

Women's roles in conflict resolution and peace among Sidama people of Hula Woreda, Sidama National Regional State

Dagne Shibru Abate

Hawassa University, Hawassa, Ethiopia

Citation: Dagne, S. (2021). Women's roles in conflict resolution and peace among Sidama people of Hula woreda, Sidama National Regional State, *Ethioinquiry Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 5-20.

Publication history: Received the revised version on 16/12/2021; Published online in 27 December 2021; Web link: <https://journals.hu.edu.et/hu-journals/index.php/erjssh/>

Full length article

Open access

ABSTRACT

This study aims to assess women's roles in conflict resolution and peace-making among the Sidama people of Hula woreda, Southern Ethiopia. The study employed a qualitative approach and purposive sampling was used to select informants from the total women population. To collect necessary and relevant information, various instruments were used. These include an in-depth interview, group discussions, and structured observation. Concerning data sources, both primary and secondary data sources were employed. In Ethiopia, as in other developing countries, Men's and women's respective positions and roles have been presented in such dichotomous categories as public/domestic, nature/culture, and production/reproduction. These categories depict the men-women relations that constitute a relation of domination and subordination. To further discuss theoretical orientations, symbolic anthropology, feminist perspectives, and structural-functionalist views were examined. As the findings of this study depict, among others, one of the many major reasons for the low participation of Sidama women in indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms relates to low social status and discriminatory attitudes towards women. Women are the primary victims of conflict. The inclusion of women in conflict resolution mechanisms can be beneficial to ensure sustainable peace in society. To enhance women's participation in conflict resolution and peace building, patriarchal attitudes and discriminatory value systems should be eradicated. Women must be involved in conflict resolution at all levels. When they are not active participants, the views, needs, and interests of half of the population are not represented, and, therefore, interventions will not be as appropriate or enduring.

Keywords: conflict, conflict resolution, peace, Sidama, women

1. INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an inherent and ever-present element of human society from the dyad to the largest human group. There is no human group in which life moves along in harmony at all times (Offiong, 1997). Handled badly, it harms relationships among individuals, organizations, communities, and nations. And handled well, it helps to identify and solve problems and build stronger, deeper relationships. Conflict mishandling is quite common

in developing countries, partly due to their underdevelopment. Africa is the typical example of this (OSSREA, 2004).

In Ethiopia, it is commonly known that women and men do not have the same right of using resources; they do not equally participate in politics and decision-making. They have many differences of experience in conflict circumstances. Men dominate the political, economic, and social arena in all cultures (Esrael, 2009; Bamlaku, et al, 2010). Women have long been excluded/underrepresented from the political, social, and economic life of the society in which they live (Melisew et al., 2015).

However, it is believed that one of the important means of creating greater stability in Africa is giving a greater voice to African women. Women need to become major voices in the decision making not just about development - although that is crucial - but on the other issues, including security matters (OSSREA, 2004). The Ethiopian government proclaimed and enacted different laws and regulations to change the legal trajectory and improve women's involvement in the socio-economic sphere and enhance their development. The 1995 FDRE Constitution guarantees equal rights to women and men and puts an end to discriminatory laws and regulations that adversely affect women (Article 35 of the FDRE Constitution). To put this into effect, institutional arrangements have also been put in place at all levels to push the realization of the constitutional objectives and ensure women's empowerment (Tsehay and Lebesech, 2010). Key government programs and strategies, including the Plan for Accelerated and Sustainable Development to End Poverty (PASDEP): 2005-2010(FDRE, 2005a) and the Growth and Transformation Plan I: 2010/11-2014/15(FDRE, 2010) pay special attention to women and their legitimate questions for social, economic and political inclusion. In response to these, considerable efforts have been made to enhance women's political representation and economic empowerment and maintain their legal and human rights (Nigatu and Tesfaye, 2015). Among these significant efforts, in 2018 the federal government of Ethiopia made 50% of the ministers' council to be women.

Despite these efforts, the situation on the ground is quite different. It is unfortunate that Ethiopian women, particularly those living in the rural areas, in most cases, are still given lower status, and most customary laws and practices consider women as unfortunate and weak. Similarly, among the Sidama, social, economic, and political institutions accord primacy to men, and the issues that concern women are subordinated to these frameworks (Markos, 2014). This does not mean that women do not play any role in society. "Since women make half of the entire population and also emanate from their maternal proximity to children and the whole family, their role in all aspects of human activities need to be given due attention and significant recognition"(Jemila, 2014). Accordingly, this study is all about women's roles in conflict and conflict resolution endeavours by taking experiences from Hula woreda as a case study.

Problem Statement

Biases against women are a worldwide phenomenon, at virtually every income level and in every stratum of society but are pervasive in the poorest parts of Africa (EGLDAM, 2008). Similarly, Ethiopian women face structural, cultural, and economic constraints upon their participation in conflict resolution and peace building processes. Many of the constraints stem from the perception that women are "not associated with violence"(IIRR, 2009).

Despite these, Ethiopian women are significant contributors in building peace and resolving conflicts that occur between individuals, families, clans, and others. “During the conflict, women’s role is very pivotal in promoting as well as stabilizing the conflict immediately by making distress call (uuu...uuu...uuu!, i.e. help... help... help!) to call the neighbourhood in the surrounding area, organizing themselves in the form of a human chain to enter physically between the conflicting parties (Tuso, 1988). For example, women are the only group in the Oromo society who have such status of being woyyu (sacred) with authority to prevent conflict; no one in society would pass over a chain of human bodies created by women and attack the other side party”(ibid.).

Contrary to these, women actively took part in the hostilities during the Second World War and the Gulf War, in liberation wars, and in intrastate conflicts such as in Sri Lanka where one-third of the fighting forces consist of women. In Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda, women participated in ethnic cleansing. They are also involved in a conflict indirectly by supporting their men in military operations and by providing them with the moral and physical support needed to wage war (Tsjeard and Frerks, 2002). Women are also responsible for instigating conflicts that occur at a community level, for instance, by singing certain songs, enacting certain dances, and delivering certain gender-related insults, all or any of which can be used in promoting male dispute. Within the Amhara society, for instance, there is a famous Amharic saying, "*Set yelakew mot ayferam*", which could roughly be translated as "a female sent man does not afraid to die ". Such sayings demonstrate the fact that women exert significant influence over the existence of either peace or conflict within the community and the nation as a whole. In north-western Ethiopia, it is common for women to invite their husbands towards conflicts by questioning their manhood, so if the men shy away from conflict, the women may use a well-known insult and say, "*Kekmisegiba*" which is roughly translated as "if you do not act like a man why do not you wear a women's dress?"“They also use gender-specific insults like "*setua set agibita*"“a woman married to a woman” (IIRR, 2009).

In South Omo Zone, during traditional ceremonies such as girls’ circumcision, women chant a song of praise for the killers during the war and insult the non-killers. So the men who are not respected by women become unbearable for a man to listen to the insulting songs directed to him by women. This enforces the man to engage in killing and cattle raids owing to such songs. In other areas of the country, women may create community disharmony by being conspicuously absent from important community events or by not being present in the marketplace. In this case, they may claim that their absence is because they have been “disgraced” by their husband’s failure to enter into conflict to protect them (ibid).

This shows that women are stakeholders in peace and conflict because they are impacted by and have an impact on violence in very specific and gendered ways. Analyses of peace and conflict should, therefore, include women's experiences (Hedstrom and Senarathna, 2015).

Though not well studied and documented, the above assertions are also applicable in conflict scenarios of the Sidama people as well. Different scholars conducted researches on conflict and conflict resolution in the Sidama society. Of these, Kifle (2007) studied building stability in a multinational/ethnic society by taking conflicts in Sidama society as a case in point; Markos, together with his colleagues (2011) researched *Sidama History and Culture*. Recently Markos (2014) also studied *State-Society Relations and Traditional Modes of Governance among the Sidama*. However, no one of these researchers studied

the role of Sidama women in conflict and conflict resolution. Thus, this research aims to fill this gap.

Significances of the Study

The findings of the study are intended to provide a reliable and up-to-date account of the role of Sidama women in conflict resolution/peace endeavours. Since there is no sufficient researched document on the status of women in conflict and conflict resolution, this study could contribute towards initiating other researchers who want to research the same area further; it can give them basic and preliminary information on the subject under study.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study was to assess women's roles in conflict and conflict resolution among the Sidama people of Hula woreda, Southern Ethiopia. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- describe how Sidama women understand conflict and peace;
- list the major sources of conflict among the Sidama;
- uncover customary institutions that help Sidama women protect their honor;
- identify the prevailing changes in the customary conflict resolution institutions.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 The study area

The Sidama people are located in the southeastern part of Ethiopia and are bordered by the Oromia Regional State in the northeast and southeast, with Gedeo zone and Oromia regional state in the south and Wolaita zone in the west.

The Sidama belong to the Cushitic language family group of peoples; the language is known as *Sidammuafo*. *Sidammuafo* is spoken by over 4 million people. Religiously, the Sidama practice Christianity (protestant, Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and Catholic), Islam, and indigenous religions.

The Sidama is a patriarchal society where males/husbands make important social, economic, and political matters in the family affairs and out there, and they follow a patrilocal residence rule in which newly married couples construct their residence in or around the compound of the groom's father. In terms of descent systems, they are patrilineal in which descent is reckoned through males'/fathers' lines.

The Sidama customarily practice clan exogamous marriage. Though monogamy is the -accepted form of marriage, polygyny is also widely practiced, decreasing due to the expansion of the Protestant religion. The family is the basic unit of resource holding and decision-making. However, power within the family is not evenly distributed among members. The dominance of men in the economic, social, and political spheres is apparent. The husband is the breadwinner and principal decision-maker over major resources such as land and livestock.

Hula, the specific study woreda, is located about 96 km southeast of Hawassa, the regional capital. Agereslam is the principal town of Hula woreda. Of the 35 rural kebeles of Hula woreda, Adola Kora and Chelbessa kebeles are selected for this study's specific study kebeles.

Sidama women are marginalized from the rights of inheriting, administering, and transferring land. If a man does not have a son, his land would be inherited by his close relatives such as a brother. This means, among the Sidama land inheritance is open to sons; in the absence of sons, it could be inherited by other male close relatives. Informants tell that an unmarried girl has no problem using her father's land if she wishes to do so. Upon marriage, a woman joins another clan. Thus, she cannot inherit land from her father. The father, when becoming old and/or sick, being impressed by the care and support of his daughter, can give land to his daughter as a gift. This means contrary to the custom of Sidama, she might be allowed to get married and live by the land she got as a gift.

2.2 Methods

Gender relations as socio-cultural constructs are explained through cultural logic based on prevailing values and norms of a society. These may constitute issues of meaning, beliefs, values, perceptions, and feelings that could effectively be approached qualitatively.

This study employed mainly a qualitative approach. Purposive sampling was used to select informants from the total population. To collect necessary and relevant information, in-depth interviews, group discussions, and structured observation were adopted. With regards to data sources, both primary and secondary data sources were employed. The primary data sources were Sidama women and men living in Hula woreda who had different societal statuses. These include local, knowledgeable women, religious leaders, and woreda authorities who in one way or another, participated in conflict resolution endeavours in their respective localities. Besides, court officials and police investigators at different levels were interviewed. To this effect, an in-depth interview was employed with ten women and six men.

Regarding focus group discussions, six focus group discussions were conducted (each group comprised 6-8 women) in the study area. In the FGDs, members of different sexes, age groups, economic and social statuses were given equal attention. This method was also used to triangulate some outcome differences encountered in individual interviews. Structured observations were also used to investigate the environs of the study area. This method was useful to look into the day-to-day relationships among the community members and local customary conflict resolution settings. The secondary data sources include reports, official and unofficial documents, and published and unpublished materials from the offices of the woreda administration, culture and tourism, and women, youth and children's affairs, university libraries as well as internet sources.

As this is qualitative research, ongoing data organization, interpretation, and analysis were carried out as of the very first day of the fieldwork. Field notes were used and developed into a full-fledged research document.

Theoretical Approach

The theoretical approach in anthropology on the study of gender relations has evolved in the framework of inequality studies. Men's and women's respective positions and roles have been presented in such dichotomous categories as public/domestic (Rosado, 1974), nature/culture (Ortner, 1974), and production/reproduction (Edholm et al., 1977). These categories depict the men-women relations that constitute a relation of domination and subordination. Society assigns different statuses and roles to men and women upon which the gender power relations rest. These value and behavioural patterns are socio-cultural constructs, which influence real social relations, eventually defining rights to resources. Women's lower

socio-economic positions as compared to men's have been assumed to be universal, whereby gender constitutes a basis of inequality as it affects access to power, resources, and prestige (Getaneh and Mamo, 2016).

Gender role is the belief that individuals socially identified as males and females tend to occupy different ascribed roles within social structures and tend to be judged against divergent expectations for how they ought to behave. Owing to their gender, women face social exclusion in many forms. In explaining the role that women have in conflict resolution and peace building, there are theoretical approaches that include, among others, feminism, structural functionalism, and symbolic anthropology.

The feminist movement of the 1970s was indeed a direct result of excluding women from the labour force and undervalued housework (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). As such, feminists argue that men and women should equally participate in the labour, public sector, and home with due and equal regard to their capabilities. Luchsinger (2010) argues that in a conflict and post-conflict situation, there is systemic exclusion of women from the public sphere (and war), which becomes difficult to move out of. The needs of women are not met and their capacity and potential to participate in peace building and recovery remains unutilized and underutilized. "They form a sizeable part of the population, yet the chances of achieving sustainable peace are diminished by their under participation." (McCarthy, 2011).

The structural-functionalist theory states that conflict is so bad that disintegrates the unity of society. Nader (1968) recognized that this theory emphasized both the structural sources and the structural functions of conflict. "The structural functionalists consider society as an equilibrium system whose parts play a role in the maintenance of the whole. Therefore, as part of social life, conflicts also work towards maintaining the social structure (Lewellen, 2003).

As to the proponents of this theory, "social institutions are functionally integrated to form a stable system and a change in one institution will precipitate a change in other institutions. Societies are seen as coherent, bounded and fundamentally relational constructs that function like organisms, with their various parts (social institutions) working together to maintain peace and stability" (Bemlaku, 2010). In our case, Yakka is one of the social institutions in which Sidama women collectively play socio-cultural and political roles in their society. This institution is known for resolving the conflict and building peace by symbolizing women with a stick called Siqqo.

According to Clifford Geertz, the prominent symbolic anthropologist, cultures are embodied in public symbols and actions. Symbols are means of transmitting meaning. Geertz focuses on how symbols affect the way people think about their world and how symbols operate as vehicles of culture. The importance of symbolic anthropology is that it is an instrument for examining specific aspects of a society that involve symbolic representation and interpret the social structure and what is respected to a particular society (Geertz, 1983). Lastly, he argued that cultures may be 'read' as if they were texts, and has gone far, especially early in his career, towards trying to show that cultures are integrated in a 'logic meaningful' way (ibid).

Each of the three approaches discussed above has, in one way or another, contribution to explaining conflict and conflict resolution endeavours. Besides, no one theory alone can fully explain a reality. Women's role in conflict and conflict resolution should be understood contextually beyond the common thoughts discussed above. To better comprehend conflict and conflict resolution, there is no worth of dismissing one or the other of the thoughts for depending on several factors as all thoughts illustrate the real nature of conflict and peace in their way.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Results

Definition and Sources of Conflict and Peace

The Sidama understand conflict as a disagreement between two or more individuals/groups emanating from differences in interests, ideas, ideologies, and aims of the people concerned. Conflicts arise within families, neighbours, villages, clans, or a national or international level.

Informants revealed that conflict might also lead to hostility or physical confrontation. The Sidama believe that conflict is omnipresent in all societies and is a phenomenon that is inevitable in all human relationships due to differences in interests, goals, values, and aims among people.

As to one of my elderly woman informants, among the Sidama, peace is expressed as *keere*, and is defined as a complex mix of prosperity, truth, productivity, togetherness (living in love), and progress/development. *Keero* is also their routine greetings. The Sidama regard peace (*Keere*) and forgiveness (*Mararo*) in higher normative value than revenge and retaliation.

Since *Keere* is so valued, there are numerous mechanisms to restore *Keero* when it is disturbed or lost for whatever reason. Forgiving is a non-violent means to *keere*. *Keere* has a special place and is valued by the Sidama and it is expressed in greetings (*Keereho*), songs, prayers, proverbs, blessings, folklore, and public speeches. The Sidama believe that *Kero* is important to improve the quality of life and development in the economy of a country.

My FGD informants expressed peace as an attitude, state of mind, and mode of behavior that reflects mutual respect and love with one another. They further stated that women are engaged in peace building through positive childcare, responsible mothering, and nurturing children in ways that prepare and socialize them towards peaceful co-existence. Among the Sidama, a culture of peace, tolerance, and an anti-war tradition is embedded in and transmitted via mothers.

Among the Sidama of Hula woreda, different types of conflict arise with varying frequency. As per the information from key informants and woreda court and police documents, conflicts instigated via homicides are rare, yet resource-based conflicts are among the most prevalent causes of conflict in the woreda. Informants list conflicts over landholdings and inheritance, issues of boundary, destruction of property by cattle, theft and robbery, adultery, abduction of girls, and girls' refusal of arranged marriage as rampant ones in the woreda.

The Roles of Sidama Women in Conflict and Conflict Resolution

With regards to conflict resolution, informants reveal that the conflict resolution mechanisms among the people of the study area are broadly classified as customary and formal mechanisms. Both methods are functional in the area. "While the formal one was imported from the European legal system, the indigenous mechanisms, which is time-tested and effective, is made by the people and derived its legitimacy from participation and consensus of the local community" (Alula and Getachew, 2008). However, informants regrettably report that the state's adoption of the formal conflict handling mechanisms disregarded indigenous practices and their authority and legitimacy; the formal methods assumed the major roles while the indigenous practices held a secondary place.

Besides, customary institutions give primacy to men, and the issues that concern women are subordinated to this framework. The issues of identity and property rights are based on the descent male line. Until recently, informants disclosed that Sidama society did not recognize land ownership rights of women except under special conditions when the husband dies and where the wife claims guardianship of her children. Male domination is highly visible ranging from the household up to the highest social level.

Sidama women could not take part in elders' council (songo) meetings of their respective localities. They are not allowed to participate in important political, economic, and social matters of their community. They do not involve even in issues concerning themselves. They are considered simply housewives whose role is, among others, merely raising children, caring for the old and the sick, shouldering domestic affairs like decorticating *ensete*, milking cows, cooking food, fetching firewood, and potable water to the family. Though a husband and his wife produce and rise joint property/possession, during divorce the woman leaves her home without having any share of her part. This shows that Sidama women are subject to marginalization.

Despite these, informants reveal that Sidama women are effective in influencing elders and others to intervene in conflicts and mobilize resources to finance peace meetings and support demobilization. Sidama women have also led ways in mobilizing the society for engagement in peace work. Informants reveal that as far as women's role in peace building is concerned, the *Sidama of the study area has also a tradition of providing their women to their "enemy" group for the sake of peace and tolerance. They exchange a woman as a mechanism of inter-group conflict resolution.* This age-old culture of bringing female members of the community onto the negotiation table by the Sidama of the study area shows the significant role women have in conflict resolution and peace building.

Contrary to these, Sidama women are also responsible for instigating some of the conflicts that occur at the community level, for instance, by singing certain songs, enacting certain dances, and delivering certain gender-related insults, all or any of which can be used in promoting male dispute. During confrontations, they disseminate war news to other men of their group/ally usually through crying. When conflict erupts, they participate in fetching water to fighters and providing care to the injured. Sidama women praise men who join the war without hesitation and at the same time they also ridicule, nag, belittle and abuse those who are reluctant to join the war. They bless conflicts and prepare food beforehand, and welcome those who return with blessing, song, and dances. They give moral and *psychological support like ululation and hailing* for those who engaged in conflict /war.

Yakka: Sidama Women's Institution of Conflict Resolution

The Sidama have typically used indigenous mechanisms to prevent conflicts and abuse of women. Among all these mechanisms, there are institutions under which the Sidama women could strengthen their solidarity and have a chance to come together to address their complaints against unfair treatment by men in their society through Yakka institutions.

Yakka is an indigenous socio-cultural institution that focuses on defending the rights of women. Yakka is organized and led by elder women as a unique institution in terms of purpose and objectives focusing on protecting women from domestic violence and other attacks. All members of the institution are women engaged in preventing domestic violence, abuse, and mistreatment. Yakka also strives to draw the attention of

the community in times of the aforementioned misfortunes affecting women, urging community leaders to involve and interfere in protecting women from maltreatment. If the community fails to respond and solve a given problem, members act to the extent of protesting and rioting against the transgressor in various forms (Markos, et al., 2011).

The Sidama women hold their honour very dearly so that they have formed a special women's group, known as Yakka, whose purpose is solely "*meentuhale*" or "to give honour to females." The institution is meant to protect women against physical and psychological harm from men. All married women of the community are required to join the Yakka. If any woman refuses, the Yakka may tear down her thatched roof house, smash her pots, or "confiscate" her precious store of butter. Meanwhile, if a woman's husband prevents her from joining the Yakka, the women of the community will enact a "fine" upon him. Often this takes the form of an ox, which is a very big fine, to the Sidama of Hula area indeed.

To the Yakka, many things constitute a threat to their honour. If a person beats or insults his wife and does physical and psychological harm (particularly against a pregnant woman, a woman who recently gave birth, a woman engaged in decorticating *ensete*, a woman slept naked, and sick woman), he would be subjected to the actions of yakka. Whatever the cause of conflict, the Yakka take up their Siqqos (sticks) and gather before their leader, who is known as the Qaritte. Qaritte is the oldest woman in the village. She is highly respected and considered as sacred. Qaritte is a model for fairness, justice, love, and motherhood. Qaritte is an honest, trustworthy, and wise woman. She well knows the norms and values of her society. Her words are respected and obeyed. Not only village women, but the men also give due respect and honour to Qaritte.

Amongst the Sidama women, a stick is known as Siqqo, a symbolic 'staff of peace', which is used to uphold and celebrate the idea of female honour. Apart from the above functions, Siqqo has a pivotal role in the field of conflict resolution mechanisms. The use of the Siqqo has also been combined with the formation of a specific women's unity group, Yakka, that would act as a powerful female conflict resolution tool.

A village woman, being 7-21 in number, organized and led by Qaritte go to the offender's house. When they apprehend him, they will beat and even do acts that may degrade his honor. They may take off all his clothes and smear him with fresh dung, and they would compel him to go naked. Besides, he may also be enforced to perform activities that are assigned to females as per the custom of the community. The yakka might not limit their mob acts against the offender. They may break house furniture and destruct homestead farms which include *ensete*, the staple food crop of the Sidama. The women involved in such mob actions teach the offender, so he would not involve in such acts or behaviours that undermine the honour of women ever again. Such a move represents serious female displeasure, and the woman will immediately persuade the man to submit. Then he will be required to pay compensation. Subsequently, he is expected to slaughter a bull or sheep to the crew and reconciliation would follow. If this has not happened, the Yakka would smash their Siqqos in the man's face.

Although the Sidama has long relied on the powers of the male elders to maintain peace and order, it has also been strengthened by the contributions of the female elders. Older and more experienced women are perceived as being wise and just. Religiously devout, they are also valued as mediators and counsellors of women in conflict. It is Qaritte's job to ensure that the honour of the females of the community is protected. Having reviewed the nature of the "crime", the Qaritte will lead the Yakka in pursuit of the offender, who will soon find himself surrounded by an angry and emotional group

of hissing women. Waving their Siqqos in his face, they will chant, "Let this offense be gone! Let it not be repeated!" A jury will then be formed, before which the man must defend himself. If he is found guilty, he will be coerced to pay compensation. Typically, he will be forced to slaughter one of his bulls or sheep and give the choicest cuts to the Yakka. The yakka institution is frightened by males. This institution is highly respected in the Sidama community. No one crosses women's path as they are holding Siqqo on their way to resolving a conflict, or returning from one or returning from prayers regarding the whole community.

As to my informants, female honour could not be easily achieved. It costs so much. Informants listed out some of the major benefits of Yakka. These include empowering women in a male-dominated society, delivering swift justice, lessening the workload of the secular courts, and acting as a powerful limiting against male-female abuse.

Among the Sidama of Hula woreda, informants reported that whenever conflicts among different parties could not be resolved by elders of the community; as last resort, it is taken to the group of Qarittes. The Qaritte, apart from resolving conflict between husband and wife, mediate conflicts among brothers, families, neighbours, and different clans of the Sidama.

Sidama women are very frightening while cursing as they can influence while blessing. The women's curse is very frightening and believed to be dangerous. The yakka, which went out to resolve a conflict, do not return home without resolving conflicts between individuals or groups. If they can, they try to find a solution or arbitrate by themselves. However, if they do not arbitrate the case, they could pass it on to elders. If elders are also unable to resolve it, they will do whatever possible solution. If the case is still beyond their capability, they curse and sanction him from any social life until the man returns for apology and resolution by himself. So, Sidama women can ask for help when they see conflicting parties and make the way for conflict to end with arbitration before serious damage could happen.

If the arbitration did not bring the solution, the final duty would be a curse to conclude the case. Besides, if women do not arbitrate the conflicting parties and go home without slaughtering a bull/sheep or without blessing, it is taken as a curse. Even though they do not declare, it is believed that their spirit felt bad and it is assumed that bad things happen to the wrongdoer or the community at large. These bad things include death upon any family member, lightening up on the wrongdoer, etc. This means the women are believed to have strong spirits, who never forgive anybody for they have no energy, fall when thrown and cry when beaten. There is a belief that their spirit pays wrongdoers back for what they did.

When the conflicting parties refuse the arbitration, any of their close relatives (brothers or fathers) can slaughter an animal to those women not to go home with an empty stomach. This is because the damage caused may pass on to the conflicting parties and may also destroy their close relatives. In other words, the reason why the relatives of the offender pay slaughter are to prevent a death that may occur upon them, their family, or relatives due to the curse.

Displaying 'Private Body Parts' as Conflict Resolution Tool

Rather than standing as a passive witness to the event, the Sidama elderly women throw themselves between the fighters and outstretch arms. As the role of motherhood is highly respected among the Sidama, they directly engage in resolving conflict in their community.

The Sidama elderly woman uses respect due to her motherhood to appeal for calm amongst fighting parties, yet in other cases, she may use her mere physical presence as a form of appeal. In appealing for mercy, the women of Sidama are renowned for their bravery.

As a last resort, sometimes special mothers, the Qaritte, use begging in the name of their breast and womb to end the conflict between two conflicting groups. A group of Qaritte, comprising five women, goes to the actual war front and uncovers their dresses up to their private body parts to end the war. Women will traditionally reveal their breasts and 'womb' and remind the conflicting parties that it was the women who gave them life saying "*for the sake of our breasts that gave you milk, for the sake of our womb that gave your birth, stop quarreling!*" Women also exert great influence over the attitudes and behavioral patterns of future generations. Eager to avoid conflict whenever possible, Qaritte brings the parties in conflict to understand that fighting and conflict are not acceptable. In doing so, they do not only discourage conflict from the domestic arena /community at large but they also ensure the value of peace as an important requirement that would be firmly imprinted into the minds of future generations.

***Qu'ne* and *Gorfa* as a Tool to End Conflict**

While *qu'ne* is a tin garment made to tie the waist of an old woman, *gorfa* is a Sidama woman's traditional coat made of leather. The Sidama elderly women, particularly the Qaritte, use these garments as tools to end conflict among individuals and groups. They put these materials on the ground between the conflicting parties and beg them by saying "for the sake of our tradition, respect our words and obey what we request you to do. No one could get profit from conflict. Harmony, love, friendliness, and tolerance are God-given entities that could give you strength."

"You better end the conflict prevailing between you and back to the routine farming activity." Using this way, the Sidama women, as a last resort, try to end up conflict in their community. The *qu'ne* and *gorfa* are used to resolve conflict if the conflict cannot be resolved by different levels (family, neighbor, and clan) of Sidama elders.

Marriage as a Tool for Conflict Resolution

Sidama women play a vital role in stabilizing conflict and bringing sustainable peace through marriage. When married women give birth to sons, it is believed to fill the missed life that was perished in the clash. The enemy clan welcomes and will arrange a marriage with the other party. This enables the two enemy clans to bring together and build sustainable peace and stability. The Sidama women have always been the centre for integration through marriage that brings the two enemy clans together and cements their positive relationships. In Sidama culture, the married woman connects the two parties who have levelled each other as enemies, and thus she is considered as a backbone of the newly established family/community. This can be termed as bridging two enemy clans.

According to the key informants in the traditional Sidama society of the study area, women are considered to be bridge builders and symbols of unity between different families through the institution of marriage. Informants state that this type of marriage is proposed by any one of the conflicting clans and/or third parties to resolve conflict and build peace between the conflicting families/parties. Of course, this is done with the full consent of the couple who engage in the marriage companion.

This can indicate how women in the old days were mature and more concerned for the wellbeing of their society. Based on the above results, we can say that women have been the basis for the development of peace and unity of the Sidama community for a long.

Changes in the Customary Conflict Resolution Institutions

Customary conflict resolution institutions are not archaic entities protected from the effect of change. These institutions are currently changing. Though indigenous conflict resolution formalities and procedures are more or less intact, currently, increased involvement of the government in the affairs of indigenous institutions is observed.

Formerly, in the process of mediation of different disputes through indigenous mechanisms, a male disputant could argue with community elders for his rights; he could express and forward his ideas fully and freely. However, women could not express their ideas and feelings directly; instead, they express their feelings through males who are the closest persons to them. Thus, the women had to be satisfied with the argument presented for their rights through the male representatives. They had to accept the elders' final decision based on the arguments presented by males representing the female disputants.

Currently, since societal attitude towards women's rights is changing, there is progress in women's participation in formal and informal conflict resolution mechanisms. According to informants, although the Sidama women were highly deprived of their right to live equally with their male counterparts in the community, today the use of the Siqqois is declining because the younger generation has been increasingly influenced by the global media and modern education. The expansion of protestant religion is also mentioned as one of the factors contributing to the decline of this institution. The young generation does not have respect for this custom and institution. They view such women's institutions as backward, primitive, savage, and outdated. The expansion of formal education (especially increased participation of females in school), urbanization, and modernization have contributed to the change.

3.2 Discussion, Conclusion, Recommendation

Though bias is observed in favouring males, customary conflict resolution mechanisms are practiced in all parts of Sidama; especially rural communities prefer the customary systems to the formal one. These conflict resolution mechanisms have lasted for a long time and still are being practiced for there are persistent and different kinds of intra- and inter-group conflicts among the community. Informants state that in comparison to the formal ones, customary mechanisms are less complex, time-saving, and are easily accessible and understood. More importantly, they give a chance to parties in conflict to actively participate in resolving their problems in their way. However, as the community is moving towards modernization, formal norms are growing while the customary practices hold a secondary place, especially in urban areas.

One of the many reasons for the low participation of Sidama women in indigenous ways of conflict resolution mechanisms has to do with the low social status they have been given by the community and their discriminatory attitudes towards them. Women are the primary victims of conflict. Therefore, the inclusion of women in conflict resolution mechanisms can be beneficial to ensure sustainable peace in society. To enhance women's participation in conflict resolution and peace building, patriarchal attitudes and discriminatory value systems should be eradicated. Women must be

involved in conflict resolution as well as management efforts at all levels. When they are not active participants, the views, needs, and interests of half of the population are not represented and therefore, the maltreatments from any side will not be appropriate or tolerable.

Siqqo, among the Sidama women, is a Yaka institution in-built mechanism that can be seen as a means of check and balance to the men-dominated Sidama social order. Women can stop a violent conflict that can happen between clans by using their Siqqo. Physically Siqqo is a stick, but as the custodians of Sidama oral literature says, a deeper and richer symbolic meaning of the term should be sought within the context, history, and culture of the people who named and practiced it. A woman uses her Siqqo to enforce women's rights and resolve conflicts according to the tradition of the Sidama. If the traditional Sidama women see people fighting, they use their Siqqo to intervene. They will put their Siqqo between the fighters to separate them till the community elders come to resolve the conflict. The fighting men do not continue fighting in the presence of the Siqqo since they are bound by the tradition and culture of the traditional law of the Sidama. The Sidama women use their siqqo to control and defend over their honour and rights. Especially, when a man beats his wife or pregnant wife, the yakka group would come together with their leader / qaritte and resolve the conflict.

Informants report that among the Sidama of Hula woreda, these days, due to the influence of urbanization, modern education, and the widespread of the protestant religion, younger generations are not willing to accept those traditionally embedded aspects of women's customary conflict resolution institution like Yakka, which they used to mitigate conflict for centuries. They consider it backward, primitive, and savage. Therefore, there should be a need for revival and appreciation of those indigenous women's institutions. This could be possible through educating and socializing the younger generations and empowering women to use their gifts in the tasks of conflict resolution and peace building.

Women and men have different experiences of resolving conflict, cooling violence down, and prevailing peace; women must be allowed and encouraged to bring unique insights and gifts to the process of conflict resolution and peace building.

Women's core priorities for peace and security could be increased by allocating greater and more sustainable financial resources to support their economic empowerment and increase their political participation. If this is done, they can make important political decisions both at family and community levels. These in turn will enable to witness an environment in which women enjoy real freedom, justice, and equality both during and after conflicts.

In sum, we need women in conflict resolution and peace-building endeavours because they are half of every community and their tasks of peace building are so great that they must be equal partners in the process of conflict resolution and peace building.

REFERENCES

- Ayke Asfaw and Mekonnen Feleke.(2008). Customary Dispute Resolution in the SNNPRS: The Case of Sidama. In Alula Pankhurst and GetachewAssefa (eds), *Grass-roots Justice in Ethiopia: The Contribution of Customary Dispute Resolution*. Addis Ababa: French Center of Ethiopian Studies.
- Bamlaku Tadesse, Yeneneh Tesfaye and Fekadu Beyene.(2010). Women in Conflict and Indigenous Conflict Resolution among the Issa and Gurgura Clans of Somali in Eastern Ethiopia. *AJCR*.Volume 10 No. 1. pp. 85-110.
- Coser, L. (1956).*The Functions of Social Conflict*. Glencoe: Free Press.
- EGLDAM.(2008). *Follow up National Survey on the Traditional Practices on Ethiopia*. Addis Ababa: EGLDAM.
- Esrael Etansa. (2009). *Gada system conflict resolution and the quest for survival*. Unpublished MA Thesis, Department of peace and security studies, Addis Ababa University
- Geertz, C. (1983). *Local Knowledge: Fact and Law in Comparative Perspective in Local Knowledge*, pp. 167-234. New York: Basic Books.
- Hedstrom J. and Senarathna T.(Eds.) (2015). *Women in Conflict and Peace*. Stromsburg: IDEA
- IIRR. (2009). *Culture at Crossroads: Ethiopian Women in PeaceBuilding*. Nairobi
- Jemila Adem (2014). *Women and Indigenous Conflict Resolution Institutions in Oromia: Experience from Siinquin of the Wayyu Shanan Arsi Oromo* in Adami Tullu Jiddu Kombolcha District of the Oromia Regional State. A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Addis Ababa University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Art in Social Anthropology. Addis Ababa University, College of Social Sciences, Department of Social Anthropology.
- KifleWansamo, S. J. (2007). *Towards Building Stability in a Multinational/Ethnic Society in Sidama Land, Ethiopia*. A Ph.D. Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution. Lancaster University.
- Lewellen T. (2003). *Political Anthropology: An Introduction* (3ed Ed.). Prager West Post.
- Luchsinger, G. (2010).*Power, Voice and Rights: A Turning Point for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific*. New York: UNDP.
- MacCarthy, M. K. (2011).*Women's Participation in Peacebuilding: A Missing Piece of the Puzzle?* Research Electronic Journal.
- Markos Tekle, ZinashTsegaye, Desalegn Garsamo, GeremuGarje and BeyeneBada (2011).*Sidama History and Culture*. Hawassa: Sidama Zone Culture, Tourism and Government Communication Affairs Department.
- Markos Tekle. (2014). *State-society Relations and Traditional Modes of Governance in Ethiopia: A Case Study of Sidama*. Addis Ababa: A Ph.D. Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Political Science and International Relations, AAU

- Melisew Dejene, Gossaye Ayele and Solomon Wolde. (2015). Women, Autonomy and Decision Making in SNNPR: A Situation Analysis. In Tesfaye Semela et al (Eds.), *Impacts of Women Development and Change Packages on the Socioeconomic and Political Status of Women in SNNPR*.
- Moosa-Mitha, M. (2005). Situating Antioppressive Theories within Critical and Difference Centered Perspectives. In L. Brown, & S. Strega, *Research as Resistance*, pp. 37-72. Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press.
- Nader, L. (1968) *Conflict: Anthropological Aspects* in International Encyclopedia of the Social Science: vol .3, pp 230-241. New York: Macmillan Company and Free Press.
- Nigatu Regassa and Tesfaye Semela. (2015). *Regional Context and Research Framework* in Tesfaye Semela et al. (Eds.),. *Impacts of Women Development and Change Packages on the Socio-economic and Political Status of Women in SNNPR*. Center for Policy and Development Research (CPDR).Hawassa University. Hawassa, Ethiopia
- Offiong, Daniel A. (1997). Conflict Resolution among the Ibibio of Nigeria. *Journal of Anthropological Research*, vol. 53 No. 4, pp. 423-441.
- OSSREA. (2004). *Proceedings of the International Conference on African Conflicts: Management, Resolution, Post-conflict Recovery and Development*. United Nations Conference Centre, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Tsjeard B. and Georg F.. (2002). *Women's Roles in Conflict Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Literature Review and Institutional Analysis*. The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, Conflict Research Unit.