

# **The Role of Traditional Conflict Management Institution among the Alelto Oromo Community: The Case of *Jaarsa Biyyaa***

*Eskedar Girum*

*National Library and Archives*

## **Abstract**

Conflict may virtually arise in any social setting. It is unavoidable in human society. A study of conflict and its traditional settlement mechanisms can contribute to the understanding of various norms, cultures and belief systems of a given society. African societies had developed their own traditional institutions that often deal with conflicts. In the light of that, elderly people are respected as trust worthy mediators. African traditional institutions maintain social balances and harmony basing on the true cultural perspective of the society. Like other traditional African countries, different ethnic groups in Ethiopia have developed and practiced their own customary codes and traditional institutions to manage conflicts. Among the different ethnic groups of Ethiopia, the Oromo as the major ethnic group in the country, with large number of population size and settlement area, hold variety of traditional knowledge and culture. Some scholars from social anthropology, sociology, history and other related fields have studied the social organization, conflict management, history and culture of the Oromo people. However, researches regarding conflict management mechanisms through traditional institutions and how this reflects the value systems of the Alelto Oromo communities are limited. Therefore, researches on traditional conflict management mechanisms are relevant areas to be explored. This study is about the role of traditional conflict management institution among the Alelto Oromo community, the case of Jarsumma institution. The objective of the study is to investigate the nature and types of conflicts, causes of conflicts and the role of Jarsumma institution to

manage conflicts in the study area. For this research, relevant data was collected through a combination of primary and secondary source of data. The primary sources include participant observation, key informant interview, in-depth personal interview, focus group discussions and case method. The collected data will be analyzed and interpreted; based on the analysis, summary and conclusion will be presented.

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## **Introduction**

Conflict is inevitable; it can arise at any level of human interaction. It is a normal part of human life. Economists relate conflict with competition of economical interest. Others considered conflict as antagonism, aggression, disagreement. For Rummel (2007:1) conflict “is against peace, against an important human value. Peace has always been among humanity’s highest values...for some, supreme”. Gove (1976:476) defined conflict as a clash, competition, or mutual interference of opposing forces. Some scholars use the term conflict and dispute interchangeably. There is a significant polarity among theoretical approaches regarding the concept of conflict, causes of conflict and its settlement mechanisms. The exploration of conflict theory reveals a number of observations. There still remains a lack of cohesion among theorists.

The types and causes of conflicts vary from one society to another. The conflicting parties may be individuals, families, communities, clans, persons, lineages. But, human societies have mechanisms to manage conflicts. Various mechanisms are employed throughout the world to heal breaches of peace. These mechanisms range from traditional procedures to formal judicial system. The types of conflict management mechanisms are subject to the cultural diversity of communities.

Africa is the home of diverse societies. In most African societies, elders are respected mediators and reconcilers. African people use to have their own traditional mechanisms to deal with conflicts. Traditional conflict management institutions emulate peaceful coexistence, maintain and preserve social harmony among the society.

Like other traditional African countries, different ethnic groups in Ethiopia have developed and practiced their own customary codes and traditional institutions to manage conflicts. Among the different ethnic groups of Ethiopia, the Oromo, as the major ethnic group in the country, with large number of population size and settlement area, hold variety of traditional knowledge and culture. Similarly to the other Oromo communities, the value and belief systems of the Alelto Oromo community remain important in their social, cultural and political lives. Lanek (1999:31) states that “the indigenous methods and their rationale must be thoroughly researched, analyzed and documented. Ways of adopting them to current situations and realities should be sought.” Therefore, a traditional conflict management mechanism is an important area to be explored. Accordingly, this paper aims to describe and analyze traditional conflict management institution among the Alelto Oromo community, particularly the case of *jarrsa Biyaa* institution.

The objective of the study is to investigate the nature and types of conflicts, causes of conflicts and the role of *Jarrsaa Biyaa* institution to manage conflicts in the study area. For this research, relevant data was collected through a combination of primary and secondary source of data. The primary sources include participant observation, key informant interview, in-depth personal interview, focus group discussions and case method. The collected data will be analyzed and interpreted; based on the analysis, summary and conclusion will be presented.

## **Background of the study area**

Aleltu is found in Northern Shewa zone of Oromia. It is bounded by Kimbibit and Jida woredas from north, East Shewa zone from south, Amhara region from east and Berech woreda from west. The total area of the woreda is 588km<sup>2</sup>. It has two major towns, Miqawa and Fitch Galila. The numbers of kebeles in the wereda are 22, of which 20 are rural and two are town kebeles. Among the 22 kebele's five of them are inhabited by Amhara dwellers (AWIDS, 2007). The Aleltu Oromo are what anthropologist define "sedentary agriculturalist". Of the total Woreda area about 28,048 hectare is under 8762 farm holders and about 17,502 hectare is under cultivation. Most of the people earn their livelihood from agriculture and animal husbandry (AWIDS, 2007).

Regarding their social life, the community stress importance of neighborhood, friends, relatives, and voluntary association like *debo*, *idir*, *iqub*, *mahber* and ritual ceremonies. They are aware of importance of kinsmen, neighborhood, friends, economic cooperation and voluntary organizations obligations in time of trouble and other social events. The voluntary organizations play an important role to bring peace and reconciliation to small scale conflicts like insult, failure to respect associations obligations, simple disagreements etc. If conflict is beyond their capacity they initiate the parties to take their case to the major traditional conflict management institutions. Among the Aleltu Oromo, family is viewed as the basis of the life of each members of the community. Regarding the lineage, sub-lineage and clan system of the Aleltu Oromo people, they considered themselves as people from one clan. According to the genealogical tradition, the Aleltu elders believe that they are the descendants of Abichu clan of Tuulama. Lineage is the most predominant factor for social status.

## **Religion: *Waaqa* and *Ayyana***

There are some Muslims and Protestants in the Alelto Oromo community. However, when asked the majority of Alelto Oromo people considered themselves as adherents of Orthodox Christians. Although, majority of the Alelto Oromo community presented themselves as adherents of Orthodox Christian, the history of the people's religion is tied to their own historical account. Most of them are practicing their traditional Oromo religion. They strictly follow the cultural values and rules of the *qaalu* institution. The *qaallu* institution has significant and decisive role in their spiritual and secular life. If a person realizes that he/she is in the wrong or disobeyed taboo; he comes to the *qaallu* for mercy. Bartels (1983:14) stated that the Oromo believe in supreme god known as *Waaqa*. The supreme being that they call "*waaqa*" or sky or god, is the creator of all things and the source of all life. Sin is simply a breaking of this cosmic order. Almeida (1628-46) cited in Gada Melba (1988:23) maintains that, "the Oromo never worshipped false gods or curved statues as substitutes". They believe and worship only one "*waaqa*". Baxter cited in Mohamed (1990:7) stated the following.-

*Waaqa* was the sky god and the sky itself, manifesting dual nature of the two moieties with in the nation, controlled fertility, peace, and life giving rains which were the condition sine qua non for farming and pastoral society. Prayers for peace, fertility, and rain are the center of Oromo religion. People relate various concepts of the supernatural spirits to their everyday lives. Mystical beliefs and rituals are present in the community. Because of the belief in spirits/*Ayyana*, they relate illness and disease, personal and communal catastrophes, accidents, deaths, drought, famine to the intervention and offences of the law of spirits/*Ayyana*. Breaking a taboo or prohibition leads to undesirable consequences or bad luck. The mode of life of the community unwaveringly governed and guided by their religious belief system.

## **Causes and Types of Conflict among the Aleltu Oromo**

Causes and types of conflicts vary from one community to another depending on their socio- economic, cultural, political and geographical conditions. The Aleltu Oromo community share common socio-cultural and economic system. The community believes that they are one clan. Accordingly, there is no inter-clan conflict in the study area. They experienced different types of conflict cases among themselves (intra-ethnic conflicts) caused by various factors. Both the Aleltu Oromo community and other neighboring groups respect each other and live peacefully. However, conflict is an inevitable feature of all social relations; it may arise at any level of human interactions. Individuals of the neighboring woredas may come into conflict deliberately or unintentionally with persons from the Aleltu Oromo. Even if, conflict is inevitable, conflict with the other neighboring groups is very rare. When it happens elders from both communities play a decisive role to bring reconciliation and peace, since, the Aleltu Oromo community has more or less similar conflict management mechanisms with the neighboring groups, particularly Berech woreda and Jida woreda. Therefore, except some interpersonal conflicts, there is no inter-ethnic or clan conflicts between the Aleltu Oromo and the neighboring groups in the study area.

### **Causes of Conflict**

Conflicts have different causes, different effects and dynamics. It arises from a multitude of sources. Economic interest is the primary and root cause of conflicts among the Aleltu Oromo community. Economic resources include land related resources, livestock, and other properties. The statistical reports of formal courts and the field data confirmed that land resource is one of the most common sources of conflicts in the study area. Since land is a

highly regarded asset and economic resources for the community, is a measure of wealth and status. However, it is important to note that next to economic interest, land policy exacerbates the conflict and it could be taken as the second principal cause of conflict. Key informants and other community members confirmed that the implementation of the unrevised land policy of the *Derg* by the present government is the major problem. Land resource conflicts before 1991 continued after the fall of the *Derg* regime because of the policy pursued by the present Government. Therefore, it can be said that competition over land resources is the result of the land policy that causes most of conflicts in the study area. Next to land policy problem, drunkenness/alcohol/ is the third principal cause of conflicts among the community. Alcohol is a substance with strong stimulating effect that it can sometimes make people lose their temper and drives them to clashes. Alcohol stimulates conflicts if there is pre existing conflict or also if they is not any previous antagonism. Although there are no recorded data, the majority of the community claims that, alcohol is the root cause of many conflicts. This is because the community experienced so many shocking cases which were the result of drunkenness. Despite this undesirable consequence of drinking alcohol, various religious and cultural ceremonies and festivities are marked accompanied by drinking. People believe that drinking facilitates social interactions and is a good gesture of expressing friendliness to the guests.

### **Types of Conflict Cases**

The Alelto Oromo people have experienced different types of conflict cases such as: conflict over grazing land, water for animals, inheritance right, farm land, theft, failure to pay back debts, violation of adjacent farm land territories, injuries, fight, insult, adultery, rape, abduction, clearing forests, defamation, marital conflicts, damaging properties and homicide.

## **Traditional Conflict Management Institutions among the Aleltu Oromo Community: The Case of Jaarsa Biyyaa**

Among the Aleltu Oromo community, the traditional conflict management process heavily depends on the nature and types of conflicts. The conflicting parties may come into peace without the involvement of the third party. If the case goes beyond the two parties, kinsmen and neighbors discuss the problem to bring about peace and reconciliation. Most small scale conflicts such as disagreements between neighbors, insult and failure to pay debts, accidental or spontaneous quarrels may be managed at neighborhood level. If the case is beyond the neighborhood or if the parties do not abide by the decision, it can be taken before the major traditional conflict management institutions.

Among the Aleltu Oromo community there are three major well known traditional conflict management institutions. These are the *Jaarsa Biyyaa*, the *qaallu/qaaliti* and the *hayyuu* institutions. The community would get the necessary service from these traditional judicial institutions without incurring much cost. Using these types of traditional conflict management institutions, either the customary or spiritual law is applicable. These laws are unwritten and transmitted from one generation to the next orally.

The traditional judges perform their functions and fulfill their cultural and moral obligations. The status of the conflicting parties is irrelevant in traditional institutions. Spirits are important and have a powerful force for conformity and consistency in the traditional institutions. Threats of supernatural /the spirit/ punishments are often resorted to appease the parties into obedience and agreement. It is believed that offending and disobedience of the traditional court elders and their decision cause illness, misfortune within the offenders' family. The role of the spirits /supernatural power or *Waaqa* is high in the context of conflict management process. Judges in



traditional courts rely on persuasion and avoid blaming either side. They do enforce their decisions through the use of supernatural punishment belief. Therefore, the majority of traditional procedures end with reconciliation or both reconciliation and compensation/*kasssa*/ depending upon the nature and types of conflict. The two parties come into peace in the name of God/*Waaqa*/ or the spirits /*Ayyana*/. It is expected that elders would find amicable solution and peace in accordance with the custom and belief system of the community.

## **The *Jaarsa Biyyaa* Traditional Conflict Management Institution**

The *jaarsa biyyaa* institution is one of the most applicable traditional conflict management institutions at the local level. In this traditional judicial institution, the judges apply the customary law of the community. To some extent, the procedures may vary from one kebele *Jaarsa biyyaa* institution to another. However, the whole traditional court procedures are based on the social, cultural and economic life of the community. All types of conflict cases except homicide, serious injuries, ritual offences and hidden crimes can be taken to this traditional court.

### **Formation of the *Jaarsa Biyyaa* Institution**

Among the Alelto Oromo community, kinsmen tie is very strong and help each other when ever conflict arises. Before the conflict escalates, neighbors, relatives or kinsmen of the parties who wish reconciliation and peace take the initiative to call up on the *Jaarsa*. The plaintiff or the defendant can also take the initiative for the formation of the institution.

Nomination of *jaarsa biyya* is considered as the most important phase of any *jaarsa biyyaa* court procedures. The *jaarsa biyyaa* institution established heavily depends on the free will and approval of the two parties as it is a voluntary institution. The parties have the right to choose their own

*jaarsa* from their close relatives or people who know the parties very well. They have also the right to change the *jaarsa* if there is hostility between them. The number of elders chosen to judge case varies in number depending on the seriousness of the case. Usually the number of *jaarsa/Angafa/* range from three to five. Sources frequently participating in different *jaarsa biyyaa* institution explain,

The selection of *jaarsa biyyaa* should be administered upon the free will of the parties. We need to get acceptance and approval from both parties before we start hearing their case. Otherwise the parties may be unwilling to accept the decision. If there is complaint or a tendency of siding towards one of the litigants, the other party has the right to change the *jaarsa*. Therefore, to be nominated as a member in the *jaarsa biyyaa* institution, elders should be accepted by both parties.

### **Criteria for Being Elected in the *Jaarsa Biyyaa* Institution**

Parties are expected to choose effective and responsible elders, usually being in a better socio-economic status and influential personality to be elected as *jaarsa biyyaa* member. Among the community, active participation in social and ritual ceremonies will create high social status. Therefore, the community gives more emphasis to social and ritual participation if anyone wishes to get high social status. Age is another decisive requirement to be selected in the *jaarsa biyyaa* institution. The community believes that, the *angafa* (old) acquires the wisdom and experience of the culture which help him to bring peace and reconciliation. Therefore, an old person is perceived as a reconciler, mediator and peace maker of the community. Knowledge of the customary law and the ability to handle conflict cases are among certain attributes required. Deep knowledge of the customary rules of the community is the most important criterion to be chosen as *jaarsa biyyaa*. However, members of the *jaarsa biyyaa* may also be appointed on account of their traditional religious knowledge. Their

expertise and fairness is considered because the failure or success of the decision depends on the knowledge and capacity of the elders.

Persons who frequently serve as traditional judges in different *jaarsa biyyaa* courts are influential among the community and have a chance of being elected in several conflict cases management. This is because they are expected to acquire the necessary wisdom and experience to manage conflicts. Therefore, prominent socio economic status, age, wisdom in the customary law of the community and experience of the *jaarsa biyyaa* are among the most important attributes one needs to have for be elected as a member in the *jaarsa biyyaa* court.

## **Procedures and Methods of Handling Conflict Cases**

Once the *jaarsaa biyyaa* traditional court is established, the judges fix the date; time and place of the gathering and the parties are informed to appear on the appointment date. The judges usually sit on Sunday to hear cases. When the judges are in session, they sit on the rock or on the grass field under a holy tree shed /*adbar*/ or in the church compound in a rough circle. The *jaarsa biyyaa* court is always open to the public, close relatives and distant relatives, friends, even third parties or the passer- by who have an interest in the matter can attend the hearing. The attendants sit in front of the judges. The litigants sit separately in front of the judges. Prior to the hearing, the judges always begin with prayer and blessing. Praying and blessing should always be done by the eldest and followed by the next two elders according to their age and status.

After praying and blessing, the accused call upon a guarantee before starting the case. The guarantee can be a person or some amount of money. The amount of money varies from one kebele *jaarsa biyyaa* court to another. The guarantee is aimed to make the offender accepting and be loyal on the decision rendered by the elders. After calling a guarantee, the

accuser/compliant is allowed to present his /her case. Then the defendant takes the forum to respond to the case. Both parties present their opinion freely without any interruption. The judges may approach the parties separately or jointly depending on the nature and types of the cases. In a separate meeting, the other party sits at a distance until he/she is called upon by the judges. It is believed that a separate meeting will speed up the decision and avoid unnecessary hostility between the parties.

After the hearing, private discussions are conducted to examine the root causes of the conflict during which judges use their own personal experience and knowledge. The judges then request the defendant if he/she accepts the claim or not. If the defendant admits the charge, they directly proceed to the decision and reconciliation process. If not, they proceed to the next procedure, which is a phase of gathering of evidences and witness. On the next sessions, the parties will be allowed to present their evidence. Evidence can be individual eye witness, written document, material evidences like knife, stick or gun with which the accused committed the damage. Kinsmen, relatives and neighbors are involved and participate by collecting and providing evidences and acting as witnesses. Until the next meetings the judges also gather their own evidences from the villagers and relatives to identify the culprit.

On the second session, the judges examine all the evidences. The judges have the right to question the parties and the witness to investigate the wrongdoer. Therefore, the forum will be open for discussion and may take repeated meetings until both parties reach a consensus. After hearing the litigation between the contending parties, the decision of the *jarssa biyya* will be communicated to the parties.

If the decision fails at the *jaarsa biyyaa* court, they refer the parties to the *qaaluu* or the *hayyuu* court depending up on the preference of the parties. Some cases may be referred to the local court if they are related to homicide.

If the case is not beyond the capacity of the judges, it may get ever lasting solution.

Due to social, cultural and spiritual importance of the elders, the majority of the decisions made would be accepted. However, there are circumstances where the *jaarsa biyyaa* court ends up without fruitful results. The parties wait until the elders decide on the case because elders are believed to have come from the custom, tradition and belief system of the community. They are believed to have good knowledge of the custom of the community. Some conflict cases may be referred from one traditional institution to another.

## **The Role of Women in the Traditional Conflict Management Institutions**

In Ethiopia, among many ethnic groups, the status of women is regarded as weak, submissive and they are excluded from all the main positions of religious authority and prestige. Similarly, among the Alelto Oromo community, membership of women in the major traditional conflict management institutions seems to be forbidden. Traditionally, women don't have the right to render decision at the public so the structures of major traditional conflict management institutions are controlled by male gender. However, that does not mean that they are totally excluded from the traditional conflict management institutions. For instance, there are women in Alelto community who are considered as possessed by spirits (*ayyannas*) and play a prominent role and authority in the religious life of the community. The local people call these women *qaalliti*. These women have their own status and honor among the community. They are considered as peacemakers, mediators and reconcilers. Lewis (1984:424) confirmed that "Among the Guji Oromo, it is primarily women known as *qaaliti*, who have taken the lead in developing courts". This shows that, in the traditional conflict management institutions women are not entirely excluded.

Women in the *jaarsa biyyaa* institution also appear as witnesses, representing their own conflict cases. They also initiate the parties to come before the traditional conflict management institutions. And at the end of traditional procedures, they prepare food and drinks. Old women have also the chance to manage simple conflicts whenever conflict arises between neighborly women or children or in their voluntary associations like *mahber* and *idir* bringing reconciliation among the members. Within their family, they maintain and preserve the unity of the family members and they provide their advice to their husband to cool down or to escalate the conflict.

### **Formal Conflict Management Institutions among the Alelto Oromo Community**

*Koree Hawaasa seera Murtii Ganddaa* (Village Social Affairs Court), Woreda Police and Woreda courts are the three different levels of formal judicial systems in the Alelto Woreda. All levels of legal/formal court systems are viewed as external authorities since they overlook the cultural values and belief system of the community. Unlike the traditional conflict management institutions, they are not respected and are thought to be political members siding with the government. Formal procedures are believed to take time, be expensive, rigid and unfamiliar to the community. Therefore, majority of conflicts do not appear in front of these judicial court systems. Even when the case appears before in to the formal court, may be for fear of enmity and revenge, the elders, kinsmen, neighbors never stop their attempt to bring the offender into agreement. Therefore, some cases are withdrawn from the formal court and are referred to the traditional “court” system. Formal judicial systems also refer some civil cases like marital conflict to the traditional conflict management institutions. This shows that there is an interaction between the two systems in the considered area.

The traditional conflict management institutions have their own procedures to manage various types of conflict, including homicide. However, due to the interventions of the formal judicial systems in the woreda, the communities are forced to take homicide cases in the formal court. The traditional judicial systems have complained regarding the intervention. My informants from the traditional court explain the intervention as follows:

We have the traditional procedures to manage any types of conflict including homicide. Nowadays, due to the intervention of the state, we lost authority particularly on homicide cases. The formal judicial system considered the traditional judge's as illegal but we are not illegal. Even if we channel homicide according to the traditional procedure, the police seize the slayer. We are strictly forbidden to handle homicide cases. This is a threat to the *traditional* institution. (Awajo Lafto below, Jan, 08). Even though, the intervention of the formal court system has increased in the woreda, the traditional conflict management institutions did survive. The official statistical data and my field data confirmed that except homicide ones, the majority of conflict cases are still channeled through traditional courts.

### **Formal Vs Traditional Conflict Management Institutions**

In the study area the traditional and formal legal systems play a significant role to manage conflicts. However, the community has various reasons for preferring the traditional way of resolution. The first reason is that there is full and free discussion of the case before a settlement is reached. There is negotiation involving the disputants, their elders and other close kin. The conflicting parties might gradually come to accept the collective opinion of the mediators and the elders. The peace making abilities of the traditional judges are respected and believed among the community.

The Alelto Oromo community has common language, culture, ritual settings, religion, customary and spiritual law. The villagers in each kebele know each other and have kinship, neighborhood and marriage ties. The social and cultural interactions and kinship ties of the community force them to see their cases in private court without the interference of external formal authority. Managing conflicts outside legal court system would keep secrets from the general public. The people who serve in the traditional institutions have high values of moral and ethical standard. They are highly transparent in their decision making process, process in which even the community participate. A judicial process and decision in modern legal courts is considered superficial and not confidential. Guliver (1978:20) stated that factors like lower cost, confidentiality, easy access, etc. encourage the conflicting parties to come to the local negotiation more than to the formal legal court system. Therefore, the confidential nature of the traditional court system is preferable to formal court. They don't want to expose their secret to external authority.

The cost of the defendant and other expenses in the formal courts are indeed too high. Moreover they believe that traditional courts are flexible but the formal ones follow rigid legal court procedures, which results unfamiliar to their culture and norms. They serve the community towards restoring, maintaining and mending social harmony and relationships in an environment quite opposite from the formal court system. In modern court, conflicting parties simply terminate their social relation.

The importance of these traditional institutions is deeply rooted in the customs and traditions of the Alelto Oromo people. These institutions play a significant role in the maintenance of peace and security in respect to spiritual and customary law of the community, and to the central role of spiritual leaders and elders. Paul and Claphum (1967:845) stated that "...unlike the ordinary courts, the local elders are concerned with reaching a



morally acceptable decision capable of restoring the amicable relationship between parties”

Therefore, the majority of the community prefers the traditional courts to the formal system. The following informant’s opinion confirmed the realities:

The modern judicial approaches do not consider or allow little room for values, culture and belief system of a community. They apply modern laws and rules. We are not free to present our belief and custom in the formal courts. Our elders are experts of our culture. We are familiar with the traditional court procedures and rules more than with the formal one. Formal courts apply rigid rules and procedures without considering our feelings, customs, and belief system. Modern legal courts never maintain social harmony and satisfaction between parties. Elders understand the feelings of the parties because they apply their own creativity and knowledge.

Partialities, corruption, tendency towards one’s side are considered unethical approach in traditional institutions because elders respect the spirits/*Waaqa*. They render services equally and fairly. Parties also never plan to revenge each other after reconciliation because they fear and respect the elders and the spirits. Once a case is in the traditional court, the conflicting parties don’t pay money for the court because these courts are cost free but the formal ones need money. The preference to use traditional courts also lay on accessibility and confidential nature of the courts. It makes them more preferable than modern courts. We have the chance to access easily the traditional courts than the formal legal ones. We live very far from the town. In the traditional courts both parties and elders have no legal obligation. They respect their cultural values. Cases in modern legal courts may take months or even years to get decision. They are time taking because they follow lengthy litigation procedures. We are poor farmers. We should work on our farm land daily to feed our children; there is no time and money to present our cases to legal courts. We are not also satisfied with the delay,

cost and time taking process of the modern courts. That is why we prefer the traditional courts.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

There is a theoretical controversy among scholars regarding the concept of conflict and its causes. Many scholars argue that, conflict is an inevitable, an intrinsic and unavoidable phenomenon. The types and cause of conflict vary depends on the geographical, cultural and economic and political conditions of the society. My ethnographic data confirm that, the primary cause of conflict among the Aleltu Oromo community is economic interests. The second cause of conflict in the study area is land policy. This leads me to conclude that unequal distributions of land, the competition for acquire natural resources and a greater perception of injustice cause conflict.

The Aleltu Oromo community has similar culture and belief system. They believe in fact that they are people of one clan. There is no cultural difference with in the Aleltu Oromo community. However, there are conflicts among themselves, so it is possible to conclude that cultural differences may not always cause conflict. Conflict is a natural phenomenon and arises within any human society whether they are culturally similar or not.

Human society have developed and practiced various mechanisms to manage conflicts. Traditional African societies developed and practiced well known rules and procedures to maintain peace among them. Similarly, the Aleltu Oromo community developed traditional conflict management institutions. The community applies customary and spiritual laws and regulations in the traditional judicial system to bring peace and reconciliation between the parties.

In traditional conflict management mechanisms, oratorical processes, proverbs and spiritual powers lead elders in problem framing. The role of spirit is important and has a powerful force in the context of conflict

management process. Parties never initiate to revenge against each others after reconciliation because they respect the elders and the spirits. The community applies different peaceful modes like free discussion, reconciliation, compromise, mediation, negotiation, and arbitration at the same time to manage their conflicts.

Among the Aleltu Oromo community there are two types of conflict management mechanisms: the traditional conflict management mechanism and the formal court system. The traditional conflict management institutions of the Aleltu Oromo community is accessible, flexible, time saving, confidential, familiar to the community, cost effective, maintain and preserve social harmony, reconciliation among the party, not corrupted. These and other attributes made the traditional courts more preferable to the formal system.

Elders are highly respected as trustworthy mediator and reconciler. The belief system of the community in *Waaqa* (God) and spirits and psychological effects of such practices help the elders to manage conflicts, the parties became willing to accept the decision. Another added value among the Aleltu community is the role of women in the traditional conflict management institutions. At various level of traditional conflict management institutions women have their own part to bring reconciliation and peace among the community, that meaning women are not entirely excluded from the traditional judicial system. Finally, I would like to suggest that, the traditional conflict management mechanisms of the Aleltu Oromo community should be encouraged to serve the needs of the community. The limitation of research works on the study area needs further investigation to revitalize the positive aspects of the traditional institutions of the community.

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