



## ÜNİVERSİTEPARK Bülten | Bulletin

ISSN: 2147-351X | e-ISSN: 2564-8039 | [www.unibulletin.com](http://www.unibulletin.com)

### ÜNİVERSİTEPARK Bülten | Bulletin • Volume 7 • Issue 2 • 2018

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Bisrat Gebru Wolde

**To cite this article:** Wolde, B. G. (2018). Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in Kaffa Society of Ethiopia. *Üniversitepark Bülten*, 7(2), 128-142.

**To link to this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.22521/unibulletin.2018.72.5>

**Bisrat Gebru Wolde**, Jimma University, Ethiopia. (e-mail: [wgsoru@yahoo.com](mailto:wgsoru@yahoo.com))

## Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in Kaffa Society of Ethiopia

BISRAT GEBRU WOLDE

### Abstract

This paper is aimed at investigating the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms of Kaffa society. Exploratory design was used in this study as the issue was being studied for the first time. The participants of the study are elders, religious leaders and influential people from the study area. Those participants were selected using purposive sampling technique. The data for this study was collected using semi-structured in-depth interview and Focus group discussions. The findings of this study show that land disputes, marital conflicts, drinking alcohol, clan conflicts and religious conflicts are the major types and causes of conflict in Kaffa society. It is also found that there is gender difference concerning the immediate actions taken in the incidence of conflicts. While women mostly limit their action to verbal insults, men tend to opt to physical violence. The most common traditional conflicts resolutions mechanisms in Kaffa society are Shimgelena, Tommo and Eqqo systems. While shimgelena is also widely used in other communities of Ethiopia, Tommo and Eqqo are indigenous to Kaffa society. Although those traditional conflict resolution mechanisms are most effective among older people, younger people tend to disregard the mechanisms due to ‘modernity’ and religious reasons.

**Keywords:** traditional, conflict resolution, shimgelena, tommo, eqqo.



DOI: 10.22521/unibulletin.2018.72.5

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UNIBULLETIN • ISSN 2147-351X • e-ISSN 2564-8039

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## Introduction

Figures from the Ethiopian 2007 census and growth rate reports of the National Statistical Office show that the people referred to as the Kaffa make up 874,716 of the total national population of around 84 million (Central Statistical Agency [CSA], 2007). The Kaffa consists of various ethnic groups found in the southwest of Ethiopia. This paper addresses the majority ethnic groups of the Kaffa namely, the Gommoro, Manja, Mano, Menit, and Bench peoples. These ethnic groups mainly speak the Kafigna, Menit, Benchigna, or Amharic languages; with a high likelihood of them speaking more than one (Chernet, 2008; Yoshida, 2013).

The majority agriculturalist Kaffa live in the rural highland, settled in kin-group villages, while a number are engaged in various petty-trade and small- to medium-level businesses in the capital of the zone and in other nearby zones (Chernet, 2008).

A feature of Kaffa is that traditional institutions operate to administer affairs of societal members as side-by-side structures of the modern state agencies. The traditional institutions take organizational forms based mainly on councils of elders set up at different levels from neighborhood/village to clan/tribal levels (Yoshida, 2013). Their purpose is to set and enforce norms and rules governing aspects of life ranging from simple socioeconomic relations between individuals to wider community, local and regional issues. Settlement of disputes and management of conflict aimed at obtaining justice and social order among community groups and members is one area in which these institutions are engaged.

Centuries of history of traditional systems of governance in Kaffa and the rest of Ethiopia to date suggests that societies that are recently incorporated in to the Ethiopian state have forms of social control other than those with relatively long history of state bureaucracy that have modern institutions of law. Perrow (1991), whose thesis of “society of organizations” provides one such sociological theory is that large and complex organizations are the key to orderly management of social, political, and economic activities. Perrow reasons that large organizations have absorbed society, where, among other things, “activities that once were performed by relatively autonomous and usually small informal groups (e.g. family, neighborhood) and small autonomous organizations (small businesses, local government, local church, voluntary organizations) are now performed by large bureaucracies” (p. xx).

The fact that the present day legal landscape in most parts of Ethiopia is made up of multiple forms of legal systems (traditional, modern, religious) raises the observer’s interest to revisit the distinction drawn between the so called “large organizations” and “small informal groups” involved in the maintenance of social order (Assefa, 2001; Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit [GIZ], 2013). According to Perrow’s theory, traditional ethnic-based, community institutions such as the ones found in Kaffa are nothing but the source of friendships and marriages, counseling, recreation facilities, apprenticeship training, and retirement options.

While the formal legal system has been undergoing processes of transformation in the face of multiple challenges and problems, the traditional system has also been struggling to overcome problems that range between lack of full recognition by the modern system to practical issues of achieving decisions on legal cases and enforcing them (Deutsche

Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit [GIZ], 2013). The transformation being pursued within the formal legal system includes computerization of information management, automated information provision to litigants on the status of their legal cases, upgrading of manpower skills and strengthening of coordination between the different formal legal bodies such as the police and judicial courts.

The aim of the current research is to explore the traditional conflict resolution and reconciliation mechanisms functional in Kaffa society of Ethiopia which can be used for interventions of peacebuilding and reconciliation.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Conflict is inherent in virtually every aspect of human relationship, from sport to parliamentary democracy, from fashion to arts to paradigmatic challenges in the sciences, and from economic activity to intimate relationships. Yet, it can be among the most serious social problems the human race faces.

Most societies have a variety of traditional ways of managing and resolving conflict. These may be informal or formal through respected elders within a family, clan, religious groups, or community that may help people in conflict solve problems themselves, or may impose solutions which are seen to be legitimate because of the elders' wisdom and/or position (Chapman & Kagaha, 2009; Zartman, 2000). Alternatively, formal systems of courts and administrative decision-making bodies may be established in order to hear and decide on a variety of cases.

Contemporary Africa is faced with the reality of numerous states that have to grapple with the inevitability of conflict. On their own, the fledgling institutions in these states cannot cope with huge demands unleashed by everyday conflict. The continuing role and influence of traditional leadership in modern Africa is hard to miss (Zartman, 2000). However, the uniqueness of traditional institutions, by virtue of being indigenous and the use of local actors, cumulatively enables them to either resist or even sometimes subvert the state. These traditional institutions, also known as endogenous conflict resolution systems continue to demonstrate their relevance in post-conflict states (Chapman & Kagaha, 2012; Zartman, 2000).

Greater use of traditional community-based systems, such as elder's arbitration councils, could help resolve longstanding conflicts between communities in Kaffa zone. However, although the community is used to resolving conflicts in the area, there is no clear study conducted in these issues and procedures are not certain.

The current study aims to explore particular traditional mechanisms used in the area and the procedure followed in reconciliation process.

#### *Research Questions*

- What are the major causes of conflict in Kaffa society?
- What are the frequently occurring phenomena during the process of conflict in Kaffa society?
- What are the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in Kaffa society?
- Are the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in Kaffa society effective?

### *Significance of the Study*

To date there have been no research studies conducted on the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms of Kaffa society. As an exploratory research, this current study aims to contribute in many ways. First and foremost, the study will help as a springboard to further research, both as a source of data and of ideas in this unexplored area. The study will also help people using the mechanisms, government and other development partners develop strategies based on the research finding so as to resolve conflicts locally by indicating the norms and strongest aspects of the mechanisms. The study will also reveal some the indigenous values and culture of Kaffa society to the outside world.

### *Scope of the Study*

The study is conducted on the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, and does not concern modern mechanisms. Geographically and culturally, the study is limited to Kaffa zone and does not include respondents and other traditional conflict resolution mechanisms of nearby societies like Sheka, Bench Majji, or Jimma. Participants under the age of 40 years are not included as respondents for interview or for focus group discussion. As with any qualitative research, the findings may not be generalized or deemed applicable to other societies.

### *Limitation of the Study*

Two major limitations applied in conducting this research. The first concerns the issue of people's willingness to give information during the focus group discussions and interviews. This was a specific challenge while seeking information on indigenous practices such as Eqqo and Tommo which include have aspects of worship; because people were fearful of being judged as followers of such practices in what is a Christian-dominated society.

The other challenge faced was the problem of transportation to/from and accommodation within rural areas. This problem was due to some of the areas selected being remote, although this was deliberate in order to avoid urban bias.

### *Ethical Considerations*

The research has acquainted itself to social science research protocol and code of ethics. The participants consented to be interviewed and were briefed beforehand with regards to the objective of the study. Their permission was also sought to audio-recording of the interviews and for photographs to be taken during the focus group discussions. Names and other personal information are kept confidential. Names mentioned in this paper are all fictional names, and do not resemble the participants of the study in order to ensure their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses.

### *Review of Related Literature*

#### *Understanding Conflict*

The history of conflict is as old as human history itself. Ever since, communities have been competing for control of resources and for dominance. These competitions have inevitably led individuals as well as social, political, economic, and religious groups to engage in conflicts. Whilst it is true that conflict has devastating effects and is unwanted, it is also true that conflict is unavoidable and continues to occur (Chapman & Kagaha, 2009; Perrow, 1991; Zartman, 2000).

Indigenous conflict management and resolution mechanisms use local actors and traditional community-based judicial and legal decision-making mechanisms in order to manage and resolve conflicts within or between communities (Assefa, 2001; Zartman, 2000). Local mechanisms aim to resolve conflicts without resorting to the state-run judicial system, the police, or other external structures.

More than anybody else, governments, whose main duty is the maintenance of peace and security, are responsible for providing their people with alternative conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms; and popular and widely used among these are indigenous mechanisms (Chapman & Kagaha, 2009; Ramakrishna, 2013).

#### *Conflict Resolution Mechanism*

Since the causes of conflict differ, it is better to employ use different mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflict.

Indigenous mechanisms are time-tested and effective in handling conflicts that arise within the Horn (of Africa) region. Had it not been for these mechanisms, situations could have been exacerbated and spun out of the government's control and developed to full-scale war between neighboring states. When compared with non-indigenous, indigenous mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflicts are less complex, save time, and give a chance to parties in conflict to actively participate to resolve their own problems, and to handle their affairs in a relatively more acceptable way to all parties (Assefa, 2009).

#### *National Situation and Trends of Conflict*

Traditional mediation is effective in dealing with interpersonal or intercommunity conflicts. This approach has been used at the grassroots level to settle disputes over land, water, grazing-land rights, fishing rights, marital problems, inheritance ownership right, murder, bride price, cattle raiding, theft, rape, banditry, and interethnic and religious conflicts. Traditional mediation is effective in addressing the mistrust and animosity that can be the local root cause of conflicts (Assefa, 2009).

Grassroots mediation depends on an existing tradition of local conflict management mechanisms, even if these are currently considered dormant. Credible local people must be willing to undertake the role of traditional mediators. There must first be a pause in the violence, therefore traditional mechanisms are often ineffective when the conflict is in an acute phase, especially if the conflict is violent and widespread (Chapman & Kagaha, 2009; Zartman, 2000).

#### *Local Situation and Trends of Conflict*

Indigenous conflict mitigation mechanisms can address some of the proximate factors that fuel conflict at the local level: access to land or water, marital issues, grazing, and other property issues; and can provide appropriate, sustainable and long-term solutions. While local peace processes are unlikely to stop a large conflict, they can help prevent smaller disputes from escalating into larger or widespread conflicts (Assefa, 2009).

Many communities perceive conflict resolution activities directed by outsiders as intrusive and unresponsive to indigenous concepts of justice, and prefer to resolve conflicts within the community. Conflict management mediators from the local community are generally more sensitive to local needs than outsiders and are immersed in the culture of the

violence-afflicted community. Their activities are rooted in conflict's context, address some of its immediate causes, and can bring about long-term solutions. They can draw people away from the conflict, breaking its momentum (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit [GIZ], 2013).

Indigenous conflict management and resolution mechanisms aim to resolve conflicts locally, preceding or replacing external dispute resolution and thereby reducing reliance on external structures. Traditional mediation helps the community keep control over the outcome of the dispute. Implementing this approach does not require sophisticated party structures or expensive campaigns; it provides a low-cost, empowering means of resolving conflicts within a relatively short timeframe (Ramakrishna, 2013; Zartman, 2000).

In many societies, elders have traditional jurisdiction in facilitation, arbitration, and monitoring outcomes. Local conflict mediators typically possess moral status, seniority, neutrality and respect of the community; they are acceptable to all parties and demonstrate leadership capacity.

## **Methodology**

### *Study Area and Period*

The study area is found at about 470 kilometers from the capital of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State. The two specific woredas (districts) that the study was conducted in are 74 kilometers (Chena Woreda) and 25 kilometers (Decha) from Bonga, the capital of Kaffa zone (Chernet, 2008).

Dwellers of the Kaffa are mainly Gomorro, Manjo, and Mano; while, Menit, Amhara, Oromo, Bench, Kambata, and Hadiya also live in the area; most of whom are settlers. The study was conducted from January to June, 2014.

### *Study Design*

Exploratory qualitative study design is employed in this study. Exploratory design is used as the issue is relatively new and there are no previous studies conducted on the subject matter in the study area. Qualitative approach was preferred in order to capture the dynamic situation in the opinions, attitudes, experiences and expressions of the different research participants.

### *Sampling*

The participants of the study are elders, religious leaders and influential people from the study area. Purposive sampling technique was used in this research. The sample size was determined based on saturation of information obtained from those included in the study.

### *Data Collection*

A semi-structured in-depth interview and focus group discussion guide was prepared to achieve the objective of the study. After the instruments were prepared and evaluated, the data collection process commenced by selecting and training data collectors. Audio-recording and note taking were used to record the data acquired from the respondents in both the interviews and the focus group discussions. The methods of data collection used in this research are discussed as follows.

*In-depth interview:* A comprehensive data collection tool (interview schedule) was prepared to conduct an in-depth interview. The schedule comprised all relevant thematic issues/components that are relevant to the research questions. The Selection of interview participants/key informants (Elders, religious leaders and influential individuals) was based on criteria such as their knowledge of the assessment variables and different aspects of the prevailing situation in their respective area and Kaffa in general. 12 in-depth interviews were conducted with relevant individuals.

*Focus group discussion:* Useful information was collected from the discussants through focus group discussion. Focus group discussion involves a group of persons representative of different groups assembled to discuss various aspects of the assessment under the guidance of a group moderator. Two focus group discussions were conducted at both sites of the study area.

#### *Data Analysis*

The audio-recorded interview and focus group discussions were transcribed and translated by two professionals in order to crosscheck that the recorded information was appropriately transcribed. After transcription, the data were analyzed through thematic data analysis. This method involves the creation of response categories and the categorization of responses where necessary. Chronological writing was then used to describe the process of conflict resolution mechanisms as narrated by the respondents.

## **Results**

### *Socioeconomic Situation of the Study Area*

Bonga, the main town of Kaffa zone is found 450 kilometers southwest of Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. According to the 2007 census, the people referred to as the Kaffa make up 874,716 of the total Ethiopian national population of around 84 million. More than half of the Kaffa population is under 20 years of age (Central Statistical Agency [CSA], 2007). As compared to the national figure, urbanization is very low in Kaffa zone. In the rural area, which accounts for 85% of the population, life is still in a primitive condition. Public services such as schools and health facilities are only at the initial stages of development. More than 70% of the rural children do not go to school. Most young girls and boys of the urbanized area are school dropouts, and unemployment is very high (Central Statistical Agency [CSA], 2007; Chernet, 2008).

There are highly rigid and complex class systems based on production, occupation, descent and status. Kaffa zone is home to the Kafficho people, though there are different clans under the main Gommoro tribe. Traditionally there are higher- and lower-status clans. From the lower-status clans, Faki (Mano) and Menja are considered the lowest. Menjas, especially, were segregated for an unknown period of many years and had no social interaction outside of their clan (Yoshida, 2010).

Besides these occupational groups, hierarchical structured descents exist based on a class system with complex institutions interrelated to one another. The most problematic and still existing discrimination, although with very slight improvement, is the Menja people who are extremely outcast from political, economic and social relations with others. They live in Kaffa and the peripherals of Jimma, and Sheka zones, and are a very low status group. Their population in Kaffa is estimated at 10-15% of the total (Yoshida, 2013).

### *Overview of the Nature of Conflicts in Kaffa Society*

Conflict is an inevitable feature of any society. This view is also reflected in the Ethiopian proverb “While living together let alone people, two legs of an individual would go in to conflict.” As in any other society, conflicts are also observed in Kaffa society. The following briefly describes the nature of conflicts found within Kaffa society.

According to the information acquired from the interview and focus group discussion, there are several reasons for incidences of conflict in Kaffa community. One of these factors concerns the issues of land disputes. As the majority of Kaffa people are agrarian, they place a high value on land possession as that is their major means of livelihood. Often conflicts over land possession turn grave because most people do not compromise over matters of land which they believe belongs to them. In relation to land and agriculture, conflicts also arise due to the mishandling of cattle, especially during crop seasons when animals belonging to someone else damage the crops of another farmer.

Another common factor concerns marital conflicts. Conflicts in marriage occur mostly because of promiscuous habits on the side of either the husband or the wife, but mostly the husband. Marital conflicts which occur due to this or other reasons may result in divorce, if they are not resolved in a timely manner. Causes of divorce may also lead to the extension of conflicts during the partition of property between the separating husband and wife. Such conflicts are often kindled by people on the side of the wife who may make much claim intending to secure more property for their side.

In addition, conflicts are also observed when people are intoxicated through liquor. Though drinking alcohol in itself is not a root cause for such conflicts, it can be the trigger of conflicts rooted in other factors created when the parties were sober. People start such conflicts through verbal abuse, commonly observed in the spirit of drinking alcohol. Such verbal conflicts often take on violent forms after a while.

Clan conflicts are also sometimes observed due to superiority and inferiority complexes among the majority *Gommoro* and the minority *Menja* clans. There are also several recent instances of religious conflicts between followers of different religions.

The type of people who are mostly involved in conflicts include those who are abnormally conservative to handover land to other parties; alcoholics who have unresolved covert disputes with other people; married people practicing promiscuous habits and hot-tempered people who reflect partisan bias during divorce cases; members of some clan groups; and some religious fundamentalists.

When conflicts occur, the immediate actions of the in conflicting parties is mostly taking immediate revenge through the violent use of sticks or stabbing. However, most often, there is a gender difference concerning the immediate actions taken in the incidence of conflicts. While women mostly limit their action to verbal insults, men tend to opt for the aforementioned physical violence. In cases of group conflicts such as those involving clans, the most common actions taken can be as grave as the destruction of property, the burning of houses and even mass killings; however, such conflicts occur rarely. The duration of conflicts depends on its type. In cases when the causes of the conflicts are very serious such as conflicts over land, it may take years until the conflict is resolved. However, medium-level

and simple conflicts are generally resolved in a short amount of time; sometimes immediately at the very spot and instance of the conflict.

#### *Traditional Ways of Conflict Resolution in Kaffa Society*

There are different ways of resolving conflicts in Kaffa society. Some of these mechanisms are also commonly used in other societies as well, whereas some are indigenous to Kaffa society. Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms have long been employed in Kaffa society. As all interview and focus group discussion participants' unanimously agreed, such traditional conflict resolution mechanisms have been in use for generations; since time immemorial.

The most common traditional conflicts resolutions mechanisms in Kaffa society are:

- Shimgelena: resolving conflicts through elders or religious leaders
- Resolving conflicts using leaders of indigenous beliefs i.e. "Tommo" and "Eqqo"

#### *Shimgelena*

This traditional conflict resolution mechanism in Kaffa society is based around the elders (*Yehager shemagelewoch*). As people having a central role in resolving conflicts through this mechanism, the choice of *yehager shimagelewoch* (elders of the area) considers the following criteria:

- Age: people of an older age are preferred as such they are likely to have general wisdom, knowledge of the culture, and self-control in cases of temptation.
- Ability: people having a convincing level of ability.
- Charisma: respected people whose judgments are accepted unquestionably.
- Blood ascription: people having "good" and respected hereditary origin, especially in terms of their clan.
- Religious leaders: especially if the two parties in the conflict are followers of the same religion.

Based on these criteria, the elders are selected as judges and who also suggest the terms of agreement to bring an end to conflicts.

The time duration for the *Shimgelena* process of resolving conflicts depends on certain factors. First is the level of the conflict. In this regard, simple and medium-level conflicts are resolved mostly within one session, while very serious conflicts may take up to four or five sessions until final resolution is reached. Another factor is the nature of the people, especially those on the side of the recipient. If these people are liberal, the time the process takes tends to be shorter, whereas if they are conservative and rigid, it tends to take longer to resolve the conflict. As the majority of the Kaffa society are agrarians, the dates preferred for *Shimgelena* are communal days-off such as monthly church holidays and the Sabbath, when people do not farm. This may also affect the duration the *Shimgelena* process.

When we see the process of *Shimgelena*, at the beginning, people on the side of the offender (*yebeday wegenoch*) select and send some elders (other than the judges) to the people on the side of the victim (*yetebeday wegenoch*). Those elders propose an idea for peaceful reconciliation of the dispute through *Shimgelena*. The people on the side of the victim may or may not accept this proposal at the first encounter. If they do not accept at first, the people on the side of the offender would select other group of elders and send

them again after three or four days had passed. On this second occasion, the offended people will most likely accept the request. However, they require the presence of the first set of elders whom they initially refused, in order to give their positive response in an explicit manner. They do so to show their reason for initial refusal is not because of disrespect for the first set of elders; and to avoid disappointing the first set of elders.

Once agreement is reached to resolve the conflict through *shimgelena*, they decide on the date for the *shimgelena* and the number of elders on the side of the offender and the offended to attend the *shimgelena*; these are in addition to the neutral elders appointed as the judges. Usually equal numbers of elders are selected on both sides. When the decided date arrives, all parties avail themselves and the compromise starts.

When the process starts, the first step is that both the offender and the offended represent their bailers to avoid verbal abuses during the *shimgelena*. These bailers are the persons to be held responsible in case if verbal abuse occurs from the respective party they represent.

Then, both the offended and the offender present their cases to the elders. After thorough consideration and investigation of the matter, the elders may order either parties or only the offended to stay out of the room in which they are gathered. This helps them to have free discussion in order to reach agreement among themselves concerning their final judgment. After such discussion, they call in the offender to express what blame they see as theirs and to advise them to admit their wrong deed; and they also require them to suggest a commensurate compensation according to their offense. After that, the elders call in the offended and make their statement to bring lasting solution and so state the required compensation in the presence of both sides.

The type of compensation can be in the form of a sheep, oxen, or some amount of cash. If the compensation is monetary, the amount of money shall cover all the expenses of the offended, which they had spent/lost directly due to the conflict. Sometimes, after the type and amount of the compensation is decided; the people on the side of the offended, especially if they are wealthy or intending to win social respect, declare that they have willingly lifted the compensation and do not require it, with positive intentions.

Then, cold water is presented in a circular tub (*Saffa*) and a bunch of fresh grass is inserted in to that water. Then all the elders put their hands into the tub containing the cold water and fresh grass. This symbolizes their wish for the conflict to cool down like the cold water, and for the future life of both parties to flourish like the fresh grass.

After this blessing by the elders for future peace, all parties celebrate by eating and drinking whatever has been prepared for the occasion. Significantly, at this point it is the discussion and play between the offender and the offended that shows the end to their past silence and disappointment.

According to the information from the focus group discussion, once conflicts are resolved through the *shimgelena* process, the terms of the agreement are respected with strict compliance. Such strict compliance to the terms of the agreement is mainly due to the respect the communities have for the elders and the social sanction in it. Failure to observe the decision of such respected elders would result in being outcast from the community since it is considered as disrespect for the elders and ultimately the sacred values of the

society. In some cases after agreement is reached through the *shimgelena*, some level of punishment (mostly materialistic or monetary) is decided in a case where either or both parties violate the terms of the agreement in the future. Fear of incurring such punishment on the side of either party also helps strict compliance to the terms of agreement.

Moreover, once conflicts are resolved through *shimgelena*, a condition of genuine peace, security and trust is created among the conflicting parties. The revival of conflict over the same issue is not likely to occur between the two parties, once it is resolved through *shimgelena*. In addition, mostly the relationship between the conflicting parties becomes smoother over time after resolution of conflict through *shimgelena*.

#### *Conflict Resolution Through Eqqo/Kalecha*

“*Eqqo*” or its Amharic meaning *Kalecha* is a spirit that is traditionally accepted by a significant segment of Kaffa society. The person on whom this spirit is believed to reside is known as *Alammo*. With this spirit, the *Alammo* is believed to have a gift of prophecy.

The *Alammos* play a significant role in settling conflicts that happen among respective members of *Eqqo/Kalecha* followers with the help of the spirit vested in them. The *Alammos* are also believed by their followers to have solutions to other problems in the lives of their followers. The procedures followed in conflict resolution through *Eqqo/Kalecha* are as follows.

If a neighbor, family member, spouse or other person in the social circle does something unfavorable to another party, that party or a family member or the group harmed appeals their case to “*Gaberecho*” so that he can arrange time to present the case officially to the holder of the spirit and honest judge, the “*Alamo*.” Once the case is presented to the *Alamo*, the next process is arranging a discussion time with the group and/or individuals accused of mistreating this party or their spiritual brother so as to make a joint meeting as soon as possible.

After discussion with the accused party, a joint meeting would be scheduled along with the regular adoration called “*Yebbo*” which is believed to have the visit of the spirit to foresee and find solution for the problems the followers come with. It is at these times the meeting is usually arranged. The reconciliation process is made at this time based on the belief that the *Alamo* gets spiritual ties and support from the *Eqqo* in order to make good judgments and to let the other members learn a lesson so that such problems would not occur to others.

When the *Yebbo* spiritual ritual ceremony ends, both parties are asked to kneel down in front of the *Alamo* and present the root causes of the problem. After they finish presenting their point of disagreement, the *Alamo* allows them to sit and wait for final settlement.

The *Gaberecho* and *Alamo* hold a brief discussion on the situation that has been presented and a decision is made. They also put into consideration the experience the parties have in conflict, their obedience to the values of the community, and their cooperation in social life and commitment to the spirit.

Finally, both parties are invited to come and sit near the *Alamo* and *Gaberecho* to listen to their consultation and final decision. Different types of punishments are decided for the party who harmed its fellow brother/sister, depending on the type of offense. If the offense

was oral/insulting, the offending party is usually given advise and made to compensate the offended party by arranging an event at the *Alamo's* residence in order to make an official program of reconciliation and forgiving, known as "*Shuune Decho*." If the offense is material loss and other serious offences, the person is punished with commensurate compensation to the other party. The compensation is made in not more than two months' time. However, if the material loss is too great to be afforded in such a short time, and with understanding from both sides and the *Alamo*, the time can be extended; but not for more than an additional two months.

After the final decision of settlement is made by the *Alamo*, the offender kneels down, requesting their brother/sister to forgive them in front of the gathering. The other party places their hands upon the offenders head and confirms that they have forgiven them in the name of the *Eqqo*. Then, the offended and offender move to the *Alamo* to greet and thank him for his time and energy in organizing this reconciliation.

Finally, coffee is prepared in the *Alamo's* house and served to everyone in the house. When the coffee ceremony ends, the *Alamo* allows them to go to their houses in peace and to meet with their friends who missed their friendship. The compensation date is also decided before they leave the house as it is to be done in the residence of the *Alamo*.

According to the information acquired from the focus group discussion, once a conflict is resolved through the *Eqqo/Kalecha* mechanism, there are no tendencies for conflicts to be revived where they have been resolved in this radical manner. This is because the *Alamos* are such respected personalities among their followers, that their followers do not want to disappoint them and their spirit by going against their decisions.

#### *Conflict Resolution through "Tommo"*

*Tommo* is another traditional conflict resolution mechanism used by some members of the Kaffa community. This traditional conflict resolution mechanism has similar procedures and rationale to *Eqqo/Kalecha*, except for the difference of the people employing these mechanisms.

*Tommo* is one of the clans of Kaffa society. It also refers to the leader of such a clan who has a gift of knowing what people have done to other people even if he has not seen it in person and/or heard of that act from other people. For the purpose of this study, the term shall be taken to have the latter understanding. The *Tommo* conflict resolution mechanism is used by all clans of Kaffa society, beyond that of just the *Tommo* clan. The procedures followed in resolving conflicts through the use of *Tommo* are as follows.

At the beginning, as in other traditional conflict resolution mechanisms of Kaffa society, the person/group harmed or mistreated brings the case to the "*Tommo*". The *Tommo* presents the case to his accomplices and organizes a task force that will handle the case.

The task force organized by the *Tommo* talk to the offender to brief them about the situation and to understand the cause for the conflict with the other member, mentioning that the issue has gone to the *Tommo* and that he wants to know about the case. The task force collects all the required information, and returns to brief the *Tommo* on all the information they have gathered. Depending on the information collected by the task force, the *Tommo* arranges a program for the joint meeting and sends messages to both parties that he wants to settle the problem by a certain date that the *Tommo* thinks all necessary

parties can be available. After discussing with the conflicting parties, the task force formed for the reconciliation process confirms the convenience of the date for the meeting back to the *Tommo*.

When everyone attends on the date decided; the *Tommo* makes a short formal speech about the overall situation and the objective of the gathering. Following his opening speech, the offended party is requested to present their case, mentioning as to how and when the problem occurred. Then, the offender is allowed to have a say on the points mentioned by the person/groups who claimed to have been harmed/mistreated. After listening to both sides, the *Tommo* together with the task force settles the situation by making a reasonable and balanced decision for both.

Then, the reconciliation process ends with both parties forgiving each other and reuniting with water and fresh grass presented in a small circular tub (*Saffa*), which symbolizes hope and care to wash away the sin as they put their hand in the water, and grass to cleanse; after which they hug each other. This last procedure is similar to that followed in the *Shimgelena* procedure of conflict resolution.

Like other traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in Kaffa society, the *Tommo* mechanism resolves conflicts in a lasting manner. People who use this mechanism tend to be bound by the decisions of the *Tommo* because deviance from the words of the *Tommo* is believed to bring a curse to the violators in ways such as loss of wealth or affliction of mental illness.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The major types and causes of conflict in Kaffa society are:

- Disputes over land and disputes due to cattle destroying other peoples' crops;
- Marital conflicts and disputes that arise during divorce cases;
- Conflicts that arise during the drinking of spirits, that mostly have other hidden root causes;
- Clan conflicts due to superiority/inferiority complexes between the majority *Gommoro* clans and the minority *Menja* clan;
- Recent experiences of conflicts due to religious fanaticism.

Upon the incidence of conflicts, immediate actions taken by the parties in the conflict include verbal abuse, physical attack, destruction of property, burning of houses and killings.

The most common traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in Kaffa society are *Shimgelena*, *Eqqo/Kalecha* and *Tommo*. The latter two are indigenous to Kaffa society. *Shimgelena* is also used by other societies, but it has peculiarities of application in Kaffa society.

Through the aforementioned traditional mechanisms conflicts are resolved in a sustainable manner. People in conflict strictly adhere to the decisions of the figures in these mechanisms due to the respect those people command in Kaffa society.

Even if the conflict resolution mechanisms of Kaffa society are relatively well known and used, there is still a lack of knowledge with regards to traditional conflict prevention mechanisms. Further studies on traditional conflict prevention mechanisms are needed, and to seek out ways for their application in current modern society. This could help prevent

material destruction and loss of life observed during conflicts; and in doing so, it could help enhance security in society.

According to the information gained from the participants of this study, when people take immediate measures during incidences of conflict, there is a tendency later for the parties involved to regret their acts. These measures taken often tend to exacerbate rather than to resolve the conflict. It would therefore be advisable to raise awareness that measures should not be taken while people are still emotional from the conflict.

The traditional conflict resolution mechanisms discussed in this study are widely used by the older generations. However, these mechanisms are little known and rarely used by today's younger generation. The continued application of these mechanisms in the next and upcoming generations is therefore questionable. So, there is a need to impart the knowledge and application of these mechanisms to younger people. In other words, there needs to be an awareness created with regards to the knowledge and application of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms among today's youth.

Finally, it is equally important to support the figures in the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. Surprisingly, some of these figures especially the indigenous *Eqqos* and *Tommos* face some kind of disgrace from people who are not their followers. Though people may question the status of such people in terms of faith, the contribution of these figures in conflict resolution deserves recognition and support.

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## Appendix

### List of Interviewees

#	Name	Woreda	Kebele
1	Kero Gebre	Chena	Shisho Ende
2	Woldemariam Worku	Chena	Wacha
3	Takele Tefera	Chena	Wacha
4	Wudinesh Abebe	Chena	Wacha
5	(Sajin) Sitotaw Shiferaw	Chena	Shisho Ende
6	Hailegebriel Mamo	Chena	Shisho Ende
7	Woldegiorgis Haile	Decha	Beha-Gonno
8	Alemayehu Gibbo	Decha	Awasho
9	Aklilu Gadissa	Decha	Beha-Gonno
10	Abebe Woldegiorgis	Decha	Beha-Gonno
11	Belete Deribew	Decha	Awasho
12	Ahmed Kedir	Decha	Awasho

### Translation of Local Terms

Local Term	Translation/Meaning
<i>Shimgelena</i>	A conflict resolution mechanism through elderly people
<i>Yehager shimagelewoch</i>	Elders of the area
<i>Tommo</i>	Leader of a tribe who has the gift of knowing something which other people have done but he has not seen/heard of (where there is no witness for that act by other people)
<i>Eqqo</i>	A spirit of prophecy
<i>Alammo</i>	A person who holds the spirit of <i>Eqqo</i>
<i>Gabberecho</i>	People who accompany the <i>Alammo</i> in all its actions and movements
<i>Saffa</i>	A circular tub, especially used to wash cloths
<i>Menja</i>	A minority and out casted clan of Kaffa society
<i>Gommoro</i>	A term used to commonly refer to the rest clans of Kaffa society other than the <i>Menja</i> clan.
<i>Shuune Decho</i>	Official reconciliation and forgiving program in conflict resolution through <i>Eqqo/Kalecha</i> .
<i>Yebbo</i>	Regular adoration of the spirit of <i>Eqqo</i>
<i>Yebeday wegenoch</i>	Parties of the offender
<i>Yetebeday wegenoch</i>	Parties of the offended
<i>Woreda</i>	A basic local government administrative unit in Ethiopia similar with district