RESEARCH ARTICLE

VALUES, BELIEFS AND SYSTEMS RELATED TO *LIDARA* INDIGENOUS SECURITY ALLIANCE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION INSTITUTION AMONG SODO-GURAGE, LIBIDO-MAREKO, OROMO, *MESKAN* GURAGE AND SILTE ETHINIC GROUPS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
  *Corresponding author:	The main objective of this article is to investigate Values, Beliefs and Systems Related to Lidara Indigenous security alliance and Conflict Resolution Institution among Sodo-Gurage, Libido-Mareko, Oromo, Meskan Gurage and Silte Ethnic groups in Southern Ethiopia. To attain this objective, the article employed both secondary and primary data sources. Both primary and secondary data were organized thematically and analyzed through systematic interpretation and triangulation of various sources. The article found that the major causes of conflicts in the study area are predominantly related to economic issues, especially, conflicts over land holding which are prime causes of other types of conflicts like homicide, physical injuries and property destruction. In addition to these, violations of social and cultural norms are also leads to conflict. In lidara indigenous inter-ethnic security alliance and conflict resolution institution the beliefs, values and procedures the system involves during conflict resolution take credit for the system's success in maintaining peace and harmony of the society. Despite the theoretical controversy among scholars regarding the sources of conflict, the article further found that the four ethnic groups have develop their own view of sources of conflict, way of handling and decision enforcement mechanisms, which helps Lidara indigenous security alliance and conflict resolution institution in conflict resolution process.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict and disputes within a society and individuals over different issues are part of human history (Burtone, 1996:12). It is often argued that conflict is inevitable normal, positive and even some times necessary and useful for social changes (Jacob *et al.*, 2009:1, Augesurg, 1996 in Stewart 1998).Conflicts are facts of life, inevitable and often creative (Fisher, 2000). Fisher (year)?points out that in our day-to-day interaction with others, we either observed or pass through conflicts which range from the very interpersonal quarrel, family and neighbors dispute, ethnic and inter- state conflicts to the global war. Burtone (1996) states that a great deal of conflict and violence is provoked by such circumstances as childhood environments, absences of job opportunity, insecurity experienced because of a minority statues, resource deprivation and post-colonial boundaries that cut through ethnic communities. Wolf and Columbes (1981 in Assefa 2005:72) also classified causes of conflict under seven major categories, these are systematic failure, human aggression as biological needs, great power imperialism, economic rivalry, elite and popular fatalism regarding war, political conspiracy and the general movement of history.

The biggest challenge today confronting human nature is not about occurrence of conflict per se, but how to these conflict are fully resolved whenever they occur to prevent them from further escalation (Bokari, 2013). Alula and Getachew (2008) argued that resolution of conflict is crucial for day-to-day coexistence as human societies are in constant search of resolution mechanisms of conflicts. According to Alula and Getachew (2008), conflict resolution mechanisms in Ethiopia can be broadly classified as customary conflict resolution mechanisms and formal (state justice system) conflict resolution mechanism. The formal conflict resolution mechanism (which is provided by the state) in Ethiopia is mainly European origin (Ayalew, 2012:8). It was introduced in Ethiopia in the 1960s, and subsequent laws issued by succeeding governments. The professed intention was to create comprehensive set of laws, modernization of the legal framework that would serve modern Ethiopia (Ayalew, 2012). According to Alula and Getachew (2008:1), indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms and inter-ethnic security are prevalent throughout the country at local level and it is the dominant justice system in the country. Indigenous mechanism to conflict resolution is made by the people not by the state and

drives its legitimacy from participation and consensus of the community and its recognition of the same by the government (Abera, 2003:839). Indigenous conflict resolution mechanism emanates from the custom of the people as practiced over long period of time and accepted by the community as governing principle and hence binds the society, a breach of which entails social reaction and even punishment (Dagne and Bapu, 2013:2). Ethiopia is home for various ethnic groups. Almost all ethnic groups have developed indigenous mechanisms of conflict resolution. Different ethnic groups like Oromo, Afar, Amhara, Benishangul- Gumuz, Hareri, Somalia, Sidama, Walayeta, Gamo, Tigeray and others develop their own indigenous mechanisms of conflict resolution with certain peculiar features. These features which comprise social traditions, values, norms, beliefs, rules, and laws are communicated and accepted among the respective communities for peaceful co-existences. Abera (2000) argues that these indigenous conflict resolution institutions of different ethnic groups were the major body of law in Ethiopia for centuries. The Meskan-Gurage, Sodo-Gurage, Silte, Mareko , and Arsi Oromo ethnic group of Southern Ethiopia have their own time tested indigenous inter-ethnic security alliance and conflict resolution institution, , which has been used to resolve intra- and inter -group conflicts. This study will investigates the *Lidara* indigenous inter-ethnic security alliance and conflict resolution institution among the Meskan-Gurage, Sodo-Gurage, Silte, Mareko , and Arsi Oromo ethnic groups in Southern Ethiopia, with specific reference to the procedures and processes involved in *lidara* indigenous security alliance and conflict resolution institution, types and causes of conflict in the study area, the enforcement mechanisms used by the indigenous institution and the relationship between *Lidara*indigenous security alliance and conflict resolution institution and the formal court system in the study area.

Major Types of Conflict in the study area: According to the data gathered from Mareko *Woreda,* Meskan *Woreda,* Sod o*woreda and* Silte *woreda* court, administration*,* security office (The nine-month report for July-March 2017/18) and *Lidara* elders (FGD 1and 2)different types of conflicts arise in the study area with varying frequency. These conflicts range from simple insult to homicide. Some conflicts in the study area are extremely rare like homicide and abduction, while others like theft and land related conflicts are considerable. The gathered data from the stated *Woredas* court and focus group discussion with elders shows that conflict over land, destruction of property, abduction of girls, rape, car accident, quarrel and physical injury, theft, intimidation, refusing to give food for the family and homicide are major types of conflict in the study area. Due to the homogeneous settlement of the four communities, the majorities of conflict under the jurisdiction of *Lidara* are observed at inter-ethnic level. Both the official statistics and informants indicate four levels of conflicts in the study area. Conflicts are common at the family, bordering neighborhood, clan and ethnic group level. In the study area, conflicts at the four levels have a different magnitude. Conflicts at family and bordering neighborhood levels are frequent while conflicts at the clan and ethnic group level occurred rarely.

Causes of Conflict: According to the discussants and the informant the major causes conflicts in the study area are land related conflicts, marriage and gender related conflict, alcoholism, socio-cultural value related conflict and accidental conflicts.

Land related conflicts: Lederach (1997:43) argues that the underlying causes of conflict at grass root level are social and economic insecurity. As far as source of conflict is concerned, on other hand, the advocates of human need theory argue that the unmet needs could lead individuals to conflict. According to informants from the security office and elders (Focus group discussion 1and 2), the main cause of conflict in the study area emanates from land and economic related issues. The Silte, Mareko, Oromo and Gurage ethnic groups inhabited a land, which is suitable for agriculture. However, with the growing population land shortage is becoming acute. Hence, according to the informants, conflict that arise from land related is the main reason for the occurrence of other types of conflicts like homicide, quarrel, destruction of property, burning some one`s property and physical injury (damage of teeth, damage to eye or ear and amputation of different body parts). Land is the fundamental property for all of the four ethnic groups. Land related conflict in the study area have different forms. The most common are renting ones land for more than one person for specified period, breach of rented land contract, refusal to return land after expiry date of contract, conflict over border mark, plough or plant a tree by crossing a marked border of a neighbor land. According to informants from the *Woredas* Administration, the present potentially productive land is possessed by the old generation. Due to this and population growth, the young generation is unable to get access to land. As a result, the young generation gets access to land only through contract, inheritance and lease or purchase from the owners. Nevertheless, this kind of land possession is full of breach of contract/agreement, which leads to conflict. The breach of contractual agreement is prevalent in the study area. Sometimes after someone rented the land, other claimant mainly wives or children, refute to recognize the agreement and take the case to the court. The court depending on the evidence returns the land to the owner. The one who lost his money and land therefore, uses force to either get his money or land that could finally break in to violence. The other cause of land related conflict are refusal to return land after expiry date of contract and renting land to more than one person at a time.In the study area there are lands which are claimed by two ethnic groups and this claim also leads to conflicts in study area. Land claims in Goto*kebele* between Mareko and Silite ethnic group, Didakebele and other 9*kebeles* by Mareko and Meskan-gurage ethnic are best example.

Marriage and Gender Related Conflicts: Marriage and gender-based violence are also common in study area and among four ethnic groups and their members. Conflicts like the practice of polygamy (though Silite, areko, Meskan and Aris Oromo ethnic groups as any other Muslim community belief in marrying more than one wives, sometimes this belief face challenge form the first wife, her family and/or the community). Marriage between the same clan members, extramarital sexual relationship, abduction of girls, refusal to accept arranged marriage are also common gender and marriage related conflicts in the study area. Adultery is other source of conflict. Having an extramarital sexual affair with any married women is a heinous act. Adultery is a serious moral shock against the whole community in the study area. It reduces the social status of the spouse. If a wife is found committing adultery, the husband can initiate a divorce. In addition to adultery, the cause of several conflicts, which could

result homicide and serious physical injury, emanate either from rape or from abduction against one`s sister or daughter. According to informants marriage, and gender-based conflict are the second sources of conflict in the study area. These conflicts have no boundary; they could occur at any level.

Theft: Theft cases are predominantly common in the study area, especially domestic animals. It can happen at any time. Group of thieves could dislocate animals especially high value related animals such as ox, donkey, and mule, from the field or the owners' home in the absence of the shepherd or the owner, took them to neighboring *Woredas* or ethnic groups, and ask money called *yeqechema*. At this moment, the owner who knows the whereabouts of the lost animals may get into conflict with the thieves, or with the clan or the ethnic group found in the act of hiding those lost animals. According to *lidara* elders beside the economic importance, animals among Libido-Mareko ethnic group are symbols of status. Thus, animal theft is a serious offence. According to informant from the formal court and police office this is the main cause for intra- ethnic conflict in the area.

Alcoholism: Discussion with the *Woredas* court prosecutors (FGD 3) clearly indicates that alcoholism is the common source of conflict. According to this discussion, most homicide and physical injury are the result of alcoholism. Conflict due to alcoholism is prevalent during the time of abundance mainly between the months of December and March. The other period is whenever most rural men have idle or less occupied (between September and November). Elders also see alcoholism as the common source of conflict. In addition to the prosecutor's information, elders also claim that alcoholism has become a common cause of conflict at family level. Mostly, if not always, husbands spent money on drinking. The wives who realize the economic and social consequence of alcoholism may oppose drinking and long absence from the daily activities. The husband who is not economically affected turndown the warning of the wife. This in turn leads to serious conflict and divorce cases.

Breach of social norms: In addition to the above land and marriage related conflicts, there are also other conflicts that have social and cultural dimensions. These conflicts are mainly occurs when individual breaks the social and cultural law of the community or refuse to accept the law. These conflicts include intimidation, insulting of an individual or a specific clan or ethnic group, improper dowry, refusal to accept arranged marriage, and so on. Among the four communities blaming someone without evidence for something has gone wrong, undermining one`s clan or an individual and putting a person to lower status is defamation. Such conflicts in the study area are considered as serious offences because they affect individual`s life and social interaction.

Homicide: All of the four ethnic groups strongly concerned with any form of homicide. Among the four communites ethnic group, homicide is an atrocious crime. In the study area, the occurrences of homicide offence are rare but very serious crime, which involves ethnic group, clan, and family. According to discussants (FGD, 1, 2 and 3), the homicide case is not an overnight event but the accumulative effect of other causes of conflict (see fig.1). It could be the result of dispute over land, alcoholism, car accident and so on. Some causes of homicide like land related conflict, adultery, economic related
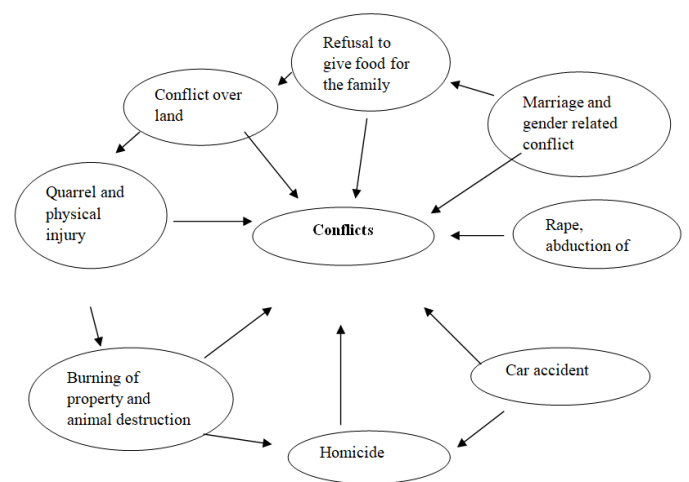
Source: FGD 1, 2, 3 and informants (see appendix 3 and 4)

Fig. 1. Causes of conflict and their relationship

issues, inheritance could finally break in to revenge in which again lead to loss of life. In conclusion, as the above figure shows, causes of conflict in the study area do overlap. The cause of one conflict may result in the other form. The conflicts that arise from quarrel, physical injury and property distraction seems purely economic. Marriage and gender related conflicts and lack of willingness to uphold families and community responsibility are arising from the violation of social norms.

Values and Beliefs Systems Related to the Indigenous Conflict Resolution Institution: Any community has its own long existed values and beliefs, which help the society to live together and uphold its identity and provide guidelines in maintaining peace and harmony of the society. Literatures, regarding indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, such as Alula and Getachaw (2008) and Tarkegn and Hannah (2008), are recommending their significance in resolving conflicts at grass-root levels. Oshaghae (2000:213) also points out, resolution of more serious conflicts is impossible without the management of less serious conflicts at the lower levels. Such literatures indicate the success of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms in revealing truth, provision of win-win solutions, and reconciling conflicting parties. In addition, these studies show that the high legitimacy of the systems among the members. As far as *lidara* indigenous inter-ethnic security alliance and conflict resolution institution is concerned, the beliefs, values and procedures the system involves during conflict resolution take credit for the system's success in maintaining peace and harmony of the society. This sub-section discusses those values and beliefs the indigenous conflict resolution institution involve in the study area.

Tur/Xiirro: *Xirro for* Mareko ethnic group and *Tur for* Meskan Gurage, Sodo-Gurage and silte ethnic group is one of the values that the are most concerned about in their interaction with the people and the surrounding environment which range from the way one treats his/her domestic animals like cat, dog, donkey, etc, to the treatment of people of different class, power and wealth. Libido-Mareko and SodoGurage ethnic group members have a belief which says *un proper use of any crop and immoral killing or harming of any animal have xiiro/tur. Xiiro/tur* literally stands for atrocity (Wendemu, 2014, Wubeyede, 2015). This *xiirro* is considered as a main source of criminal matter conflicts among the ethnic groups (FGD 1 and

2). *Xiiro/tur* is believed to be result of some hidden misdeed or immoral act of the conflicting parties or their ancestors that left unresolved. It is not something that gained by chance rather it is the result of a person's and his/her ancestor`s and sometimes their clan or family misdeed and immoral act. *Xiiro/tur* is not confined to the life span of an individual person rather it transcends the life span of an individual person with the potential of manifesting the spirit of *xiiro* in the descendants.

According to interview with *Lidara elder's* chairperson and focus group discussion (FGD 1 and 2), the stated ethnic group members believe that human and animals have equal value and *Xiiro/tur* because one God creates both. Due to this, members of the four ethnic group give high concern in their interaction with the surrounding environment, which ranges from the way one treats his/her domestic animals like cat, dog, donkey and so on to the interaction and treatment of different people. For example, if someone kills domestic animal immorally or without purpose, due to that immoral act, the blood of the killed animal is in his/her hand. Due to this, he/she or his/her descendants might kill someone or be killed. According to elders, the highest stage of conflict resolution mechanism in the study area*,* simple animal *Xiiro/tur* might lead to homicide or physical injury. Due to this, in all criminal matter related conflicts, conflicting parties are advised to investigate their and their ancestor's history, their relationship with animals and to finish it according to the appropriate ritual process as advised by *Raaga or ferezagegne or Aba Geda*. Unless, it is believed, they will continue to suffer from similar incidences

Qaala-Maala **(Promise):** *Qaala-Maala,* literally means swearing, which the *elders* or the conflicting parties may prefer to settle the conflict. *Qaala-Maala* happens when the disputants deny the plain facts or no witness or even after the proof of evidence. In the *Lidara* conflict resolution process it is common that the prosecutor and the witness take *Qaala-Maala,* though sometimes the accuser also takes the swearing. According to the informant of the study community the traditional value of the ethnic groups discourages taking *Qaala-Maala.* Because of its horrifying damages of swearword, any members of the ethnic group do not want to take *Qaala-Maala,* unless he/she is sure about the issue. *Qaala-Maala* is an action-oriented swearing that is the most scaring, intimidating, and a thrill swearing which involves various ritual activities that all four ethnic group members try to avoid in their life.

The party who prefers *Qaala-Maala* may be allowed to swear in different ways depending on the type of the conflict and its complexity and the culture of the conflicting parties. However, in most occasions the accuser has the right to choice the kind of *Qaala-Maala*. This is done with the belief that it makes the decision easy and acceptable by the accuser. In the conflict resolution process, if the prosecutor denies the claim and take *Qaala-Maala,* the conflict resolution process stop there and the *lidara* elders give advice for both parties not to harm each other and not to mention the other person's name in a negative manner and wait the consequence of the *Qaala-Maala.* For example *Qaala-Maala* in the Libido-Mareko, Meskan Gurage and Sodo-Gurage ethnic group has various kinds depending on the conflict. Several items are used in this process like spear, muck, crop, fire and hole. Those things symbolize different things. As discussants stated (FGD 1 and 2), the *Qaala-Maala* taker is required to say words loudly following the *Maaga by* jump each things prepared for swearing and put on the ground,

'if I lie let the spear stab my stomach, let no animal grow in my family, no crop grow in my land, let my body buried in the hole, let my descendents smashed like water smashed fire,'. The procedure of *Qaala-Maala* in *Lidara* conflict resolution process serves as mechanism in revealing the truth. Since ethnic group members in *lidara* fears taking of *Qaala-Maala* and they try to avoid it in their life, the likelihood of making *Qaala-Maala* on false ground is rare.

Gudda/Gurda: *Gudd*a literally means a covenant or contract entered by two conflicting persons (groups) to solidify trust, friendship, and support and so on between themselves. *Gudda* in many occasions performed at the end of the conflict resolution process. Once an individual or groups are entered *gudda,* it is a lifetime partnership. Even though the breach of *gudda/Gurda* is punishable by *Lidara* and respective indigenous conflict resolution mechanism of each ethnic group, its practicality is more of moral obligation than legal obligation. People are bound by *gudda/gurda* not because of their fear of legal aftermath rather the fear of *xiiro/tur*. Because is *gudda/gurda* is entered through swearing by the name of God and underpinned by different ritual activities, any breach of *gudda/gurda* is penalized by God/*waqaa* and bring*xiir/tur* to the family and the group. For this reason, *gudda/gurda* is feared and respected among the local people and people tied by *gudda/gurda*are life time friends and family called *yeguddazemede*. For example even though it depend on the memebership of the conflicting party ethnic group in may homicide case the conflict resolution ends with ritual ceremony by slaughtering*,* black goat, which is highly feared among the ethnic group members. In the case of serious conflict, the *lidara elders* bring the conflicting parties respective mothers and put the two conflicting parties at the leg of the opponent`s mother and feeding the opponent`s mother breast since then two become brother. *gudda/gurda* enables the indigenous system to restore severed relationships between conflicting parties.

Uulten Seera or Seera: The Sodogurage, Meskangurage, Mareko, Silite and Oromo ethnic group members have developed a set of customary laws called *Seera* that prescribe and proscribe particular action so as to keep order in their land. This *Seera,* govern the behavior of any member of ethnic group member and limits all possible action of individual and group. The term *Seera* literally translated as customary law, which contains moral ideas about good behaviors, and specific prescription about mundane like dress and grazing practices. It covers every aspect of social relations, including marriage, family administration, animal rising, dressing, conflict resolution, religious practices, speaking style and so on. For example according to *Seera* of all four ethnic groups marriage between same clan is forbidden. Every ethnic group members is expected to respect and protect the customary law of the land. If someone is against the law, it is the responsibility of anyone who knows the *Seera* to stop the action. However, anyone who refuses to respect the law of the land gets advice from elders in his/her family, his/her clan and at the end from the assembly of Libido-Mareko. Faller to observe the customary laws would be followed by sanction against the perpetrator, which makes life so difficult. Security issues and the conflict resolved by the indigenous conflict resolution institution, *lidara* is believed to be reinforced by the values of *xiiro/tur* and ritually and morally sanctioned by the procedures of *qaalamaala* and *guuda/gurda* and the deliberation of decisions are conducted with full awareness of the *Seera* in the

form of customary law. The conflicting parties belief on these values and procedures made them obedient to *lidara* decision and loyal to the rules for various ritual and moral reasons.

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