Count	5	21	26
		% within Location	19.2%	80.8%	100.0%
		% within Strong Zay Attachment	9.4%	19.1%	16.0%
		% of Total	3.1%	12.9%	16.0%
	Bochesa	Count	10	16	26
		% within Location	38.5%	61.5%	100.0%
		% within Strong Zay Attachment	18.9%	14.5%	16.0%
		% of Total	6.1%	9.8%	16.0%
	Addis Ababa	Count	7	5	12
		% within Location	58.3%	41.7%	100.0%
		% within Strong Zay Attachment	13.2%	4.5%	7.4%
		% of Total	4.3%	3.1%	7.4%
Total		Count	53	110	163
		% within Location	32.5%	67.5%	100.0%
		% within Strong Zay Attachment	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	32.5%	67.5%	100.0%

			Part. in Zay culture etc					Total
			Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Location	Zway	Count	2	3	7	10	3	25
		% within Location	8.0%	12.0%	28.0%	40.0%	12.0%	100.0%
		% within Part. in Zay culture etc	40.0%	42.9%	50.0%	12.0%	5.7%	15.4%
		% of Total	1.2%	1.9%	4.3%	6.2%	1.9%	15.4%
	Meki	Count	2	0	3	11	7	23
		% within Location	8.7%	0.0%	13.0%	47.8%	30.4%	100.0%
		% within Part. in Zay culture etc	40.0%	0.0%	21.4%	13.3%	13.2%	14.2%
		% of Total	1.2%	0.0%	1.9%	6.8%	4.3%	14.2%
	Aysut	Count	0	1	0	22	2	25
		% within Location	0.0%	4.0%	0.0%	88.0%	8.0%	100.0%
		% within Part. in Zay culture etc	0.0%	14.3%	0.0%	26.5%	3.8%	15.4%
		% of Total	0.0%	.6%	0.0%	13.6%	1.2%	15.4%
	Debra Tsion	Count	0	1	1	14	10	26
		% within Location	0.0%	3.8%	3.8%	53.8%	38.5%	100.0%
		% within Part. in Zay culture etc	0.0%	14.3%	7.1%	16.9%	18.9%	16.0%
		% of Total	0.0%	.6%	.6%	8.6%	6.2%	16.0%
	Herrera	Count	0	0	0	3	23	26
		% within Location	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	11.5%	88.5%	100.0%
		% within Part. in Zay culture etc	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.6%	43.4%	16.0%
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%	14.2%	16.0%
	Bochesa	Count	0	2	1	16	7	26
		% within Location	0.0%	7.7%	3.8%	61.5%	26.9%	100.0%
		% within Part. in Zay culture etc	0.0%	28.6%	7.1%	19.3%	13.2%	16.0%
		% of Total	0.0%	1.2%	.6%	9.9%	4.3%	16.0%
	Addis Ababa	Count	1	0	2	7	1	11
		% within Location	9.1%	0.0%	18.2%	63.6%	9.1%	100.0%
		% within Part. in Zay culture etc	20.0%	0.0%	14.3%	8.4%	1.9%	6.8%
		% of Total	.6%	0.0%	1.2%	4.3%	.6%	6.8%
Total		Count	5	7	14	83	53	162
		% within Location	3.1%	4.3%	8.6%	51.2%	32.7%	100.0%
		% within Part. in Zay culture etc	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	3.1%	4.3%	8.6%	51.2%	32.7%	100.0%

			Pride in Zay			Total
			Strongly Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Location	Zway	Count	0	6	19	25
		% within Location	0.0%	24.0%	76.0%	100.0%
		% within Pride in Zay	0.0%	13.3%	16.4%	15.3%
		% of Total	0.0%	3.7%	11.7%	15.3%
	Meki	Count	2	2	19	23
		% within Location	8.7%	8.7%	82.6%	100.0%
		% within Pride in Zay	100.0%	4.4%	16.4%	14.1%
		% of Total	1.2%	1.2%	11.7%	14.1%
	Aysut	Count	0	17	8	25
		% within Location	0.0%	68.0%	32.0%	100.0%
		% within Pride in Zay	0.0%	37.8%	6.9%	15.3%
		% of Total	0.0%	10.4%	4.9%	15.3%
	Debra Tsion	Count	0	0	26	26
		% within Location	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% within Pride in Zay	0.0%	0.0%	22.4%	16.0%
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	16.0%	16.0%
	Herrera	Count	0	3	23	26
		% within Location	0.0%	11.5%	88.5%	100.0%
		% within Pride in Zay	0.0%	6.7%	19.8%	16.0%
		% of Total	0.0%	1.8%	14.1%	16.0%
	Bochesa	Count	0	13	13	26
		% within Location	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
		% within Pride in Zay	0.0%	28.9%	11.2%	16.0%
		% of Total	0.0%	8.0%	8.0%	16.0%
	Addis Ababa	Count	0	4	8	12
		% within Location	0.0%	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
		% within Pride in Zay	0.0%	8.9%	6.9%	7.4%
		% of Total	0.0%	2.5%	4.9%	7.4%
Total		Count	2	45	116	163
		% within Location	1.2%	27.6%	71.2%	100.0%
		% within Pride in Zay	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	1.2%	27.6%	71.2%	100.0%

			Strong sense of belonging			Total
			Strongly Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Location	Zway	Count	0	3	22	25
		% within Location	0.0%	12.0%	88.0%	100.0%
		% within Strong sense of belonging	0.0%	7.5%	18.0%	15.3%
		% of Total	0.0%	1.8%	13.5%	15.3%
	Meki	Count	0	3	20	23
		% within Location	0.0%	13.0%	87.0%	100.0%
		% within Strong sense of belonging	0.0%	7.5%	16.4%	14.1%
		% of Total	0.0%	1.8%	12.3%	14.1%
	Aysut	Count	0	20	5	25
		% within Location	0.0%	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%
		% within Strong sense of belonging	0.0%	50.0%	4.1%	15.3%
		% of Total	0.0%	12.3%	3.1%	15.3%
	Debra Tsion	Count	0	0	26	26
		% within Location	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% within Strong sense of belonging	0.0%	0.0%	21.3%	16.0%
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	16.0%	16.0%
	Herrera	Count	0	3	23	26
		% within Location	0.0%	11.5%	88.5%	100.0%
		% within Strong sense of belonging	0.0%	7.5%	18.9%	16.0%
		% of Total	0.0%	1.8%	14.1%	16.0%
	Bochesa	Count	1	7	18	26
		% within Location	3.8%	26.9%	69.2%	100.0%
		% within Strong sense of belonging	100.0%	17.5%	14.8%	16.0%
		% of Total	.6%	4.3%	11.0%	16.0%
	Addis Ababa	Count	0	4	8	12
		% within Location	0.0%	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
		% within Strong sense of belonging	0.0%	10.0%	6.6%	7.4%
		% of Total	0.0%	2.5%	4.9%	7.4%
Total		Count	1	40	122	163
		% within Location	.6%	24.5%	74.8%	100.0%
		% within Strong sense of belonging	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	.6%	24.5%	74.8%	100.0%

Appendix III – Letter from the House of Federation to the Oromia Regional State

የኢትዮጵያ ፌዴራላዊ ዲሞክራሲያዊ ሪፐብሊክ
የፌዴሬሽን ምክር ቤት

The House of Federation
of
The Federal Democratic Republic
of Ethiopia

ቁጥር: መዝ.ፌ.ሪ.ፖ. (ጸ/ቤት)
No.
ቀን: 15/05/2001
Date

በሰርዔሊያ ብሔራዊ ክልላዊ መንግሥት ር/መስተዳድር ጽ/ቤት
ፊንፊኔ

ጉዳይ:- የዛይ ማህበረሰብ አቤቱታን ይመለከታል፤

በሰርዔሊያ ክልላዊ መንግሥት በአርሲ እና ምስራቅ ሸዋ ዞኖች በዝዋይ ሀይት ላይ ባሉ ደሴቶችና አካባቢው የሚኖሩ የዛይ ብሔረሰብ መኪሎች ነገ በማለት ጥቅምተኛ 25 ቀን 2001 ዓ.ም ለምክር ቤታችን አቤቱታ ቀርቧል። የቀረበው አቤቱታ የዛይ ብሔረሰብ ማንነቱ ታውቆ በየደረጃው ውክልና እንዲፈቀድለት ቋንቋና ባህሉ እንዲጠና የሚሉ ጥያቄዎችን ይዟል።

በእኛ በኩል አቤቱታው የፌዴሬሽን ምክር ቤትን ለማጠናከርና ሥልጣንና ተግባርን ለመዘርዘር ከወጣው እዋጅ ቁጥር 251/93 አንቀጽ 19 እና 20 ድንጋጌዎች ጋር ተገናዝቦ እንደታየው የክልሉን መፍትሔ አሟጦ ያልቀረበ ሲሆን የክልሉ መንግሥት ጥቃቂው የአገሪቱ መብትና አፈጻጸሙን ለማስጠበቅ ህግ በሰርዔሊያ ክልላዊ መንግሥት ሕገመንግስትና በሌሎችም አግባብነት ባላቸው የክልሉ መንግሥት ሕጎች መሠረት እንዲያይላቸው አቤቱታቸውን በጥቅምት 15/05/2001 ዓ.ም. ጋር መሳካትን እንገልጻለን።

 ከሠላም ል/ጋር
ዳጊኤል ደምሴ አገላ
የሀገሪቱን የክልሎች ጉዳይ
ዓ/ዲ/ኮሚቴ ማህተም

እንዲያውቁት

- ለተከበሩ የፌዴሬሽን ምክር ቤት አፈ-ጉባኤ
- ለተከበሩ የፌዴሬሽን ምክር ቤት ምክ.ፌ.ዲ.ሪ.ባኤ
- በፌዴሬሽን ምክር ቤት

ገልጻል

- ለአቶ በክቲ ቱምሳ
- ለአቶ ሲራክ ወ/ሰላሴ

ባለ-ቤት

ስልክ 242322
ፌክስ 242309

ፋክስ 242304
ፌክስ 242308

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ጽ/ቤት
ፊ.ዲ.ሪ.

Letter from the House of Federation to the Oromia Regional State stating that Zay requests for representation as cited by the Zay in Proclamation No. 251/2001 “Consolidation of the House of Federation and Definition of its Powers and Responsibilities.”