

## Segregating the Living and the Dead: The Case of the Dawro in Ethiopia

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### Abstract

This article deals with social segregation among the Dawro in southern Ethiopia with a special focus on the *Degellaa* (tanners). The Dawro has five major hierarchical social categories, namely: the *Maallaa* (higher stratum), the *Wogac-c-iya* (blacksmith), the *Degellaa* (tanners), the *Manaa* (potters), and the *Manja* (hunter-gatherers). The *Dege.llaa* are segregated in their interactions with the dominant group as well as the remaining minority groups of the society. The article aims to discuss the nature of this social segregation and its changes across time in the Dawro. Primary data were collected from the field via observation, FGDs, interviews, and case studies. The data were transcribed and translated and were thematically classified before the final write-up. The findings show that the *Degellaa* are segregated from access to land, social networking, local and religious institutions, burial sites, marriage relations, and sharing food and drink, among others. The *Maallaa* consider the *Degellaa* a pollutant and ritually-impure. There is a hereditary principle of specialization, rigid hierarchy, and repulsion in society. In terms of theoretical debate, the social stratification and the consequent social exclusion among the Dawro are exceptionally similar to the caste system. Finally, it is recommended that policymakers design a policy framework to end social segregation. Both enabling policy frameworks and social, political, and economic transformations are important to end such solidified social segregation.

**Key words:** /Dawro/Degellaa/Maallaa/Social hierarchy/Segregation/

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Social Stratification in Ethiopia

Epple (2018) shows that occupation and descent-based marginalization are long-established traditions in Ethiopia. Although institutions like churches and non-governmental organizations have tried to integrate the marginalized minorities into the ‘mainstream’ majority, marginalization is still prevailing to date. For instance, Akalework (2014) shows the presence of a group of people called Ayilles in Wolaita who hold the lowest layer in the social category of the people. This social phenomenon was ended legally<sup>4</sup> although it has persisted and still affects the social, political and economic lives of the interacting groups in Wolaita.

According to Aalen (2011; 2012) and Tronvoll and Hagmann (2012), as cited in Epple (2018), marginalization has revived in response to the cultural revival of the post-1991 Ethiopian federal political context. Epple (2018) indicates that the marginalized groups are potters, tanners, weavers, blacksmiths, woodworkers, musicians, hunters and their descendants, slave descendants and some special clans. These groups have low social statuses ascribed to them by birth and are disadvantaged in all aspects of their lives, and the associated negative characteristics are physical and/or ritual impurity. Segregated groups are found in the egalitarian and stratified societies of Ethiopia. Instances of these groups are the *Fuga* in Gurage, the *Weyto* in Amhara, the *Manjo* in Kaffa, and the *Wata* in Borana. In all these societies, there are internal differentiation and stratification.

The minorities are referred to as ‘avoided castes’, ‘pariah’, ‘outcasts’, ‘depressed classes’ or ‘marginalized groups’. They are perceived as being fundamentally different from mainstream society. The dominant majority justifies the marginalization by referring to various issues. These include the ritually-impure occupations and/or the handling of impure materials, the mythical origins of the groups such as being of non-human or half-human descent, loss of purity either due to an ancestral curse, or unethical behavior of the ancestors. Contact with marginalized groups is thought to pollute and harm the dominant groups (Chaudhry, 2013; Epple, 2018). However, the relationships they have with one another and with the dominant group differ across cultures and social categories (Epple, 2018).

The segregation between the dominant groups and the minorities is executed through some rules of avoidance that include inter-marriage prohibition, avoidance of close physical contacts like sexual intercourse, and entering each other’s houses and touching each other’s objects, particularly food containers (Amare, 2017; Epple, 2018). The prohibition is not one way in which the majority avoids the minorities, but the latter also prohibits the former from entering their houses and touching their work tools (Epple, 2018). Gebresslassie (2016), for example, demonstrates the severe marginalization of the *Manja* group, who live in pockets of Kaffa, Sheka, Bench Maji, and Dawro areas in southern Ethiopia.

Freeman and Pankhurst (2003) wrote about the excluded minorities in the peripheral areas of southern Ethiopia, including the Dawro. In this work, they have shown the interactions and restrictions among people with hierarchical social status. They have discussed the *Degellaa* in Gamo, Wolaita, and Dawro. Importantly, they have also shown some similarities among the tanners across these ethnic groups.

Even though the existing scholarly works on minorities in Ethiopia are so important, there are variations among the minorities in terms of the nature and severity of the marginalization and intergroup interactions. Intergroup interactions are realized both vertically (i.e. between the dominant group and the rest of the minorities in society) and horizontally (i.e. across the various minority groups).

In this regard, as far as the knowledge of the authors of this paper goes, there are no ethnographic researches that provide the full picture of the extent of the marginalization of the *Degellaa* among the Dawro. Most of the works, however, focus on the lowest social stratum, the *Manja* (the hunter-gatherers). Thus,

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<sup>4</sup> See Ethiopian constitutions of 1987 and 1995.

this paper addresses the prevailing research gap among the socially-marginalized *Degellaa* (tuners) group in Dawro. The paper intends to reveal the waxing and waning of social positions of the *Degellaa* across time in the longstanding social hierarchy of the Dawro. The paper responds to the questions:

1. What are the myths behind the social segregation of the *Degellaa*?
2. How is social segregation manifested?
3. What changes have been in place across time in terms of social segregation among the Dawro?

## 1.2. Theoretical Debate: Stratification and Marginalization

Different forms of social stratification and the resultant marginalization and social exclusion are prevalent across time and societies (Epple, 2018; Schiffer & Schatz, 2008). The list of marginalized individuals or groups also varies from context to context. The groups that suffer from marginalization can be certain ethnic minorities, immigrants, disabled people, or caste groups. Despite the disparities in their social backgrounds and history, these groups might be marginalized or kept outside of mainstream society in terms of social networking, access to resources, and political power (Schiffer & Schatz, 2008; Subedi, 2011). As Subedi (2011) shows, many societies use caste, class, race, ethnicity, gender, and the like to fix the intended social categories and differentiation. The term 'caste' is often used to refer to social stratification. Yet, it entails different meanings in different contexts.

There have been long debates in literature over whether a caste system is a cultural or a structural phenomenon. In this regard, there are two major anthropological positions. The first school presents the caste as a unique Hindu system that is incomparable to other systems. This position emphasizes Bouglé's (1971) as cited in Subedi (2011; 2013) classic definition of the principles of "the spirit of caste". These are hereditary specialization, hierarchy, and repulsion. The first associates a caste with a specific trade or profession. On the other hand, hierarchy determines unequal rank or stratified personal status in terms of rights and duties, and finally, repulsion restricts group alliances and relations based on group boundaries, which often involve customs of marriage like endogamy, pollution concepts, and food taboos. Based on these principles of defining caste, Bouglé tried to see if caste is exclusive to Indian (Hindu) society. However, he finally stated that there are caste-like properties across cultures, but that caste in its real sense is found only in India. In this regard, caste is the system of social organization peculiar to the traditional regional societies in Hindu, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lankan societies.

The second position is the comparative or stratification theory of caste. Caste is a structural phenomenon that falls under the general theory of social stratification that is prevalent everywhere. Berreman (1972) uses the term in its broadest sense to understand similar systems of social stratification across cultures. This theory considers the caste system not as an exclusive religious ideological or structural category but rather as a matter of social segregation. Regardless of the context, every system of social stratification entails a kind of power and privilege allocation based on a ranked division of labor and birth ascription (Subedi, 2011, 2013). From this perspective, a caste system is prevalent under the condition of birth-associated groups with unequal social status which involves differential evaluation, rewards, and association. Thus, a "caste system is applicable anywhere outside of Hindu India, and it can be usefully applied to societies with a system of hierarchical endogamous subdivisions where membership is hereditary and permanent, wherever they occur" (Berreman, 1967, cited in Subedi, 2011, p. 149). This position focuses on cross-cultural comparisons concerning social structure, rather than cultural patterns and value systems. One can see similar systems widely scattered over areas like the Arabian Peninsula, Polynesia, North Africa, East Africa, Guatemala, Japan, North America, and the contemporary United States (Subedi, 2011, p. 137).

According to Subedi (2011), regardless of the debate, there are certain characteristics of the caste system which are almost universally acknowledged to be associated with it as a socio-cultural institution. Some of these features include a hierarchical society, segmental division of society, restriction on feeding and sexual

intercourse, different privileges and duties to different sections of society, restriction on marriage, restriction on the choice of occupation, endogamous, polluting power associated with the lower status, and the hereditary principle of determining one's caste. As Epple (2018) shows, the literature on occupation and/or descent-based groups' marginalization in Ethiopia has been compared with the caste system in India. The findings of our paper also corroborate this line of argument.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. The Dawro

The Dawro are one of the Omotic-speaking peoples residing in southwestern Ethiopia. In the post-1991 Ethiopian administrative structure, the Dawro are organized into a zonal-administrative structure situated in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Regional State (SNNPRS) (Dawro Zone Finance and Economic Development 2010)<sup>5</sup>. The Dawro zone administrative capital is Tercha, which is located 496 kms southwest of Addis Ababa. The total population of Dawro was 543,148 (CSA, 2007). *Dawrotsuwa* or 'Dawro language' is the spoken language of the people (Dawit, 2016). *Dawrotsuwa* is related to Gofa, Gamo, Wolaita, and Konta and is classified as part of the central Omotic Language Families (Seid, 2007, p. 2).

### 2.2. The Study Site

This study has employed a qualitative approach. Field data were collected from the north-western highlands of the Dawro Zone in *Mareka* and *Mari-Mantsa* districts. The reasons for the selection of these sites were the presence of senior and knowledgeable informants who could tell the myth of the origin of the people as well as the prevailing social segregation in Dawro.

Primary data were collected from the field through observation, participant observation, in-depth interviews, case studies, and focus group discussions. Informants from different social groups were interviewed. Research participants and key informants were selected based on their social categories and knowledge of the issues under discussion. A total of 34 key informants were purposively selected and interviewed, out of which 18 were *Degellaa*, 10 were *Maallaa*, one, a blacksmith and the rest, five were government employees working in the office of culture and tourism. Among the informants, only four of them are females because they were not willing to participate in such activities and usually referred to their male partners. Two of the female informants are *Degellaa* and the remaining two are *Maallaa*. Through the in-depth interviews, efforts were made to obtain data on their myth of origin, marriage customs, class structures, beliefs and rituals, economic and social activities of the group.

Participant observation was one of the methods of data collection for this paper. The first author, being a Dawro, resided with the study population. He stayed at the research sites and took part in the daily life activities of the people, observing and recording their beliefs, values, and opinions. He observed and participated in social events such as circumcision, marriages, mourning and burial ceremonies, communal workings, and rituals and festivals. He also participated in group tasks of the *Degellaa* and non-*Degellaa*, and this enabled the collection of data in the natural and social settings of the group.

Three FGDs were organized to support data from the other sources. Out of these, two of the FGDs were *Degellaa* groups and the other one comprised non-*Degellaa* members. In each group, six discussants were purposively selected based on their knowledge of the issue under discussion. The data gathered through these field methods were important to uncover opinions, shared ideas, and perceptions with the participants. The FGDs were conducted to secure information on the relationships between the *Degellaa* and the non-*Degellaa*, their views about themselves, attitudes towards the non-*Degellaa* groups and the reasons for their

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<sup>5</sup>Annual report of Dawro Zone Finance and Economic Development

exclusion. We have secured ethical clearance to conduct this research from our Host University and Dawro zone administration. All informants have consented orally to provide information and there is no real name mentioned in this paper.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Social Stratification and Marginalization in Dawro: An Overview

*The Dengella Social Status and Marginalisation:* The Dawro practice a long-standing social stratification that segregates certain minority groups. In the social stratification of the Dawro, some free citizens have the highest social stratum—the *Maallaa*. The three artisans' groups constitute the second social category. These are the *Wogac-c-iyaa* (blacksmiths), *Degellaa* (tanners) and *Manaa* (potters). The third category is the hunter-gatherers—the *Manja*, who are also woodworkers. Thus, the Dawro have five major hierarchical social categories: the *Maallaa*, *Wogac-c-iyaa*, *Degellaa*, *Manaa* and *Manja* (Data, 2007).

The *Maallaa* social stratum is the most dominant<sup>6</sup> and one that is considered a full man with unrestricted privileges in the society. They are farmers. The rest are all segregated at different degrees in their interactions with this dominant group and within themselves. One of our informants stated that the *Maallaa* use derogatory terms to refer to the remaining groups in Dawro. For example, *k'od'd'iwa* means 'scratcher' for the *Degellaa*, and *womppiina puniyawa* for the blacksmith (*Wogac-c-iyaa*).

The *Maallaa* segregate the minorities based on ascription and occupation. The *Wogac'c'iyaa* represent the highest social strata among the artisan groups. In addition to metalwork, farming is also their means of livelihood. The *Wogac'c'iyaa* occupy a subordinate position, but without any deniable food habits. Their lower status is attributed to their myth of origin and occupation. The *Degellaa* take the next position in the social ladder. They are blamed and segregated for being pollutants against the *Maallaa*, for being impure, for their eating habits, and because their women are blamed for not undergoing circumcision. The *Manaa*-potters are at the bottom of the social hierarchy of the artisans. In addition to their occupation, the *Manaa* are often blamed for eating the flesh of dead animals called '*bakuta*'. The subordinate position and segregation of the *Manaa* also emerge from the associated spiritual power of possessing an evil eye and harmful spirits that have the potential to inflict misfortune and even death to others. In addition, the *Maallaa* believe that the *Manaa* often goes to funeral places to revivify the body of a person they caused to die so that they would eat 'alive'. It is believed that these people often use the hyena as a means of transportation to and from an entombment. Since the *Manaa* are potters whose products are vital for the entire social groups, avoidance of entering their homes is hardly possible. Individuals visit the home of the *Manaa* to purchase their products by taking some protective medicines that prevent the potential attack of the perceived evil spirit possessed by the *Manaa*.<sup>7</sup> For *Manna*, however, the accusation is mere attribution and baseless<sup>8</sup>.

The *Manja* are woodworkers and serve their communities by blowing trumpets and playing musical instruments like *His's'iis'iyaa* and *Lokuwa* on various social occasions. They also provide labor for small payments in rural and urban areas. The *Manja* are labeled as 'foragers' and are at the bottom of Dawro social hierarchy. Primarily, the *Manja* are accused of eating the flesh of wild animals like swine, porcupine, and colobus monkey, some of which are forbidden. They are also segregated for eating carcasses, like the potters and tanners. The *Manja* are also blamed for their bad personal hygiene and begging habits. They often beg for food since they commonly face shortages. The *Maallaa* blame the *Manja* for breaking the taboo of begging in

<sup>6</sup>A dominant group is the group that influences the sociopolitical structure of the Dawro and in this paper, it refers to the *Maallaa*.

<sup>7</sup>Interview with *Maallaa* key informant, February 2019, Marek'a

<sup>8</sup>Interview with *Manaa* key informants, March 2019, Marek'a

Dawro. Finally, the *Manja* are considered alien to the Dawro land since they have arrived lately from Kaffa (Data, 2007; Seid, 2007).

In the Dawro social structure, those who eat carcasses and prohibited food items are said to commit *Tuna*, or "impurity". According to Wondimu and Mulugeta (2003), the concept of *Tuna* is related to the traditional belief system that generally entails the notion of pollution (*Tuna*), prohibition (*Pila*) and affliction (*Gomiya*). These concepts indicate that there are groups in the social ladder who break the food taboo of the dominant group and become impure as a result of feeding on what is culturally prohibited. This act is believed to offend the deities of the dominant group with the potential of harming (*Gomiya*) the ritually pure *Maallaa*.

The *Tuna* of the *Degellaa*, *Manaa* and *Manja*, by provenance, passes from generation to generation. The misfortune caused by the *Gomiya* can only be averted through the ritual of purification which a *Maallaa* person under risk of impurity has to undergo. The potential of *Gomiya* by the *Manja* social group is the severest of all.

*Origin and clan structure:* The ostracism and disparities of the *Degellaa* can be seen in terms of their myth of origin, as well as the economic, social, and political aspects of their lives. The origin myths of the *Degellaa* show two main versions. The first shows that the *Degellaa* were created as tanners and the second shows that they were recent migrants from another place. According to Dubale (2012), the oral tradition of the Dawro shows that God created human beings from the earth. One man was seen with a piece of metal, and God ordered him to be a smith; another had crops on his hand, and God ordered him to be a farmer, and another had hides, and he was told to be a tanner. This was the forbearer of the *Degellaa*. Still, another man was empty-handed, and he was created to hunt and gather. There was a man who was created with gold and he was created to be a king, and therefore, to administer all the others. This mythology shows God created different people with different professions right from the beginning. This myth of origin is still common among the Dawro.

The second version shows that the *Degellaa* were not original to the Dawro, and one explanation for this version is that the *Degellaa* came from Kaffa, a neighboring ethnic group. *Degellaa* informants<sup>9</sup> also claimed that their forefathers came to the Dawroland from the Kaffa to serve the king of the Dawro. As the story goes, there were wars between the Kaffa and Dawro kingdoms, which finally ended in a royal marriage between a princess who was a daughter of a Kaffa king and a Dawro king. The artisan groups were sent to Dawroland with the princess to serve the king (see also Data, 2007; Seid, 2007).

Data from non-*Degellaa* and *Degellaa* key informants<sup>10</sup> show that the *Degellaa* are viewed as sub-humans who are ritually-impure and potentially pollutants, and, therefore, must be avoided. The expected contacts between the *Maallaa* and the *Degellaa* are guided by these concepts of impurity and pollution. The standard contacts between the two groups are manifested at all levels, including greetings, dining, sharing burial places, marriage, physical contact, sharing items, and participating in politics, and other related social occasions. For instance, the *Degellaa* must kneel or kiss the ground in front of their patrons for salutation. The hierarchy is also manifested when traveling between places. The *Degellaa* must take the lower part of the road in terms of slope or travel on the left-hand side of the road. If they happen to meet at a crossroad, the *Degellaa* has to give in to the *Maallaa*.

### 3.2. Types of Segregation

*Physical segregation:* Social exclusion also entails residential segregation along with social stratification, except for the blacksmiths who live interspersed with the *Maallaa*. As it was reported by our key informant from Blacksmith and *Maallaa*<sup>11</sup>, this is so because the farmers need the products of the *Wogac 'c' iya* for farming, and their settlement pattern should fit the demand of the higher stratum.

<sup>9</sup>Interview with *Degella* key informants, February 2019, Marek'a

<sup>10</sup>Interview with three *Maallaa* and two *Degellaa* key informants, February 2019, Mari-Mantsa

<sup>11</sup>Interview with a blacksmith and *Maallaa* key informant, March 2019, Marek'a

The *Degellaa* have villages of their own separated from those of the *Maallaa*. Their villages are often situated in inconvenient locations, such as on hilltops or near the valleys. They are segregated in marketplaces, too. They are expected to use the extreme corner of marketplaces to sell their products. This physical marginalization is, therefore, a direct reflection of social segregation.<sup>12</sup>

However, under the former Ethiopian socialist regime (1974–1991) when villagization and resettlement programs were designed and implemented, the *Degellaa* and the *Maallaa* lived together in one village and had common voluntary associations under the command of the government. The imposition was aimed at abandoning the rigid social and physical segregation in the Dawro. In response to the attempt, individuals participated in social events like weddings, religious, and funeral ceremonies, irrespective of their social categories. They also ate and drank together, and entered each other's houses freely.<sup>13</sup>

*Stratification based on Occupation:* Handcraft products are the main sources of the livelihood of the *Degellaa*. *Degellaa* males are skillful in traditional leatherwork and are full-time tanners. Women are regular providers of materials required for tanning. The tanners use water and other substances to soften and color the hide products. Women provide water to wash the hides and grind wild roots and fruits called, warara (a plant root used to color the hide) and the s'eemafruits (used to soften the hide). They are also engaged in income-generating activities like brewing local beer, *borde*, for household consumption and sale<sup>14</sup>.

The *Degellaa* collect hides and process them for sale on the market or for small payments from the users. They also provide free services to the *Maallaa*. The *Degellaa*'s leather products include the *Manchchalla*, 'sleeping or seating mat', *Koraa*, 'saddle', *Agelgiliya*, 'coating', *Gonddaliya*, 'shield', *Borssa*, 'sack', *Sak'iyaa*, 'belts', *Dupuwa*, 'strips' and whips for sale on regular market transactions. The *Manchchalla* is well-known in Dawro and beyond. It is full of drawings that reflect some historical and cultural elements of the Dawro. There is a high demand for the *manchchalla* mat because it is an item of a gift for wedding ceremonies. It is also used in different ceremonies, including religious events, funerals, and other rituals.

Despite the socio-cultural, economic, and political values of these leather works, the group in question is referred to in derogatory terms that imply they are pollutants. The social and physical distances between the upper social stratum and the tanners remain intact. The tanners work under the pressure of serious stereotypes. The *Maallaa* always look down upon the *Degellaa* and their products. The *Maallaa* use the term *k'od'd'iwa*, 'scratcher' to describe the *Degellaa*.<sup>15</sup> The term has negative connotations that are loaded with characteristics of impurities that hurt the psycho-morality of the referred group. The tanners complained that the *Maallaa* who need all the leather products are neither willing to acquire the tanning skills nor acknowledge the importance of the occupation nor respect the tanners.<sup>16</sup>

The *Degellaa* informants commonly evaluate the degree of segregation and marginalization across the different Ethiopian political contexts. The FGD discussants complained that the segregation was severe under the former feudal system (until the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution) in which the *Degellaa* were mere vassals of the upper social stratum, and their very existence was to maintain the customs of their masters and to provide them with necessary leather products for free. Under that system, the *Degellaa* had no right on the land and other natural resources. According to our *Degellaa* informants, the situation was better during the five-year Italian occupation (1936–1941). During that time, the *Degellaa* enjoyed relative freedom and recognition from the *Maallaa*. This was because the general administrative orientation under the Italians appreciated the trade of the *Degellaa*. The Italian authorities attempted to end the segregation under the slogan "*addaa pilopittee, ayliiyaa zalopittee*", 'Don't exclude minority groups, and stop the slave trade.' This was the first time the *Degellaa* heard the idea of freedom and equality for minorities.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Interview with *Degellaa* male and female informants and non-*Degellaa* key informants, February 2019, Marek'a

<sup>13</sup>FGD1, Marek'a, February 2019; FGD2, Mari-Mantsa, February 2019; FGD3, Tocha, March 2019.

<sup>14</sup>Interview with *Degellaa* and *Maallaa* key informants, February 2019 Marek'a, Mari-Mantsa; March 2019, Tocha

<sup>15</sup>FGD1, February 2019, Marek'a; FGD2 February 2019, Mari-Mantsa; FGD3 March 2019, Tocha

<sup>16</sup>Interview with *Degellaa* key informants, February 2019 Marek'a, Mari-Mantsa; March 2019, Tocha

<sup>17</sup>FGD, *Degellaa* discussants, February 2019 Marek'a, and March 2019, Tocha

After the brief Italian rule, the former system of marginalization was restored until the coming to power of the Ethiopian socialist regime in 1974. The *Degellaa* informants acknowledged that the degree of marginalization was less harsh under the socialist regime. Through the Cultural Revolution which aimed at building a socialist society, this regime attempted to liberate the marginalized groups from severe exploitation, resource alienation, cultural suppression, and social exclusion. The socialist government organized training centers for tanners, metalworkers, woodworkers, and potters in which individuals from different social categories took part.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to their traditional artisanal work, the minorities also got land to till and pasture their animals. They also sat, ate, drank, and shook hands with the *Maallaa*. These minorities were also able to attend basic education being in the same classroom as the *Maallaa*. During that regime, there were some theoretical and, to some extent, practical changes to the social exclusion scenario. However, the *Maallaa*, who considered these occupations inferior and impure, were not happy about the tendency to equalize them with the minorities. According to data from the field, artisans' birth-related occupations remained so. There had been neither inter-artisans' skill transfer nor the adoption of the artisans' occupation by the non-artisan ones.<sup>19</sup>

Although the rural communities still value hide products and use them for different social and ritual purposes, the young generation of the *Degellaa* is leaving their longstanding trade behind due to the severe marginalization it has always received. In addition, the products are being replaced by factory outputs. The availability of factory products such as foam mats, plastic products, and the erosion of some cultural values associated with using items like shields and whips have affected the need for local leather products.

*Kinship and Marriage-based Segregation:* The data from our FGD discussants show that although the *Degellaa* are clan exogamous, they always marry within themselves. The most ominous and lasting form of marginalization is the rule that prohibits intermarriage between the *Maallaa* and the other minority groups. Inter-marriage between the *Degellaa* and *Maallaa* is extremely forbidden. Our *Maallaa* informants stated that a marriage between the *Maallaa* and the *Degellaa* is a serious breach of the stratification and inexcusable from the side of the former. If such a marriage happens, it often ends in divorce due to the intervention of the family from the *Maallaa* side.

In addition, the *Maallaa* try to justify the marriage prohibition by appealing to the 'impurity' of the *Degellaa* women, since these women do not undergo female genital cutting, and the uncut is impure and, therefore, causes serious misfortune to her *Maallaa* sexual partner. The following case is an instance of a marriage between a *Degellaa* woman and *Maallaa* man which ended in divorce. Here is the case<sup>20</sup>:

### Case One

A *Degellaa* woman who lived in Addis Ababa got married to a *Maallaa* man. She gave birth to three sons and led a happy married life. The husband did not know that his wife was a *Degellaa*. At one point, the couple went to Dawroland to visit her parents. Upon arrival, the husband saw some leather works in the vicinity and got shocked. He asked who her parents and the people in their village were. She disclosed that her parents are tanners and the village also belongs to them. Since the local custom does not allow him to enter the house of the *Degellaa* regardless of their being his in-laws, he quickly went back to Addis Ababa, and that incident concluded their marriage in a de facto divorce.

According to this informant, the *Maallaa* practice segregation within themselves to maintain the 'purity' of their social status. To substantiate this, he narrated his lived experience as follows:

<sup>18</sup>FGD, *Degellaa* discussants, February 2019 and Marek'a, and March 2019, Tocha

<sup>19</sup>FGD, *Maallaa* Discussants, March 2019, Marek'a

<sup>20</sup>Interview with *Maallaa* key informants, February 2019 Marek'a



## Case Two

Mr. Kufu, a *Maallaa* of middle status, married a woman from the *Maallaa* of higher status through elopement about forty years ago. Her parents did not accept him as their son-in-law because he was not eligible to marry their daughter owing to his social status. He tried to be polite and respectful to them. However, some of the family members even threatened him, and due to this, he felt unsecured. He bought a grenade to protect himself. His in-laws reported the case to the police and accused him of illegally owning a firearm. He was then jailed. His wife, however, visited him throughout his stay in prison. It was only after a long time that his in-laws accepted him, mainly because the wife had already given birth and her chance of marrying another person of her status had faded.

*Economic-Based Segregation:* The Dawro practice mixed farming as a means of livelihood (Biniam & Bahilu, 2017, p. 14). The *Degellaa* who earn income from the sale of their leather products supports their subsistence economy by engaging in mixed agriculture. However, they lack ownership rights to the land and have less opportunity to farm as well as to raise livestock. In Dawro society, the *Maallaa* are the dominant and legitimate owners of the land. It is believed that the *Maallaa* have the rights and the responsibilities to sacrifice for the land. The spirit of the land does not welcome any sacrifice from non-*Maallaa* who are regarded as non-citizens. Accordingly, all the artisans and the hunter-gatherers have no right to scarify for the land and by default have no land (Seid, 2007).

Under the pre-1974 feudal system, the *Degellaa* were tenants who ploughed the land of their masters on a share-cropping basis. The affluent class of *Maallaa* could extract free labor from the tenants. According to Data (2007) and Seid (2007), the minorities were left with no other options except to practice the craft jobs "they were born for" and work for the landlords.

Since the downfall of the feudal system and the coming to power of the socialist regime, under the slogan "Land to the Tiller", the *Degellaa* were able to access agricultural lands. The government declared that '*ayli womanuwa gidoo, asawa goshshiya goshshanchchay bare karniwa gidoo*' 'slave and minority groups became free persons and tenants became land owners'. According to our informants, in principle, the socialist government allowed equal distribution of the land to all landless peasants and minorities. Yet, the distribution was not fairly done. The artisans got inconvenient, infertile, and small plots of land to farm, whereas the *Maallaa* got large and fertile lands. This happened under the influence of traditional social segregation, which excluded minorities from any local administration. Alternatively, the *Degellaa* often approach the *Maallaa*, who have excess farmland for share-cropping arrangements. The *Maallaa* do not use the crop they share with the *Degellaa* for household consumption. Instead, they either give it to the Manja in exchange for their labor or sell it in the market<sup>21</sup>.

Despite the shortage of grazing lands, the *Degellaa* rear livestock. However, their livestock are marginalized by the extension of human marginalization. This marginalization of animals is manifested in different forms. Primarily, any physical contact between the livestock of the *Maallaa* and the *Degellaa* is avoided for fear of the *Gomiya* (misfortune), which may stop cows from giving milk, kill calves, weaken oxen, reduce livestock productivity, and affect the entire wellbeing of the community. The Dawro have an association of cattle herders called *Wudiya*, in which the villagers bring their livestock together and herd turn by turn. In *wudiya*, cattle are herded into ranges or communal grazing lands. Nevertheless, the *Degellaa* cannot be members of the association and their livestock are not allowed to join the livestock of the *Maallaa* to graze on the communal pasture. As a result, the *Degellaa* had to graze their livestock on isolated and peripheral lands with poor pasture.<sup>22</sup>

In rare cases, the *Maallaa* arrange share-rearing with the *Degellaa*. However, the *Maallaa* do not consume the cattle products of the share-reared animals but sell them instead. The *Degellaa* offer sacrifice to their deities for the protection of their animals. The *Maallaa* believe that this offer makes the animals and their

<sup>21</sup>Interview with *Degellaa* key informants, February 2019 Marek'a; March 2019, Mari-Mantsa

<sup>22</sup>Key informant interviews with *Degellaa* and *Mallaa*, February 2019, Marek'a,

products impure. If a *Maallaa* person violates this rule of avoidance, their deity would never accept any sacrifices from the person. As a result, any member of the upper social class must refrain from using the *Degellaa's* livestock.<sup>23</sup>

In normal market transactions, the *Maallaa* avoid buying and using any livestock or its products from the *Degellaa*. A *Maallaa* informant said that '*Maallaa erennan Degellaa pilanne ooyssa gewan shamiddi bare sooyyi aheedda giddoppe shiri Degellaa goolle appidi gati taana wod'd'edda gide pilanne oyssa zaridi bira akibiwe anttuwa piliya gishshasa.*' The *Maallaa* never buy any milk products from a *Degellaa* woman. If the transaction happened unintentionally in the market and a *Maallaa* woman happened to know that the seller was a *Degellaa*, she has the right to give back the item in return for her money. In some cases, the *Maallaa* women can spill the milk and demand for the return of the money.<sup>24</sup>

The *Maallaa* do not prefer to use *Degellaa's* horse for transportation or their oxen for plowing. In all cases, the *Maallaa* fear the potential pollution of the *Degellaa* and the misfortune that this may inflict on their lives. Using a *Degellaa's* oxen is an embarrassing incident for the *Maallaa*. A *Degellaa* informant<sup>25</sup> narrated his lived experiences as follows:

### Case Three

During the socialist regime, there was a cooperative farmers' association in which all members of the social classes were members. The majority of the *Maallaa* provided oxen to plow. Most of the *Degellaa* contributed labor using hoes (*koos'iya*) or cutlasses (*wallaa*) to work on the field in place of oxen. They also transported the agricultural tools to and from the field. Fortunately, our informant, a *Degellaa* man, had oxen and some of the destitute *Maallaa* individuals were supposed to carry the agricultural tools. This was the time when the *Degellaa* and *Maallaa* oxen ploughed together. It was the time when the *Maallaa* touched the oxen, the beam of the plough and the yoke of the *Degellaa*. The *Maallaa* took the act as the most embarrassing and disgraceful one. With the downfall of the socialist regime, the association was abandoned and the segregation once again continued.

The *Degellaa* still complain about being denied access to jobs because of their social status. Regarding this point, a *Degellaa* father<sup>26</sup> had the following point to make:

### Case Four

Mr. Abaro Abera, a *Degellaa* of sixty years, had two young men who received training in computer maintenance, but are still jobless. Regardless of the real problem that caused the joblessness, the father and his sons believed that the main reason behind their joblessness was their social status. They have believed that being a *Degellaa* has impaired their ability to compete with others who are from the upper class in the Dawro Zone. When there are job opportunities in government institutions, priority is given to the *Maallaa*. The father complained that the prevailing social system is against the *Degellaa* across generations.

Data from the field show that the degree of segregation has waxed and waned over different political contexts without yielding any significant change for the *Degellaa* in general. After the fall of the socialist regime in 1991, the ethno-linguistic-based federal system implemented in the country has promoted the culture and history of the various ethnic groups in the country. This political structure has promoted the revival of local cultures and norms, including the former social exclusion among the Dawro. This situation indicates that the political context under which the Dawro live matters in order for the segregation to either prevail or be subdued.

<sup>23</sup>Interview with a Culture and Tourism office expert; interviews with key *Maallaa* informants, February 2019, Zurya; March 2019, Loma

<sup>24</sup>Interview with *Degellaa* and *Maallaa*, female key informants, February 2019, Marek'a

<sup>25</sup>*Degellaa* key informant interview, February 2019, Mari-Mantsa

<sup>26</sup>Interview with key informants from *Degellaa*, February 2019, Marek'a

*Political Leadership and Segregation:* Concerning the political participation of the *Degellaa*, most of the research participants stated that they are excluded from any leadership position. Our *Degellaa* informants complained that their social and political representations in the government and local administrations and associations have been minimal or null. At most, the *Degellaa* serve as local militias in peasant associations. However, the *Maallaa* do not take any legal order from a *Degellaa* militia. According to data from interviews and FGDs, the *Degellaa* were given leadership positions at the local level during the brief Italian occupation and under the Ethiopian socialist regime only. During the socialist regime, the government frequently recruited young men to fight the insurgents in the North. The *Maallaa* usually let the government forcefully recruit young men from the *Degellaa* who were at schools. The act has become an additional challenge to minorities' ability to send their children to schools. This recruitment was not to benefit the minorities but to let them suffer in the wars<sup>27</sup>.

Currently, few educated *Degellaa* serve as teachers, health, and police officers, though they still face marginalization and deprivation at their workplaces and home. Locally, the *Degellaa* are not chosen as mediators in elder moots regardless of the social strata of the disputing parties. The local mediators are always the *Maallaa* elders. The *Degellaa* people who are not allowed to serve as mediators do not also serve as witnesses since they are blamed for being deceitful. The custom demands that mediators are served food and drink after mediating the dispute. However, if the disputants are the *Degellaa*, since the *Maallaa* do not eat with them, the offenders should pay the authorities in cash<sup>28</sup>.

The *Degellaa* who herd pack animals for transportation must respect the rule of hierarchy when using the animals. Under the Ethiopian feudal regime, the *Degellaa* could use the pack animals only with the permission of their *Maallaa* patrons. Currently, if a *Degellaa* man on horseback finds a *Maallaa* on his way, the former must dismount from his horse and walk on foot regardless of whether the latter is on foot or horseback. If a *Maallaa* person is on foot, he or she has the right to use *Degellaa's* horse. Nonetheless, this rarely happens because the former avoids using an animal that belongs to the latter<sup>29</sup>.

*Eating Habits and Social Segregation:* A *Maallaa* informant said that *Degellaa k'uma Maallaay darissed piliwe, unttutu bakuta miwonne mac'c'awanttu k'assis'oriya k'ans's'etena gishshasa.*' The *Maallaa* do not eat and drink with the *Degellaa* because the latter are accused of consuming the meat of dead animals. The *Maallaa* also blame the *Degellaa* for eating *galbba k'od'd'uwa*, "a "piece of meat from the hide" when tanning. The *Maallaa* often use the expression '*Degellaay ashu bayyinaan ak'eena*', meaning 'you eat meat daily like the *Degellaa*' to undermine someone who frequently eats meat. The expression refers to *Degellaa's* access to pieces of meat while tanning. The *Maallaa* do not also eat whatever is prepared by the *Degellaa* women who do not undergo genital cutting.<sup>30</sup> However, the *Degellaa* informant disqualifies the accusation, saying that '*Nu ma'iyā wode Degellaattu hayk'eda miizza ashuwa miinno. Hanoppe attin haa'ii wode miikkino.*' This means "our fathers and grandfathers ate the meat of dead animals. Now, we do not do it."

As stated by our *Maallaa* informants, they believe that the spirits of the *Degellaa* allow them to eat things that are taboo and forbidden for them. This fact makes the *Degellaa* to be regarded as impure. The deity of the *Maallaa* does not allow them to share food and drink and have contact with the impure ones. If that happens, the deities are offended and do not welcome any sacrifices from such a person. The offended deities cause the offender a misfortune called *Gomiya*, which might be sanctioned by death. Alternatively, the fortune of the *Gomiya* should be cleansed via a certain form of ritual purification. In this framework of interactions, the *Maallaa* are providers of food for the *Degellaa*, under certain restrictions<sup>31</sup>. The latter, on the other hand, are entitled to provide labor or leather products for the former.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with *Degellaa* key informants, February 2019, Marek'a; March 2019, Mari-Mantsa

<sup>28</sup> Interview with key informants from *Degellaa*, February 2019, Marek'a

<sup>29</sup> Interview with an expert from the Culture and Tourism office, Tarcha; Interview with *Degellaa* key informants, February 2019, Marek'a

<sup>30</sup> Interview with *Maallaa* key informants, February 2019 Marek'a, March 2019, Mari-Mantsa

<sup>31</sup> Interview with *Maallaa* key informants, February 2019, Marek'a; March 2019, Mari-Mantsa

Data from our FGD discussants show that the *Maallaa* do not invite the *Degellaa* to occasions of festivity and weddings.<sup>32</sup> If the *Degellaa* are invited in recognition of the labor they contribute to the festivity, they are served the leftovers from food and drink outside of the main compound where the ceremony is held. In all circumstances, the *Maallaa* block the ‘pollutants’ from entering into their houses. The *Degellaa* should, therefore, sit on the eaves outside the compound. Since the *Degellaa* cannot use the utensils of the *Maallaa*, they are required to eat and drink what was given on the leaves of an *enset* (*Ensete ventricosum*) or on their bare hands. At most, they have to use broken cups and plates. If a utensil is used by this group, the impurity of the material is believed to be communicated to others. Due to this, the item must be discarded or kept somewhere for future similar purposes. If it must be discarded, then the *Degellaa* themselves must do it to avoid potential pollution.<sup>33</sup>

The *Maallaa* do not serve a *Degellaa* person any food prepared from milk and its products. This is because the *Maallaa* offer gifts of *k'essaa*, "colostrum", to their deity, that is responsible for the safety of the lactating cow and its calves. If the *Maallaa* give the milk of a cow and its products to the impure ones, the deity is offended. This causes *gomiya*, "misfortune" and terminates the milk, kills both calves and cows. The *Degellaa* are not only denied consumption of milk and milk products, but also are not allowed to cross the kraals of the *Maallaa* cattle for fear of potential pollution<sup>34</sup>.

*Religious Aspect of the Exclusion:* The Dawro have a traditional belief system that legitimizes the social hierarchy in society. For instance, according to Data (2007), the *kati*, "king", was a sacred and an elect of God in Dawro. The *Maallaa* hereditary deities are the *Kafu Miza S'oossa Dewuntoo*. The spirit medium is called the *Sharechuwa*, or *Alama*. The followers are *ya'a*, ‘congregates’. Their place of worship is known as *Zaba*.

Data from interviews and FGDs indicate that the traditional hut where only the *Alama* resides is *S'oossa kawutakeetsa*<sup>35</sup>. The compound of the *Alama* has seven fences and seven gates with special statuses. Individuals from the minority groups are protected from entering the main gate of the worship compound or from peeping inside the compound. Minorities can't worship this deity of the dominant group. It is said that the worship of those with low statuses would never please the deity of the dominant ones. Minorities entering an *Alama's* compound would result in an affliction (*gomiya*) against the *Maallaa*, particularly the one in charge of the spirit. The spirit is offended and would punish the *Maallaa* for allowing the ‘impure ones’ to get into the compound. The *gomiya* is only cleansed by slaughtering a goat or a bull in the compound and washing one's hands with its blood. The entire exclusion scenario revolves around this belief system in which the spirit of the *Maallaa* does not accept the minorities for their associated impurity and potential communication of the impurity.

If the *Degellaa* want to worship the *Maallaa's* deity, the latter have to allow them under certain restrictions. Any offer to the *Maallaa* deity must be kept outside the sacred compound. Similarly, the *Maallaa* sometimes worship *Degellaa's* deity, but they do it covertly, without entering the ritual hut. If this situation is disclosed, the *Maallaa* ostracize those individuals who visit a deity of the *Degellaa*. In addition, the *Maallaa* believe that a *Maallaa* man who worships the deity of the *Degellaa* will suffer from scabies. The deities and ritual leaders of each group command their adherents to worship their respective deities and exclude the deity of the other group. Under this religious-based segregation, the *Degellaa* have separate burial sites<sup>36</sup>.

Our *Degellaa* informants complained about segregation in Christianity, which was consistent with their traditional belief system. Following the incorporation of the area into the modern Ethiopian state at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Orthodox Christianity became the dominant religion in the region. The *Maallaa* adopted this

<sup>32</sup>The *Degellaa*, even though not invited to wedding ceremonies, have to contribute labour and give gifts of *manchalla* and *koraa*.

<sup>33</sup>Interview with *Maallaa* key informants, February 2019, Marek'a; March 2019, Mari-Mantsa

<sup>34</sup>Interview with *Maallaa* key informants, February 2019, Marek'a; March 2019, Mari-Mantsa

<sup>35</sup>A sacred hut where only a spirit medium and his messengers reside

<sup>36</sup>Interview with an expert from Culture and tourism office, Tarcha; Interview with *Maallaa* key informants, February 2019, Marek'a

religion, but the *Degellaa* did not until recently (Data, 2007; Seid, 2007). Currently, some of the *Degellaa* follow Orthodox Christianity, but most of them are members of Protestant Christianity. Yet, the marginalization of the *Degellaa* continued the same way it was in their traditional belief system (Data, 2007; Seid, 2007; Wondimu and Mulugeta, 2003, p. 26-46). The religious-based segregation is more vivid in terms of church services and burial places to be discussed below.

*Segregation in Idir*<sup>37</sup> *Association and Burial Sites*: According to a *Degellaa* key informant and FGD discussants, there is a voluntary association called *idir* to processes funeral ceremonies. Formerly, under the feudal regime, the *Degellaa* had separate entombment associations and places. The upper class simply attended the funeral and did not participate in any kind of activities pertinent to it. Digging the grave, preparing a coffin, carrying the corpses of the *Degellaa* and burying are taboo for the *Maallaa*. Given their small number, the *Degellaa* had to come from different places of Dawroland to attend and perform the funeral procession. The tradition demands that burial ceremonies must be performed by the immediate neighbors. However, in the case of the *Degellaa*, the corpse is buried either by kin groups or *Degellaa* from another locality since the nearest *Maallaa* do not cooperate on this occasion.<sup>38</sup>

As discussed above, during the Ethiopian socialist regime (1974–1991), the entire social categories were incorporated forcefully into the various local associations, including *idir*. However, since the communal burial association was imposed by the decree of the government, the upper class was not happy to break the taboo. Instead, they hired economically-low-earning *Maallaa* or people from other minority groups to discharge the responsibilities on their behalf. However, the *Maallaa* do not fully participate in the funeral of the *Degellaa*. One informant<sup>39</sup> narrates the case as follows:

### Case Five

In October 2018, a *Degellaa* young man died. The *Maallaa* who were members of the entombment association and neighbors of the deceased person were supposed to attend and organize the funeral. However, these people went to another village to attend the funeral of a *Maallaa* man who died on the same day. As they returned home, the *Degellaa* protested against the *Maallaa* who abandoned the corpse of their *Degellaa* neighbor in favor of the *Maallaa* in another locality. As a result, the *Degellaa* decided to establish a separate burial association of their own. The conflict was settled and the former association remained intact with the intervention of the *Maallaa* from another locality<sup>40</sup>.

The *Degellaa*, on the other hand, participate in several activities pertinent to the funeral ceremony of the upper class. However, they are not allowed to touch the dead bodies of the *Maallaa*. If that happens, the relatives of the deceased are blamed for letting the impure touch the dead bodies of the pure. Since the dead cannot defend themselves from the pollution of the *Degellaa*, it is the responsibility of the living ones to do so.

Despite the general trend of segregation, there are some variations across the different churches and localities. Data from observation, interviews and the lived experiences of one of the writers show that at one of our research sites, *Wach* village, there is a St. Mary Church in which the *Maallaa* and *Degellaa* are members and attend the church services and share entombment places without any segregation. On the contrary, the *Degellaa* complain about their relations with the *Maallaa* in another locality—*kati Gad'd'uwa* as discriminatory. The *Degellaa*, who are members of the Orthodox Church, face severe marginalization from fellow members of the church. They are ostracized in terms of where to sit in the church, kissing the cross,

<sup>37</sup>Self-help voluntary association of residents to support each other during hard times, especially to organize and perform funeral ceremonies.

<sup>38</sup>Interview with a *Degellaa* key informant, Koyisha

<sup>39</sup>Interview with *Maallaa* key informants, February 2019, Marek'a; Interview with *Degellaa* key informants, February 2019, Marek'a

<sup>40</sup>Interview with *Degellaa* key informants, February 2019, Marek'a and March 2019, Mari-Mantsa

drinking sanctified water, entombment place, and baptismal ceremony. In response to this situation, most members have changed their religious affiliations to the *K'aale-Hiwot* Protestant Church<sup>41</sup>.

The *K'aale-Hiwot* Protestant Church has a common entombment place for all social classes. Despite this improvement, there remains the rampant internal segregation of burial places across the social strata. According to key informants' interviews, the *Daka K'aale-Hiwot* Church entombment place itself is divided based on social categories as a direct indicator of the prevailing social stratification in the society. In this church, the *Degellaa* are made to use the cliffside of the burial place. Due to this persistent marginalization, some *Degellaa* prefer the former burial site of their ancestors compared to the church-based segregated burial site. The *Degellaa* who were marginalized in the Orthodox Church and joined *K'aale-Hiwot* Church faced similar marginalization. Our key informants who are Protestant Christians have complained that the marginalization is similar across traditional belief systems and in Christianity. Regarding this case, Mr. Adaye Attumbo, an old *Degellaa* man of 90, narrated *Degellaa's* position and treatment in Protestant churches as follows:

### Case Six

Initially, the church leaders promised the *Degellaa* fair and equal treatment with the remaining fellow Christians in all church and social services. However, after the *Degellaa* joined *K'aale-Hiwot* church in mass, the *Maallaa* continued the usual segregation against *Degellaa* for burial places. On one occasion, right after their evangelization, a *Degellaa* man died. They took the corpse to a Protestant entombment place. However, the *Maallaa* church members refused to offer a burial site. They took the case to the local administration, who gave them no solution except to advise them to bury the corpse in their previous burial place. They also appealed to the district chief administration (second tier of administration). Still, there was no solution. The *Degellaa* kept the corpse unburied for three days, waiting for a solution. Finally, the *Degellaa* appealed to their God and buried the dead at their former burial place. Mr. Adaye said, 'a corpse is a corpse, and it cannot deny one another. How do the people who segregate our dead accept us while we are alive?' At another time, a *Degellaa* woman died. This time the *Degellaa* organized themselves and buried the body at the Protestant Christians' burial site by force. With the intervention of the administration, the *Degellaa* got a burial site adjacent to the Protestant burial site which they finally secured even though it is a hillside and an inconvenient one. The informant said that for the *Degellaa*, evangelical Christianity has done little to improve their social status. Due to this, most of the *Degellaa* prefer the burial sites of their ancestors to the new sites that are full of quarrels<sup>42</sup>.

## 4. Discussion

The longstanding social stratification and exclusion among the Dawro are based on attribution and occupation. The *Maallaa* dominant group considers the *Degellaa* as sub-human and those who are ritually impure. In line with the discussion of Schiffer and Schatz (2008), the *Degellaa* are denied reasonable access to social networking, political, and natural resources. Thus, the anthropological debate about whether a caste is specific to Hindu India and related societies or a structural phenomenon is relevant to the case of the Dawro. In the absence of the term caste, the social stratification and the consequent social exclusion are exceptionally similar to the caste system. There is a socially-constructed principle of specialization, rigid hierarchy, and repulsion. The *Degellaa* are excluded from all forms of social networks with the upper social stratum. Marital relations, physical contacts, sharing of resources including food, drinks and burial sites are strictly forbidden. Contacts between the upper and lower classes are considered offensive, whether they are alive or dead. As Subedi (2013) shows, Bougle (1971) discusses that there are caste-like structural phenomena across the world. The Dawro case fits into this theoretical position.

<sup>41</sup>Data from observation, February and March 2019; Interview with *Degellaa* and *Maallaa* key informants, Koyisha.

<sup>42</sup>Interview with a *Degellaa* key informant, Koyisha.

Moreover, the comparative or stratification theory of caste is pertinent to explain the case of the Dawro. According to Subedi (2011), regardless of the debate, there are certain characteristics of the caste system which are almost universally acknowledged to be associated with it as a socio-cultural institution. Some of these features include hierarchical society, segmental division of society, restrictions on feeding and sexual intercourse, different privileges and duties to different sections of society, restrictions on marriage and the choice of occupation, the polluting power associated with lower status, and the hereditary principle of determining one's caste. Epple (2018) also shows that the literature on occupation and/or descent-based groups' marginalization in Ethiopia has been compared to the caste system in India.

In line with the argument of Epple (2018), occupation and descent-based segregation are a longstanding tradition in Ethiopia. It has survived governmental and non-governmental efforts to end it. Since the introduction of the ethnolinguistic-based federal structure in 1991 and the consequential revival of traditional values and practices in the country, segregation has been exacerbated in the area. Despite its being discriminatory, the community promotes and re-initiates some of its former cultural practices and values, including minority-majority relationships. Finally, we recommend that the different stakeholders contribute to abolishing segregation. To this end, policymakers have to design an enabling policy framework and social, political, and economic transformations that help to tackle social segregation among the Dawro. In addition, civic organizations, religious institutions and other relevant stakeholders have to work in unison to end the deep-rooted social segregation among the people in the research area. Despite the contributions made in this paper, the work does not show a comprehensive picture of the existing social segregation among the Dawro who have other marginalized groups. Thus, we recommend further and more detailed research engagements on this appealing topic.

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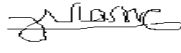
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