The Quest for Resolution of Guji-Gedeo Conflicts in Southern Ethiopia: A Review of Mechanisms Employed, Actors and Their Effectiveness

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Abstract

This article assesses the quest for resolution of Guji-Gedeo conflicts, the federal device as a means of managing conflict employed and their effectiveness. Methodologically, the study is mainly based on qualitative approach with an opinion and descriptive surveys to reveal the existing problems. It emerges from the study that the different structures, processes and mechanisms, which are employed at various levels of administrative hierarchies of governments for managing the conflicts, remain ad-hoc, not well-coordinated and, above all, their actions are mainly reactive. The study draws an argumentative conclusion that the Federal Government and authorities of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) and Oromiya Regional State need to boost their close cooperation, engagement in early warning and conflict management endeavors in addressing the conflict as the two communities are still at loggerheads over the issue of defining the contested boundary claims. It is also useful to extend the scope of such cooperation and engagement to the level of local governments in both Regional States. Along with these efforts, it would be better if authorities at various levels revitalize and empower traditional conflict resolution institutions to run parallel with 'modern' government structures to respond to the conflicts promptly. It is thus prudent to use the advantage of federalism as flexible and innovative system of governance to manage the conflict constructively.

Keywords: *Boundary conflicts, ethnicity, ethnic federation, federal restructuring, Guji-Gedeo conflicts, indigenous institutions.*

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Introduction

Ethiopia is a highly complex and colorful social mosaic, comprised of a number of ethno-linguistic groups characterized by a vast spread of cultural diversity and heterogeneity. While on the one hand, these people are bound together by strong bonds of culture, multilayered and complex fabric of shared identities that impinge on each other, history, common objectives and destiny; on the other hand, they also have witnessed inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts particularly in the aftermath of the federal restructuring[2] of the country along ethnic lines (Girum 2001: 35-36, Abbink 2006: 390, Asnake 2004:55 and 65). This phenomenon is no less evident in the ethnically diverse southern part of Ethiopia than elsewhere. The change in Guji-Gedeo interethnic relations is not unique in this regard. Like in the case of many adjacent ethnic communities, the incident of border conflicts emerged between these two communities of southern Ethiopia first in 1995 and then in 1998 following the federalization of the country (Girum 2011: 81 and 91).

    The main purpose of this article is analyzing the federal device used as a tool of conflict management and its effectiveness. The article is organized into eight sections. The first consists of the introduction. The next section provides a brief account of historical and political background of the two ethnic groups. Section three outlines the research design and data collection tools of the study. Section four discusses some theoretical and conceptual issues regarding federalism and ethnic conflicts management. The setting of the study area which describes both physical geography and geography of the population, economic resources and activities, and social fabrics and traditional systems of administration of the two communities is discussed under section five. Section six is devoted to discuss the interactions between the Gedeo and the Guji ethnic communities that have exhibited both forms of cooperation and conflict. What follows in the seventh section is a discussion of the institutions involved in the management of the conflicts between the two ethnic communities. In this section, the role of the Federal Government, which is still characterized by hegemonic and centralizing tendencies of the political center, Regional States and Local Governments

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[2]Federal restructuring refers to devolutionary processes that lead to the federalization of a once unitary system into a federation (see Weinstock, 2001).

of Oromiya and SNNPR, and indigenous conflict resolution institutions are presented. Section eight depicts the changing dynamics of Gedeo-Guji relations in the post-conflict period so as to speculate the recent trends and future prospects for peace and harmony between the two peoples. Finally, in section nine, I end my discussion by providing a conclusion along with some suggestions.

Historical and Political Background

The Guji/Guji-Oromo[3] and Gedeo (formerly known as Darassa/Derrassa[4]) ethnic communities are adjoining communities inhabiting the southern part of Ethiopia. During the imperial régime, both ethnic groups belonged to the then Sidamo Teklay Gizat (Province under Imperial-era). Although the Derg[5] régime carried out an administrative restructuring in 1987 within the former Sidamo Kefle-Hager[6] (Province under Derg-era), the two adjacent communities continued to live within this province (Taddesse 1995: 24).[7] Consequently, during those periods both ethnic groups, like any other ethnic community in the province, were subjected to heavily centralized administration from the political center. In effect, the relations of both ethnic communities with central authorities were thus more or less similar.

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[3]In this article, the term 'Guji-Oromo',and 'Guji' are interchangeably used.

[4]The term 'Derrassa/Darassa' connotes a pejorative expression often labeled up on the group (Gedeo) by the Abyssinian rulers. The term Gedeo was officially instituted by the Derg régime in 1975 (Solomon 2009, Tadesse *et al.*, 2008).

[5]The 'Derg', Amaric-Geez word for a 'committee', refers to Military regime that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991(Assefa, 2006; *ibid.*).

[6]When the Derg régime assumed political power, it changed the name of Teklay Gizat (Province under imperial-era) into Kefle-Hager (Vaughan, *ibid.*).

[7]In the last days of the Military régime particularly in 1987, when the Derg régime carried out an administrative restructuring within the then Sidamo Kefle-Hager, Gedeo Awraja was divided into four Awrajas, namely Gallanna, Bule-Uraga, Wenago, and Yirga-chefe. In the same way, the new administrative reorganization also carved up the then Jem Jem Awraja into four Awrajas, namely Bore, Bule-Uraga, Waderra-Adola and Oddo-Shakiso (Taddesse 1995:24). Consequently, most parts of Gedeo land fell under the jurisdictions of the newly introduced four Awrajas which were carved out of the then Gedeo Awraja, whilst the main portion of the Guji territory was administered under the newly established four Awrajas that were born out of the then Jem Jem Awraja (*ibid.*).

The trouble assumed a new visage in the post-1991 period, when the TPLF/EPRDF[8] redesigned the political structure of the country into an ethnic federation[9] to accommodate ethno-linguistic groups in national politics and lessen ethnic tensions and conflicts (Merera 2003, Alem 2004, Asnake 2004). As a result, both ethnicity and governance have experienced many changes. The political changes that are closely associated with the re-constitution of the Ethiopian state pose sets of opportunities and challenges in the management of inter-ethnic relations. In fact, the most evident change concerning conflict in Ethiopia following the federalization process has been the emergence of localized violent conflicts involving several ethnically diverse regions (Abbink 2006, Asnake 2004, Merera 2003). It is in this context that the Guji-Gedeo conflicts must be viewed. Like in the case of many contiguous ethnic groups, the federal restructuring process affected the relations that existed between the two ethnic communities. After the federalization of the country, most parts of the Guji were incorporated into the Borena Zone of Oromiya Regional State while Gedeo remained under Gedeo Zone (hereinafter Gedeo People) of SNNPR.

While about 245,165 Gedeo inhabit predominantly in Borena and Guji Zones, there are also significant numbers of Guji living in both Gedeo and Sidama Zones (Central Statistical Authority [CSA] 2007).[10] This means that the traditional competitive patterns of relations between them experienced changes because of the overall changes in the political structure of the country. As a result, traditional competitions between these groups over

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[8]The Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) was organized in 1975 by the Tigrean youth who was discontented with the shift of political power to the Amhara and the subsequent 'suppressions' of the group under the Amhara hegemony. The principal aim of the TPLF was the liberation of Tigray. As a political strategy to enter into the territories beyond Tigray and as a camouflage to attract the support of the West for political, ideological and financial support, the Front superficially changed its name to Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1989 by creating surrogate parties (PDOs-Peoples' Democratic Organizations) from other ethno-linguistic groups (Merera 2003, Vaughan 2003).

[9]Ethnic federation refers to a federation 'in which internal boundaries have been drawn and powers distributed in such a way as to ensure that each national/ethnic group is able to maintain itself as a distinct and self-governing society and culture' as multinational federations (Kymlicka 2006: 64-5).

[10]For more on this see *The 2007 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia: Statistical Report for the Oromia and SNNPR.*

scarce resources[11] were transformed into boundary conflicts after ethnic regionalization in the post-1991 period (Girum 2011: 81 and 91). What makes the Guji-Gedeo border conflicts more interesting is the fact that it has significantly changed the picture of a long-standing Guji-Gedeo friendly relations (Girum *ibid.*).

Federalism and Ethnic Conflict Management: Some Conceptual Issues and Controversies

In history multi-ethnic states have experimented with several strategies or policies for containing or eliminating ethnic conflicts aimed at ethnic homogenization. Although there is little consensus as to what constitutes the most suitable strategy for achieving peace, the predominant practice of states in the past were a variety of instruments that ranged from physical extermination to coercive assimilation (Kymlicka 2001:2). Along with Esman (2000), John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary (1993) in this respect sketched the taxonomy of state practices regarding macro-ethnic conflict regulation strategies that include two broad categories of eliminating and managing differences. The particular tools of eliminating differences or diversities consist of forced mass population transfer, genocide, secession and/or partition and integration/or coercive assimilation. Methods for managing ethnic diversities, on the other hand, incorporate hegemonic control, cantonization, arbitration, federalism and consociationalism or power sharing (*ibid.*: 4).

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[11]Although the traditional competition over scarce resources in some way existed for long between the Guji and the Gedeo people, this competition over the resources, now coinciding with the border issues between the two ethnic communities in the post-1991 political development, seems to change the dimension of these conflicts into boundary type conflicts. My finding is thus pretty much different and contrary to Hussein Jemma's findings who blatantly reveals the "resource competition thesis" as a root cause of the recent Guji-Gedeo conflicts (Hussein 2002:1). As to the position of Asebe related to the case of Guji-Gedeo conflict as well, his arguments oscillate between the question of self-government and territorial integration, to state policy's boundary division that separating the two groups and defining the contested border issues between the two ethnic groups (2007:4, 17, 73, and 96-97).

A number of multi-ethnic countries all across the world practiced from among the four strategies of eliminating differences or diversities with the aim of addressing problems of ethnic diversity (McGarry and O'Leary 1993: 6-17). For instance, western democratic states that traditionally refuse to recognize collective rights of ethnic minorities promoted assimilation (Smooha 2002: 423). In the case of Ethiopia, from among the strategies of eliminating differences or diversities enumerated above, the imperial régime employed an assimilation policy to promote the *Amharic* language as a national language. Forced mass population transfer and secession that happened during the *Derg* and EPRDF régimes respectively can be also cases in point (Asnake 2004:52).

However, these days there is a growing insight that forging ethnic groups into a 'homogenous nation is not a practical approach' (Lijphart 1991: 493). As a result, the challenges to some of the strategies enumerated above are growing in number for their deficit in terms of social justice, and face serious problems, which have led some scholars, policy-makers, and statesmen to view federalism as a promising alternative. Likewise, the post-1991 Ethiopian experience has uncovered the use of some of the instruments belonging to the management of ethnic differences, among which, federalism is the principal one in containing inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts in the country (Asnake 2004: 53). Thus from the four strategies of managing ethnic diversity and inter-ethnic relations aforementioned, federalism is of particular interest in the analysis of the area under consideration.

The federal dispensation, which aims at balancing the principles of 'self-rule' and 'shared-rule'(Elazar 1987), remarkably has gained increasing attraction among multi-ethnic states, especially those in the developing world as an appropriate institutional framework for managing their ethno-linguistic differences (Harris and Reilly 1998). Although federalism in its original form was not designed to regulate conflicts triggered by ethnic diversities, today many countries are experimenting with federalism and other forms of autonomy with the aim of accommodating ethno-linguistic communities in national political space and containing inter-communal tensions and conflicts. The federalization of the Ethiopian state is also associated with the management of the country's conflict ridden inter-ethnic relations (Asnake 2004: 52-53). The general argument is that the system

grants internal self-determination to territorially concentrated groups; makes for institutional expression of pluralism; and enhances political participation, equality, and equitable provision of services (Ebel and Vaillancourt 2001, Inman and Rubinfeld 1997, Kymlicka 1995). But federalism is also known to have grave downsides: it institutionalizes discriminatory treatment of citizens, breeds competition among ethnic groups, inter-communal tensions and conflicts and emboldens them to ask for more powers, which ends in separation (Ghai 2000, Kymlicka 1998, Schmitter 2000).

Any discussion considering the utility of federalism as a means of managing inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts, thus, presents two broad contending views. On the one hand, scores of scholars ever more advocate the use of federalism as an option for multi-ethnic states, which have been besieged by inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts (Osaghae 1997, Watts 1998, Young 1994, Horowitz 1985 and 1991, Harris and Reilly 1998, Gurr 1994). On the other hand, a number of scholars unveil their doubts about the efficacy of the federal formula as a means of managing ethno-linguistic differences (Snyder 2000, Nordlinger 1972, Kymlicka 1998, Cornell 2002, Basta-Fleiner 2000). What follows is a debate of each of these competing views.

In light of the above diametrically opposing viewpoints, Horowitz (1991), McGarry and O'Leary (1993), Coakley (2003), Hechter (2000) and Ghai (2000) are among contemporary academics who advocate federalism as a suitable means of managing ethnic conflicts and accommodating diversities in multi-ethnic states. To begin with, federal structures and processes not only offer multiple access points to political elites (Horowitz 1985: 598) but also extend proper political channels for the expression of dissatisfaction, discontent and grievance with government policies. They assist in finding solutions to the crises fuelling people's anger from time to time in federal polities (Gagnon 1993:21). In such cases, the role of federalism in managing political conflict is beyond question.

Federalism could also be used to reduce tensions and conflicts for ethnically divided societies (Ghai 1998, Bose 1995, Young 1998). For an illustration of such beliefs, it is sufficient to cite Osaghae, who points out how federalism in multi-ethnic and multi-religious states, particularly those described as internally divided states, can help in mitigating all sorts of

conflicts and has potential values as a tool for managing diversities (Osaghae 1997). Along the lines of the above argument, Watts (1998:16) underscores that despite some criticisms regarding the sustenance of multi-national federations:

> … *federations based on distinct ethnic or national units can be sustained and may help reduce tensions. Indeed, there is yet no evidence that any other form of political organization has successfully reconciled political integration and territorially based ethnic diversity* for any extended length of time except by the imposition of force (emphasis added, ellipses mine).

Along with Vincent Ostrom, Young illuminates the above position by saying that no other political organization offers better opportunities for large and culturally divided societies in the modern world than the federal formula (Young 1994: 13; Ostrom 1979: 81). Many scholars incidentally underscore that federalism in India has helped hold this vast and heterogeneous state together by embracing diversity, thereby solving inter-group tensions and conflicts essentially in a peaceful way (Bermeo 2004, Ahuja and Varshney 2005, Duchacek 1970).

Federalism's contribution to the preservation and development of minority cultures and languages could also contribute to the pacification of inter-ethnic relations (Smith 1995: 19). The Ethiopian case from this angle gives mixed signals. On the one hand, after the institutionalization of ethnic federalism, the Silte[12], who effectively mobilized for the recognition of their separate identity from the Gurage, have succeed in establishing a separate zonal structure within the SNNPR (Smith 2007, Cohen 2006, Vaughan, 2006, Assefa 2006). On the other hand, the formation of a separate Silte administrative zone adversely affected the relations between the two groups.

The credit of federalism as a device for managing conflict could also lie in its promise of making ethnically diverse heterogeneous states more homogenous through the creation of sub-units (O'Leary 2001: 281). Aalen also reveals the efficacy of federalism by saying:

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[12]The Silte people, whose identity question was resolved relatively in peace in 2001, were in the past considered as a sub-group of the Gurage ethnic group (Smith 2007; Nishi 2005; Cohen 2006; Assefa 2006; Assefa 2012; Vaughan 2006).

Although federalism in its initial form (the US and Swiss model) was not designed to regulate conflicts based on ethnicity or other identity differences, it is today conceived as one of the better devices to meet conflicts among groups and between the central state and sub-national communities (2002: 14, emphasis added).

As far as Ethiopia's limited experience is concerned, federalism's contribution to the pacification of ethnic relations is far away from what is proposed here. In fact, the most visible change pertaining to conflicts in Ethiopia after the adoption of federalism has either been the emergence or the aggravation of violent localized ethnic conflicts (Abbink 2006, Dereje 2006, Solomon 2006, Merera 2003, Vaughan 2006). These localized ethnic conflicts do not pose credible threats to the central elite.

Yet while the above division of conflict literature has pointed to federalism as a means of managing inter-group conflicts that might otherwise escalate into violence, doubts have been raised among scholars about its ability as a means of managing ethno-linguistic diversity (McGarry and O'Leary 1993, Basta-Fleiner 2000, Cornell 2002).

Indeed, as succinctly observed by William Riker, the ideological promotion of federalism as a way of guaranteeing democracy and freedom is challenged due to the creation of different majorities and minorities at national and sub-national levels (1964: 142). He still hinted that federalism works against local minorities by encouraging 'local tyranny' (*ibid*.: 143). Coming to Ethiopia, the post-1991 federal experience cannot escape from this reality. In several ways, 'local tyranny' has affected inter-ethnic relations at local and regional levels in federal Ethiopia. The inadequacy of federalism in managing ethnic conflicts is also further elaborated by Walter Kalin. He stated,

Ethnically constituted sub-national governments in multiethnic federations exacerbate minority problems whenever they are unable to integrate or even tolerate persons on their territory who are of a different ethnic origin. Thus, decentralized forms of governance may become a danger for the individual rights and possibilities of democratic participation of persons belonging to other minorities or to the ethnic group that has the majority at the national level (Kalin 2000: 5, emphasis added).

In Ethiopia, ethnic regionalization since 1991 has dramatically transformed the relations between the titular (regional majorities) and the non-titular (regional or settler minorities) groups from a nonviolent frontier one into an inter-ethnic tension and conflict. The cases from Regional States of Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, Oromiya, and SNNPR in this respect attest to the impact of ethnic federalism on the generation and transformation of ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia (Assefa 2006, Assefa 2012, EHRCO 2009, Abbink 2006, Abbink 2011).

In addition to the plight of local minorities, the efforts to define boundaries of ethno-regional identity groups of multi-ethnic federations have proven problematic and could cause ethnic tensions and conflicts. This is particularly true in the areas or borderlands where two or more ethnic groups converge. In the Russian federation, for instance, the arbitrary way in which internal boundaries divide ethnic groups has been a major source of tensions (Lapidus and de Nevers 1995: 3). In Ethiopia also several violent conflicts between neighboring ethnic groups erupted owing to contested boundaries in the post-1991 period (Lake and Rothchild 1996, Asnake 2004, Assefa 2006, Vaughan 2006, Abbink 2006, Cohen 2006). For instance, ethnic conflicts surrounding regional boundaries have been observed between the Borana (Oromiya) and Gerri (Somali), the Afar (Afar) and the Issa (Somali), and the Gedeo (SNNPR) and the Guji (Oromiya) (Assefa 2006, Assefa 2012, Abbink 2006, EHRCO 2009).

In sum, the above contending views reviewed here relating to the utility of the federal devices as a means of managing ethnic diversity unveil the actual problems of designing state structures that would help manage ethnic conflicts. In this article, a synthesis of some of the above analytical explanations and arguments on the utility of federalism as a device of managing ethnic conflicts will be used to explore the Guji-Gedeo conflict in the subsequent sections.

Research Methodology

The methodology used in this study is essentially a qualitative approach mainly with opinion and descriptive surveys that involves qualitative information collected from the field through different data collection tools. Operationally, the instruments of data collection include secondary data sources, semi-structured and open-ended interviews with key informants,

informal conversations, and small group discussions. All along personal observations have been made. The key informants were identified and selected for their specific knowledge of the information needed for the study as well as in light of its nature and scope.

Accordingly, they were selected from community elders, leaders of traditional social organizations, local and regional officials, retired civil servants, and others. While small group discussions were mainly used to scrutinize some 'controversial' or contested issues even within members of a particular group, informal conversations were chosen in order to uncover the back-region information of a group. Interview guidelines were designed carefully to serve the required purpose: the questions were open-ended and follow-up types to enable us to pose further questions following from the formally designed interview questions so as to infer the possible information that could be gained from informants.

Context of the Study

The Guji-Oromo: The Land and the People
The Guji people (also known as 'Jam Jamtu' or 'Jam Jam' by their neighbors and in some travelers' account) are one of the many branches of the Oromo ethnic group that is found predominantly in today's Borena and Guji[13] Zones (hereafter Guji people) of the Oromiya National Regional State (Taddesse 2002: 118). There are also significant numbers of the Guji people in the SNNPR, mainly in Gedeo and Sidama Zones (CSA 2007).[14]

According to the Guji Zone Education Office (2012) currently the total population of the Guji is estimated at 1.3 million.[15] The Guji land is bordered in the east with Arsi-Oromo both in the Borena and Bale Zones, and with Ganale River, in the west and in northwest with Lake Abbaya, which separates Borena Zone from the Gamo-Goffa and Welayeta Zones of the SNNPR, with Gedeo in the north and northwest, with Sidama in the east

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[13]Guji Zone of Oromiya Regional State was created in 2002, when the upland Weredas of the Borena Zone was split apart to create it (Girum 2011).

[14]For a detailed account of this see *The 2007 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia: Statistical Report for SNNPR.*

[15]See the unpublished document entitled 'Balance Score Card of Guji Zone: Education Office', Negelle, October 2012.

and northeast, with Kore and Burji in the west and southwest respectively, and with Borena-Oromo in the south (Abiyot 2005:1-2).

In the past, the Guji accounted for seven Weredas out of twelve Weredas of Borena Zone. They particularly inhabit Oddo-Shakiso, Hagere-Mariam, Waderra-Adola, Urraga, Bore, and (the newly established) Galanna-Abbaya Weredas (Hussein 2002: 34). These days, however, the Guji account for twelve Weredas, which include Hambella-Wamena, Liben, Kercha, Dima (Afele-Kola), Negelle Town, Adola Town, Girja (Harenfema), Wadera, Oddo-Shakiso, Urraga, and Bore (CSA, 2007). Beyond the Guji proper, one finds the Guji population in Bale Zone of Oromiya, across the Ganale River in the Gamo-Goffa and Welayeta Zones of SNNPR, around Natch Sarr National Park, and in Sidama Zone, particularly in the Wondo Genet area, which is found east of Awassa. We do also find a good number of Guji communities in Arero and Liben Weredas of Borena Zone (Hussein 2002:34).

In terms of agro-ecological distribution, the Guji occupy a land area of various ecologies and, practice both livestock rearing and agricultural activities with the emphasis on the former (Taddesse 1997: 300-01). In terms of altitude, the Guji land possess Rift valley, hot area, in the west, which is as low as under 1,700 meters above sea level, and mountainous areas, to the north of the Rift valley, which is as high as 3,000 meters above sea level (Hinnant 1977:16). In the northern part of Guji, the average temperature is 14° C with a periodic rainfall. Barely is the dominant crop in this area. Here, we do find permanent settlement of the people with a relatively high population density (Taddesse 1995:39). In particular, this central highland part of the Guji area is characterized by high rainfall, fertility and ever green nature, cold climate and crop cultivation, mainly barley and wheat (Abiyot 2005:2-3). This fertile land stretches between the towns of Hagere-Mariam in the west and Adola in the east. The same can be said of north-south direction, beginning from around Hagere-Selam town in the Sidama Zone, extending southwards through Bore and Waderra-Adola Weredas and stretching further south. In fact, it is this kind of fertility of the land that had attracted a large number of Gedeo, since 1960, to settle in the Guji territory (Hussein *ibid.*).

Clan Organization
The Guji-Oromo, unlike their neighboring Borena and other Oromo groups that make up a single entity, is a confederation of three independent groups, namely Uraga/Urraga[16], Matti and Hoku. Although each group occupies a defined and relatively separated and autonomous territory, the three Guji groups/confederacies were and still are firmly united and mutually interdependent in times of warfare[17], natural calamities and economic crisis, and more notably conducting Gadda ritual services (Taddesse 1995: 40, Taddesse 1994: 310, Hinnant 1977:16, Van de Loo 1991: 69).

Geographically, the Hoku mainly inhabit Oddo-Shakiso and Waderra-Adola Weredas, while the Matti live primarily in Bore Wereda. Urraga, which is considered as the largest Guji group, stretchs from Urraga Wereda in the southeast to Lake Abbaya in the west and northwest (Taddesse *ibid.*). Alabdu, who were in the earlier period purely pastoralists, predominantly inhabit a distinct territory of the Galanna-Abbaya Weredas. In effect, this phratry occupies Urraga, Bule Hora and Galanna-Abbaya Weredas (*ibid.*). The scope of this study is, however, limited to Urraga including Alabdu Guji who essentially exhibited long periods of interaction, interdependence and recently conflicts with the Gedeo people.

The Traditional System of Administration: the 'Gadaa'
The Gadaa system is a very comprehensive institution of the Oromo. No Oromo cultural and historical concepts would be understood without understanding the role of the Gadaa system and the value attached to it by the community. The system has been an important mechanism that facilitates legal, political and cultural interactions among the Guji-Oromo (Hinnant 1977: 181, Asmarom 1973, Van den Loo 1991: 26). It is considered as a vital democratic mechanism that encourages peaceful power transition within a limited period between groups of individuals who are entitled to hold political power in a series of formal steps. There are thirteen steps in the contemporary Guji Gadda grades in which a man in his life span

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[16]Uraga/Urraga is a major sub-group of the Guji-Oromo which includes Alabdu, Woyestu and Hallo. Consequently, Alabdu-Guji is considered as part and parcel of Uraga/Urraga (Taddesse 1995:40).

[17]The recent cooperation among all the Guji, regardless of group differences or administrative division, in their fight against the Gedeo is a case in point.

passes through Sulluda, Dabballee (Gudurru), Qarra, Kuusaa[18], Rabba Midho, Dori, Gadaa, Baatu (Yuba I), Yuba (II), Yuba Guddaa (III), Jarsa Gudurru (Gadaamojjii), Jarsa Qulquulu (Pure old man), and Jarsa Reqa (Old man who has ended) which symbolize childhood to old-age correspondingly (Hinnant *ibid.*: 126-34). It is found on age-set and genealogical structure.

In short, despite the various external[19] and internal[20] challenges that tested the Gadda system and abolished it or led to its decline through time among different Oromo groups, the Guji are one of the few Oromo branches who are still able to preserve the structural values of the Gadda system.

The Gedeo: The Land and the People

The Gedeo people are one of the over fifty ethnic communities who populate the SNNPR, predominantly in Gedeo Zone shortly after the adoption of the federal structure. Nonetheless, this does not mean that all of the Gedeo live only in this region. While out of the total population of 986,977 of the Gedeo, about 729,955 live in the Gedeo Zone, there are also around 245,165 Gedeo living in the Oromiya Regional State, mainly in Guji and Borena Zones (CSA 2007).[21] The Gedeo land extends south as a narrow strip of land along the eastern escarpment of the Rift Valley into the Oromiya Regional State, facing east of Lake Abbaya. The Gedeo land is virtually encircled by the Oromiya Regional State. To put it another way, the Gedeo land is bordered with Bore and Urraga Weredas in the east, Sidama Zone in the north, Galanna and Abbaya Weredas in the southwest and northwest respectively, and Bule-Hora Wereda in the south and southeast (Girum 2011:62).

In terms of agro-ecology, the Gedeo people dwell in an area of diverse ecologies and practice principally agricultural activities with less emphasis

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[18]Hinnant omitted Kuusaa, maybe as it is a break with the ordered sequence of life (see Hinnant 1977).

[19]The incorporation of the territory into the Ethiopian state and the successive imposition of culture from the center, and the introduction of missionary activities since the 1950s were the key external factors behind the decline of the Gadaa system (*ibid.*: 217-21).

[20]Equally important, the internal challenge which was the force of 'modernity' among the youth who began to question about the advantage and expediency of the system also virtually undermined the Gadaa system (Informants: Gobbu Roba and Guyyee Wato).

[21]See CSA, *supra* note 15.

on livestock rearing, no matter how the landscape is not so conducive. In terms of altitude, the Gedeo land possesses three ecological Zones, namely highland or Dega (28 per cent), midland or Woina-Dega (71.50 per cent), and lowland or Kola (0.50 per cent). This implies that the major part of the Gedeo land experiences a moderate kind of temperature and the share of lowland (Kolla) is insignificant even as compared with highland (Dega). This shows that the major part of the land is not so suitable for agricultural activities (*ibid.*: 69-70).

A good variety of crops are grown in the Gedeo land. These include coffee, Enset (false banana), maize, barely, wheat, beans, peas, and fruits and vegetables. Coffee is a major cash crop and a vital source of income for a large number of households. In this respect, Yirga-Chaffe Wereda produces one of the best quality coffees grown in Ethiopia (Zewdu 1994: 11).

Clan Organization
Clan organization of the Gedeo takes both forms of kinship and territorial pattern. Before their conquest by the Ethiopian Empire in the 1890s, the Gedeo lived in a federation of three territories or Zones called Sasse Rogo, or 'three Roga'. These Roga are Sobbho (Suubbo) which encompasses the northeast or the highland part of Gedeo, including Bule Wereda, Dhiibata the southern part of the Gedeo Zone, including Yirga-Chaffe, Kochere (formerly Fisseha Genet) and beyond to encompass the recently set up Kochere Wereda, and Rikuta (Riiqata) which is situated in northern part of the Gedeo Zone, particularly Wenago Wereda, including the town of Dilla and ruled by a council of elected elders, according to the Baallee tradition (Tadesse 2002: 25). Clan association of the Gedeo ethnic community comprises Henbba'a, Logoda, Bakarro, Darashsha, Hanuma, Doobba'a and Gorggorshsha (*ibid.*).

The informants agree that, in real terms, today, seen in the context of territorial settlement pattern, the perception of territorial division (Sessie-Roga) appears to be more theoretical than practical among the Gedeo clans. In other words, whilst some clans may be majority in some areas, we do also observe the presence of others along with the major ones. Henbba'a is dominant in Wenago Wereda, but do also inhabit Yirga-Chaffe Wereda, along with Bakarro. Bakarro are found both in Yirga-Chaffe and Kochere Weredas. The Logoda are dominant in Kochere Wereda but they do reside

in Bule Wereda as well. The reason for this is that these seven clans do not exclusively occupy a given territory or Zone contrary to the general assumption. Nevertheless, the popular view that these seven Gedeo clans live in the three Zones or territories still exists (Tadesse *et al.* 2008: 14).

The Traditional System of Administration: the 'Baallee'

The Gedeo people, like their neighboring Oromo and Sidama communities, are organized under the Gadaa system, which is also referred to as the Baallee system by the score of Gedeo themselves. It is a traditional administrative structure that provides secular and religious leadership for the Gedeo. In the Baallee system, a man passes through nine Baallee grades in his life span all through Qadado, Siida, Lumaasa, Raabba, Luba, Yuuba, Guduro, Qulullo, and Cewwadjje which represent childhood to old age respectively. It is based on generation-grading and genealogical system (*ibid.*: 19-28). Incidentally, Zewdu illuminates the above position as follows:

> Gedeo people had its own social, political and legal systems. This was Gadda system [Baallee system] of administration that divides Gedeo into groups or sets that assume different responsibilities in the society. It has guided religious, social, and economic life of the people for many years (1994: 3).

To sum up, despite the decline of the Baallee system and the value attached to the Gondoro tradition, people still recognize its importance in preserving ethnic cohesion among the Gedeo people as well as inter-ethnic cooperation between the group and the neighboring ethnic group like Guji-Oromo.

The Changing Dynamics of Guji-Gedeo Relationships

Interactions between the Gedeo and Guji communities have observed both forms of cooperation and conflict. While there had been a long record of friendly interaction, there have also emerged violent conflicts in the post-1991 period. What follows is a discussion of each of these interactions that exist between these communities.

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Amity Relationships

In general, Guji-Gedeo friendly relations have exhibited the forms of the myth of 'common ancestry', social ties, and economic relations. Thus, it is necessary to have a look at the forms of longstanding cooperation that existed between the two ethnic communities one after another.

To begin with the first one, historically besides neighborhood the alleged ethnic affinity between the Guji and the Gedeo was one factor for their limited hostility but co-existence. It is said that the Guji and the Gedeo have had blood relations. As it has been told and retold by the informants, Gujo (the founding father of the Guji) and Darasso (the founding father of the Gedeo) have considered each other as brothers where the Gedeo was even seen as an elder brother of the Guji. Accordingly, the latter respects the former in social interactions and cultural practices that they shared in common such as Gadda ceremonies.[22] Consequently, the relations between the Guji and the Gedeo have not been unfriendly until recent times (Solomon 2004: 40).

Based on the accounts obtained from Guji and Gedeo informants, and McClellan (1988: 22), one can claim that the Gedeo and Guji do not kill each other as they have come from a common ancestor. In view of that, if the Gedeo and Guji kill each other, the informants expressed their deep belief in the myth in that breaking the curse leads to fatal consequences like paralysis, leprosy, misfortunes in life and even death.[23]

On the other hand, while Gedeo informants raise brotherhood, cultural ties and intermarriage, justification that 'Gedeo never sheds blood' and 'fear of ancestral curse' as fundamental reasons for the strict ruling out of killing and/or conflict between the two groups, the views of Guji informants ranges from those who accept the Gedeo's claim-with the exception of the ideas of brotherhood and 'Gedeo never sheds blood'- to those who argue that killing a Gedeo man would not offer social prestige and economic values for the killer as the Gedeo were considered an 'inferior ethnic community'- Warra

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[22]Informants: Hayyicha Qaqqabo Shota and Hayyicha Dama Bora-Gedeo; Ato Gammade Aredo and Abba Gada Damboba Gumi-Guji, February 2010. See also Hussein (2002), and Asebe (2007).

[23]Informants: Hayyicha Qaqqabo Shota and Hayyicha Dama Bora-Gedeo; Ato Gammade Aredo and Abba Gada Damboba Gumi-Guji, February 2010.

Xinnoo (weak people) by the former.[24] In contrast, the killing of people who are rival neighbors like the Sidama, Arsi and Borena enable the Guji to hold a Kuda ceremony (a ceremony in which they boast about their deeds after killing).

Whether this happened from the brotherhood angle or Guji's view of the Gedeo as a 'simple' and 'inferior ethnic' community - as the Guji often argue - remains unclear. Albeit the Guji's claims are true, still it indirectly contributed to the coexistence of the groups.

Besides the myth of 'genealogical ties' or 'common origin', they have social interactions that include intermarriage. According to most of the key informants, from the two ethnic communities in the Gedeo Zone as well as in Bule Hora Wereda, there are a number of examples to prove the existence of inter-ethnic marriages. According to these sources, a marriage relation that exists between the two communities is practiced by the poor and the rich alike. Nevertheless, these findings should not lead us to make general assertions that there are no social and cultural traditions that impede Guji-Gedeo intermarriage. In this regard, marriage to and from alien groups is seen as violating the customs but not absolutely prohibited.[25] The informants from Matti Guji earlier also told us that the Guji normally do not enter into marriage with the Gedeo whom they consider as an 'inferior ethnic community'. It is only the poorest Guji man who may marry a Gedeo woman as he may not be able to find a wife from Guji in view of his lack of ability to afford bride wealth, which is offered in kind - commonly heads of cattle. Both Gedeo and Guji key informants confirmed this assertion.[26]

Nevertheless, no matter how views oscillate from limited and unilateral flow of marriage relations (views of many Guji informants), to common and bilateral intermarriage between the two groups (views of almost all my Gedeo informants), marriage relations may have been among factors that contributed to Guji-Gedeo harmonious relations until recently.[27]

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[24]Informants: Anonymous, February 2010.

[25]Informants: Ayano Halake and Gammade Idama, February-2010. See also Abiyot (2005:19), Hussein (2002), and Asebe (2007).

[26]Informant: Gammade Idema, Gammade Arado, Faburary-2010. See also Hussein (2002:64) and Hinnant (1972:201 and 205).

[27]Informant: Hayyicha Qaqqabo Shota, Faburary-2010.

Finally, economic interdependence, which is the third area of co-operation, had been the most significant form of harmonious interactions between the two ethnic communities without which the very existence of the groups would be trivial. The two communities have been mutually dependent in terms of exchange of products. The agro-pastoralist Guji have been dependent on Gedeo agricultural products while the Gedeo, in turn, depended on livestock and livestock products of the agro-pastoralist Guji. This mutual interdependence and cooperation, thus, created peaceful relations between the two communities (Tadesse 2002: 25). In fact, it seems that this economic interaction more fits to the reason why the relation between them became peaceful until recent time.

Enmity Relationships
As discussed in the preceding section, Guji and Gedeo have a long history of cooperation, interdependence and friendship. Like any neighboring communities, they compete for land resources. They have also traditionally developed instruments of conflict management when conflicts happen between them over resources.

Traditional patterns of conflict and conflict management between the two peoples were, however, changed as a result of the establishment of ethno-linguistic based regional states. In the new federal structure, the Gedeo became part of the SNNPR and the Guji part of the Oromiya Regional State. This means the traditional competitive natures of relationships between the ethnic communities are thus experiencing new dimensions following the formation of the two adjacent Regional States. As a result, traditional competitions/conflicts of the Guji and Gedeo were transformed into territorial conflicts first in 1995 and then in 1998 (Girum 2011). Tensions between the two communities over border issues led to violent conflicts, which led to the death of many people, displacement of thousands of people and destruction of property (*ibid.*).

Instruments of Managing the Guji-Gedeo Conflicts in the Post-1991 Ethiopia

The post-1991 Ethiopian experience has revealed the use of federalism as a political instrument that could offer better conflict management mechanisms that would lessen inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts in the

country. In this respect, federalism as a tool of conflict management presents different structures, processes, and institutions in addressing the Guji-Gedeo ethnic conflict. What follows is a review of each of these attempts made at restoring peace and resolving the conflict.

The Role of the Federal Government
Articles of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), put forward a set of laws, *modus operandi* and institutional set-up for managing disputes and conflicts pertinent to questions of ethnic identity, settler versus native relations and territorial or boundary related issues. Under the Constitution of the FDRE, the most significant and relevant constitutional organ for conflict management is the House of Federation [HoF], which is 'composed of representatives of Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' of Ethiopia (FDRE Constitution 1995: 115). This second chamber [HoF] was created to safeguard and develop the cooperation, partnership and consensual relations of Ethiopia's ethnic communities on the basis of equality and respect for their diversity while realizing their commitment to uphold the constitution (Ministry of Information, 1994). The competences of the House are, therefore, candidly associated with the need to maintain and promote the constitutional compact of Ethiopia's ethnic communities. In this regard, relating to management of conflicts, the relevant competences of the House are (a) to interpret the constitution, (b) to decide upon issues relating to the rights of Nations, Nationalities and Peoples to self-determination, including the right to secession in accordance with the Constitution, (c) to promote the equality of the peoples of Ethiopia enshrined in the constitution and promote and consolidate their unity based on their mutual consent, and (d) to strive to find solutions to disputes or misunderstandings that may arise between states (FDRE Constitution *ibid.*:116). Article 48 of the Constitution stipulates the principles and procedures that the HoF should follow in resolving border disputes between the regional states when the states fail to reach agreement.[28]

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[28] Article 48(1).The HoF is expected to give a final decision within a period of two years. Often, it tries to create a forum for negotiation between the states but if that fails it facilitates a referendum (FDRE Constitution 1995:104). See also Article 62 of the FDRE Constitution of 1995.

In the actual management of ethnic conflicts in the country, the standard practice followed by the HoF in resolving border conflicts between member regional states of the federation have been to hold a referendum, although some remain unsettled even today.[29] Referenda were held in different parts of the country to provide solutions to conflicts over territorial claims among ethnic groups residing in neighboring states (Ethiopian Human Rights Council [EHRCO] 2009:23). Likewise, referendum was conducted in some contentious Kebelles[30] of Kochere and Hagere-Mariam (now Bule-Hora) Weredas[31] of the SNNPR and Oromiya Regional State respectively. In theory, this seems an ideal solution, as it will give residents in the disputed territories an opportunity to decide to which region they want to belong. In practice, however, the referendum was not instrumental in providing a lasting solution to the border disputes between the two communities because the HoF, despite its constitutional mandate to resolve the dispute, did not make any considerable contribution towards managing and resolving such violent inter-communal conflict due to serious human and technical capacity constraints as well as its inability to address its obligation independently.[32]

Aside from the negligible role played by HoF, regarding the process and the result of the referendum, both the Guji and Gedeo people perceive

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[29]The unresolved dispute over contested borders of Borana (Oromiya)-Garri (Somali) and the occurrence of similar conflicts in the country could explain how referendum as a tool of ethnic conflict management has failed to serve its purpose although the Silte identity question has been solved relatively peacefully via referendum (Assefa, 2012). For an illustration of the former case, it is sufficient to mention the recurring long-standing tensions between the Borana and the Garri communities which yet again escalated into a fully-fledged conflict in mid July 2012 in the Moyale area. The trigger of the recent conflict, like the previous one, is thought to have been a simmering dispute over contested boundary claims (http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off_the_Wire/2012-08/14/content_26234914.htm). The case of Wolayta-Sidama ethnic conflict over border issue can also be cited (Abbink 2006).

[30]Kebelle (singular) was introduced as the lowest tier of local government by the Derg régime in 1975. It refers to neighborhood associations. In the present local and regional government system, Kebelle serves as the lowest tier of local government just below the Wereda.

[31]Wereda (singular) in Amharic refers to district and is found below the Zone.

[32]Informants: Zerihun Zewde, Alemayhu Wakktola, Demissie Andinu, and Gizachew Abebe, July-2010.

the situations differently. Some of my Oromo informants in the conflict localities casted their doubt about the sincerity of the result of the referendum by saying:

> We [Guji] are extremely displeased in many ways with the results of the referendum, which still influences the relations of the groups in these *Weredas* since it does not serve its aim impartially.[33]

In the same way, other Guji informants from other district and former government official, who was an Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) member, substantiated the above points in the following words:

> Many Guji people are dissatisfied with the process because they feel they have lost their land by a referendum that they considered as unjust and unfair. However, they have no choice rather than accepting the peace process; otherwise, they would be arbitrarily labeled as anti-peace and jailed.[34]

On the contrary, the Gedeo, whom the so-called 50% +1 'referendum' seems to have benefited compared to their counterpart, were even in favor of the resumption of the referendum while the Gedeo politicians resolutely insisted on the importance of it.[35]

It is, therefore, necessary to underscore the total failure or impracticability of using a referendum (constitutional principle) to provide a just and lasting solution to the ethnic conflicts that emerged between the two peoples at least for the moment.

Besides, the federal legislature has the responsibility of direct involvement in conflict management through investigation against human rights violations conducted by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, and by sending Members of Parliament to the conflict-ridden zones. These varieties of circumstances allow the federal government to intervene in the internal affairs of the regional states to give effective protection and remedies to victims of human rights violations as well as to reverse the

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[33]Informants: Gizachew Abebe, Alemayhu Wakktola, Turrie Bitacha, and Damboba Gumi, July-2010.

[34]Informants: Jibicho Borame, Gizaw Teka, Gumi Bembassa, and former OPDO official, Faburary-2010.

[35]Informants: Anonymous, February-2010.

grave and deteriorating security conditions in those areas. In this case, the other apparent trend in the management of the conflicts which is still characterized by the dominance of politico-administrative organs through federal government intervention noticeably was the use of force. Accordingly, upon request by the highest executive organ of the SNNPR and Oromiya Regional States, the Federal Police Forces/Rapid Police Forces intervened between the two conflicting parties to assist regional law enforcement organs to maintain law and order through the use of 'appropriate' measures 'proportionate' to the circumstances but with little success. What rather happened was that Rapid Police Forces, as it was the case in 1995, was itself encircled in areas such as Kercha Kebelle, leave alone stopping the fighting. Worst of all, the Guji became infuriated with the forces and began shelling them as they suspected some members of the force siding with the Gedeo, thereby, in some instances, complicating the situation (Hussein 2002: 76-78). In the end, unlike the traditional conflict resolution practice the groups employed long ago in bringing durable peace, the military intervention 'stopped' the 1995 conflict after huge damages were already done. This has significantly shown the inadequacy of traditionally developed instruments of conflict management of the two communities after the federalization of the country.

Unlike the 1995 conflict, however, the military intervention was 'unable' to control the 1998 conflict until local elders from both conflicting groups, and the neighboring ethnic groups intervened between the two belligerent groups for cessation of hostilities. There is a general understanding that the intervention of elders ended the 1998 conflict, while government structures made the progress of traditional institutions of intervention smooth. Government authorities also acknowledged the role of traditional conflict resolution method through the Gondoro practice.[36]

Apart from the military intervention, the Federal Police Forces in collaboration with the authorities of the two regions also rehabilitated the internally displaced persons who lost their homes and properties during the conflicts. Moreover, these forces assisted the endeavors made by the two regional authorities to bring to justice those who were implicated in criminal activities during the conflicts. Particularly, architects of the conflict

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[36]Informants: Hayyicha Dama Bora and Abba Gadda Damboba Gumi, February-2010.

from both sides including the higher officials were imprisoned indefinitely.[37]

Until recently, however, there were no efforts by the federal government to give a lasting solution to the problem. The Federal government faces a critical dilemma about the border conflict between the two peoples. The immense polarity that exists, not only between the narratives of the two groups about the root cause of the conflict, but also about the means to resolve the conflict provides little room for the federal government to maneuver a compromise. More importantly, the federal government appears tied by its geopolitical interest in the region[38], the Federal Constitution and its own policy pronouncements, which heavily emphasize the rights of peoples in the contested territories to choose freely to which region they would like to belong through a plebiscite, for which the Guji in the past vigorously blamed the federal government in many ways with the results of the 'referendum' as it did not serve its aim fairly.

From the above discussion, it is very clear that the political center emphasized heavily on temporary solutions - a 'fire-brigade' approach- rather than addressing the factors that cause the border conflict. In this connection, it may be right to cite the words of the official government report from Alemayehu which states that:

> *'As the previous 'firefighting' approach of conflict resolution has not succeeded, more efforts are now directed towards prevention; and an "early warning system"* is being studied with the assistance of UNDP. It is anticipated that within a short period of time, the country will have a comprehensive strategy on conflict prevention and resolution; and on the basis of this strategy, extensive measures will be taken to end the occurrence of conflicts' (2009: 69, emphasis added).

Based on this, it is fair to conclude that many of the interventions made by the federal government remained ad-hoc, disparate, not well coordinated and, above all, reactive.

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[37]Informants: See *supra* note 33.

[38]The contested boundary areas became a geopolitical interest of the federal government to keep the allegedly 'insecure' districts under the sphere of influence of the Gedeo Zone to weaken the alleged threat from the OLF.

The Role of Regional States and Local Governments of Oromiya and SNNPR
State and local governments have a major duty to sustain peace and security of citizens and manage conflicts through joint/inter-governmental collaborative mechanisms. While the formation of comprehensive structures, processes and mechanisms are imperative to improve inter-ethnic relations and manage inter-ethnic conflicts through the cooperation of all concerned bodies, there are some forums and channels of communication by which regional states meet and address their mutual problems at various levels. Besides, they have a duty to promote harmonious inter-cultural relations among the diverse ethnic groups residing within their territories (FDRE Constitution, 1995). With a particular reference to Article 52 (2) (**a** and **g**) of the Constitution of the FDRE, regional states have the powers and responsibilities to guarantee constitutional rights and freedoms of citizens, solve political, social and economic problems of the citizens, and to maintain peace and security of the general public inside their own territories (*ibid.*:108). In this respect, there were attempts at various levels of administrative hierarchies of the two regions to manage the inter-ethnic conflicts between Gedeo and Guji ethnic groups. In particular, the authorities of the SNNPR and Oromiya Region made a joint attempt to find solution to their common border disputes by creating inter-governmental committees. The existence of the inter-governmental mechanism, however, has depended on the good will of the states themselves. If the authorities have a good political will, as was the case with the Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz Regions (B-G Region), the joint committees can contribute considerably towards managing the existing inter-ethnic conflicts.[39] The lack of good political will, along with the constraints of human and technical competence on the part of the inter-governmental authorities as were the cases with Oromiya and B-G regions, Oromiya and

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[39]Although the potential for conflict was there, no violent conflict erupted between the B-G and Amhara regions so far owing to the manner they managed their relations (Alemayehu, 2009:62).

Somali regions[40], and Afar and Somali regions[41], the end result of the joint committee may possibly exacerbate the conflicts.[42]

Along similar line with the above cases, the track record of the committee of the inter-governmental authorities of the SNNPR and Oromiya Region in the management of such violent inter-communal conflict between Gedeo and Guji was not encouraging. The fact that members of these committees came from the ruling elite of the two regions having claims over territories meant that they were biased and lacked neutrality. To be precise, these higher authorities, who already played a role in creating distrust among the parties in a number of occasions, maneuvered the conflict handling process by intriguing the advantages in favor of their ethnic groups' claims. It seems the conflict developed the potent force of ethnicity that activates a dividing boundary of 'us' and 'them' between the formerly friendly neighbors, Guji and Gedeo. Consequently, ethnicity as a rallying factor in the conflict by stressing differences rather than unifying factors immeasurably undermined the shared core values of tolerance, cooperation, mutual trust, and traditional ways of resolving disputes that had functioned for centuries between the two people.[43]

Equally, the elite of the two regions with their political loyalty to complete the policies of the political center paralyzed the whole conflict management process. A modest illumination of the above position taken by executive agencies of the two regions comes from Merera Gudina (as quoted in Asebe 2007: 75) who contends that:

> *they were the mouthpieces of the TPLF/EPRDF party programme rather than resolving local conflicts at local level in accordance with the realities on the*

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[40]The dispute over contested borders of Borana (Oromiya)-Garri (Somali) could explain how referendum as tool of ethnic conflicts management has failed to serve its purpose (Assefa, 2006; Assefa, 2012; Abbink, 2006; EHRCO, 2009).

[41]In the case of the Afar-Issa conflict as well, the new ethnic regions of Afar and Somali either directly or indirectly participate in the conflict. For instance, the Afar region provided logistical support to Afar fighters in one of their violent encounters with the Issa (Vaughan and Tronvoll, 2003:19).

[42]The recent conflict between the Gumuz and the Oromo in the border areas between Eastern Wellega and Kamash Zone of B-G and the Oromiya regions can be invoked as a good illustration of the inadequacy on the part of the state and local government officials' knowledge in and capacity of conflict management mechanisms (*ibid.*:61 and 69-70).

[43]Informants: See *supra* note 33. See also Asebe (2007).

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ground. Had it not been for their surrogate existence, the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) would have had a different stance from the Gedeo People's Democratic Organization (GPDO)[44] [sic] in such contending issue between Guji and Gedeo peoples (Emphasis added).

From the standpoint of the political center, there is a widely held view that the 1990s Guji-Gedeo conflicts had brought suspicion on the part of the federal government that the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) was a driving force behind the political grievances raised by the Guji. It is understandable that the federal government perceives any popular movement from the Oromo nationality as being instigated by the OLF. To further strengthen the above points, Guji informants from Abbaya district described the matter by saying:

> The problem - as the view of the federal government - not only as an issue of border claims but also as a politically sensitive, insecure and delicate area, which called for heavy protection from being a safe haven for 'external force'. Hence, the central government seems to have inclined to a policy of keeping this 'sensitive' area under the administrative authority of the Gedeo for the reason that the presumed threat was from the OLF.[45]

Thus, it seemed more likely that after the conflicts of the 1990s, the government developed geo-political and administrative interest over the disputed territories. This complicated the matter further, and the settlement of boundary disputes had been a long and inexpedient process due to failure of committee members to take proper measures quickly. In consequence, in many instances, both administrative and political organs of the two regions were slow to respond and their actions were mainly reactive; the political and administrative organs, in the majority of the cases, involved themselves in conflict resolution efforts after the damage was already done. In countless cases, no preventive actions were taken, even if tensions were

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[44]This is to caution readers that the original writer mistakenly quotes Gedeo People's Democratic Organization (GDPO), the opposition party led by Alasa Mangasha, instead of Gedeo People's Revolutionary Democratic Movement (GPRDM), which came into existence in 1992 with the financial and moral support of the EPRDF when it [EPRDF] failed to control GPDO (Solomon, 2009:62-65).

[45]Informant: Anonymous, February 2010.

simmering for a long period of time between the two ethnic groups. The politico-administrative organs[46], in some cases, were also part of the problem because these organs were behind inciting the conflict through provocative actions and xenophobic statements. In this regard, the following provocative statements of a representative from Oromiya regional state as quoted from Hussein (2002:80) are very illustrative of the above remarks: "If the Guji are against the intended referendum, they could go to the jungle and fight". This means the senior authorities of the two regions participated in this conflict as both parties to the conflict and agents of conflict management.

Moreover, the role of judicial organs, i.e. courts at Wereda, zonal and regional levels in management of conflict was missing. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the conflict management processes in those contentious areas were burdened with severe constraints considerably ranging from lack of good will gesture of the authorities' fragile nature of institutionalization of inter-governmental joint effort to the extent of reluctance among all concerned bodies to work in partnership vigilantly, that is to say the authorities of the two regional states, in a number of occasions, tried to disassociate themselves from such conflicts formally.[47]

Above all, state and local governments of both regional states failed to discharge their task pertaining to conflict management effectively for different reasons. First, the understanding of the basic principles of federalism of the state government officials leaves much to be desired. Federalism consists in, among others, three basic principles: (1) it is designed to accommodate diversity in the country's political and legal system; (2) it is designed to create a public space where all citizens are entitled to equal respect in all member states of the federation; and (3) it strives for economic development and integration by ensuring free mobility of all citizens within its sovereign territorial limits and creating inter-cultural relationships among the various ethnic groups in the country (Ratnapala 1999: 113-136). If one goes further than these generalized principles, some of the advantages of federalism in managing a multi-ethnic

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[46]In this context, I use politico-administrative organs to refer to the role political (ruling party) and administrative (dominance of executive agencies of the state) structures in conflict management processes.

[47]Informants: See *supra* note 33.

society could be examined from several angles. For instance, the creation of democratic self-government for minority ethnic groups through a federal arrangement is expected to increase their sense of security and positive identification with the multi-ethnic state and thereby reducing conflicts (T. Daniel cited in Kalin 2000:3). Similarly, bargaining and compromise which are some of the typical features of a democratic federal polity could facilitate better management of conflicts (Chapman 1993: 71-2). Federal structures and processes not only provide multiple access points to political elites at national, regional, and local levels but also offer safety valves for the expression of discontent with government policies. They assist in finding solutions to the crises that erupt from time to time in federal polities (Gagnon 1993:21).

These federal principles, nevertheless, would not seem to have been fully appreciated by some, if not all, of the state and local government officials of the two regional states. The officials have not been in a situation to develop a legal framework and offer institutional support in line with the Constitution of the FDRE which calls for ensuring smooth relations between the people of the country. For one thing, they usually espouse parochial views and much more localized interests that can incite conflicts. For another, as the federal system in Ethiopia is still very young, there is lack of adequate knowledge and experience in running a government on the part of officials from both sides of the regional states, let alone having the knowledge and capacity of managing the conflict, i.e. they had neither the capacity nor the awareness of conflict management mechanisms. Thus, in spite of the fact that the ethnic regions have been given central importance by the Federal Constitution regarding the resolution of boundary conflicts, the two regions have so far failed to generate a blueprint that would help to amicably resolve their territorial conflicts via bargaining and compromise. Consequently, conflicts in those controversial areas tend to be reinforced rather than managed effectively. Likewise, the role of judicial organs of the two regional states at Wereda, Zonal and regional levels in management of conflicts was missing.[48]

To sum up, it is, therefore, imperative to underscore that there were no as such coordinated or well-organized attempts at various levels of administrative hierarchies of the two regional governments or associated

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[48]*ibid.*

bodies to deal adequately with the border conflicts of the two adjoining ethnic communities. This clearly demonstrates that there was a serious limitation from the lowest administrative levels to the highest political hierarchies of the two regions in addressing their Constitutional obligations in parallel.

The Role of Indigenous Institutions

The most influential conflict resolution device which can be considered as an indigenous conflict resolution institution among the ethnic communities of Guji and Gedeo and their neighbors is possibly, the 'Gondoro' tradition. The Gondoro tradition has managed to survive and is today used to resolve a range of inter-communal conflicts and to improve inter-cultural relations among these ethnic communities. The term Gondoro is common both in Afan-Oromo and Gede'uffa languages which denotes the same meaning, that is to say declaring or concluding an event not to happen again by making peaceful agreement between conflicting individuals/groups. It is performed not only as a mechanism of purifying the 'curse' from the guilty but also as a method of inter-ethnic conflict resolution for ending enmity.[49] Thus, the Gondoro can be considered as a resolution mechanism that is essential to the peaceful coexistence among Guji and Gedeo ethnic communities and their neighbors (Solomon 2009:9-10 and 72).

As far as the role of the 'Gondoro' tradition in the management of conflict is concerned, its endeavor began with the first round of joint consultations in which officials from government authorities at different levels including the federal government, and prominent figures from traditional structures, such as elders from the neighboring ethnic communities along with elders from the disputant ethnic communities took part. There was also a representative of religious institution of the Guji, otherwise known as the Guji Qallu.[50] This was intended to create favorable

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[49]Informants: Hayyicha Dama Bora, Hayyicha Qaqqabo Shota, and Abba Gadda Damboba Gumi, February-2010.

[50]Guji Qallu/Qallu was the supreme religious leader of the Qallu institution who, according to the Qallu principle, would not be allowed to participate in administrative activities during the heydays of the Oromo Gadda system. The ascendancy of the Ethiopian Administration disrupted the tradition by appointing Qallu leaders in administrative positions. In this manner, the Guji Qallu was appointed by the government as Deputy Administrator of the then Gedeo Zone until his imprisonment in 1995 (Informants:

conditions for a peaceful resolution of the dispute through the Gondoro tradition that the two communities share in common. Thus, the meeting can be said to be a combination of both formal and informal structure. One can argue that this first round discussion underlined the value of the traditional structure in resolving such violent communal conflicts and in bringing a tangible peace.

What follows is the continuation of the second and in fact the main round of joint meetings where traditional leaders, elders of the two ethnic communities, representatives of Gedeo and Guji masses, and elders of other communities took part. In this traditional gathering, oxen were slaughtered and the Gondoro ritual was undertaken. The Guji Qallu (spiritual leader of the Guji), who was imprisoned accused of instigating the conflict, was also brought briefly from the jail and concluded the ceremony by blessing the peace to be durable and at the same time cursing any attempt of retaliation or revenge, although he was not lucky to see the result of the conference as he died behind bars.[51] In doing so, the two sides declared the conflict was over officially and pledged not to fight against each other in the future. This practice heralded the 'end of hostility' and 'restoration of good relations'. Incidentally, when we asked about the effectiveness of the 'modern' court system and the Gondoro tradition in making long-lasting peace, informants responded that in the court system an offender stays for some years in prison and comes back. After that, families of the deceased may take revenge by killing him. But, in the Gondoro tradition people extremely fear the 'curse' that leads to fatal consequences like paralysis, misfortunes in life or even death if they violate the oath they make during the Gondoro practice.[52]

After the declared intention of the revival of normality, the Gedeo who were displaced in the process of the conflict were encouraged to return, with the exception of those individuals whom the Guji labeled as 'guilty' or who were afraid to return. The Guji cooperated in assisting the Gedeo in the reconstruction of their houses as well as in the rehabilitation of the

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Zerihun Zewde and Gizachew Abebe).

[51]Informants: Ayano Halake, Hayyicha Dama Bora, Abba Gadda Damboba Gumi, Guyyee Wato, and Bari Bakako, February-2010.

[52]Informants: Hayyicha Qaqqabo Shota and Hayyicha Dama Bora-Gedeo; Ato Gammade Aredo, Bari Bakakko, and Abba Gada Damboba Gumi-Guji, February 2010.

returnees. They also helped the Gedeo in getting their robbed properties back.

Whatever the reliability of the 'myth', it has a crucial implication in the context of minimizing the likelihood of ethnic conflicts between the two groups who had a long history of neighborly relations.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the Gondoro tradition sustains inter-ethnic relations among the two ethnic groups more peacefully than the government military interventions particularly in the case of 1998 conflict. Consequently, its potential in complementing the state institutions in their efforts to handle conflicts is noticeably immense. And that is why government authorities at different levels, unlike the 1995 conflict, have recognized the immense significance of the Gondoro tradition in handling conflict in the area and the massive degree of legitimacy it enjoys among the local public. Commenting on the efficacy of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms in this respect William Ury remarks:

> Emotional wounds and injured relationships are healed within the context of the emotional unity of the community. Opposed interests are resolved within the context of the community interest in peace. Quarrels over rights are sorted out within the context of overall community norms. Power struggles are contained within the context of overall community power (Ury 1998: 28).

It is also imperative, however, to recall that the Gondoro tradition, which served as a tool of conflict management in the past, has become increasingly inadequate following the federalization of the country. It is sufficient to remember its deficit particularly in managing the 1995 conflict.

In conclusion, the Gondoro tradition has relatively played a key role as compared to state institutions in 'resolving' the conflicts between Guji and Gedeo and in restoring 'peace'. Particularly the continued existence of the Gondoro tradition would appear to account for the preservation of local peace and normal relations between the two ethnic communities.

Guji-Gedeo Relations: Recent Trends and Future Prospects

Pertinent to the post-conflict period, informants are divided in their views. While on the one hand, a good number of the Oromo respondents claim that normality has returned and inter-marriages have revived along with other social interactions between the two communities though there are some

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signs of disaffection among the Guji people, on the other hand, many of the Gedeo informants reject the above assertions. They contend, instead, that there is no 'genuine' conflict resolution. The revival of some sort of social interactions should not lead us to the conclusion that there are 'genuine peace' and 'mutual trust' between the two communities. It is rather an apparent peace and not a reliable one. To substantiate this assertion, one of my Gedeo informants emphasized 'the Guji still want to grab land and do not want us in their territories, which may presumably affect the recent peaceful coexistence'.

Nevertheless, no matter how diametrically views oscillate and diverge between the two groups on the post-conflict state of affairs, presently, it appears that there is a prevalence of peace and normal relations between them. However, closer investigation indicates that the prospect for peace and stability in some contested areas is uncertain in many ways in the aftermath of the conflicts, which still influence the interactions of the two ethnic groups. It is sufficient to quote my Guji informants' views to confirm the above accounts vis-à-vis post-conflict periods:

> Although we [Guji] seem to have been somewhat delighted with the delay of the referendum, which would have divided large amount of our land and people from the main Guji area, the two neighboring ethnic groups in the post-conflict periods developed a sense of suspicion, skepticism and at least hidden enmity.[53]

It appears that the two communities are thus still at loggerheads since the problem of defining border has not yet been settled as it should be; it was rather 'deferred' to go off whenever the political environment would be ripened.[54]

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[53]Informants: See *supra* note 35.

[54]To add fuel to the already existing political noise, suspicion and discontent among the Guji, currently, according to my informant first-hand account, the Gedeo show in some way an apparent signal to push for the revival of the referendum to which the Guji previously objected and vigorously blamed the government for the deep scar left in their inter-ethnic relations with Gedeo which would take several years to heal. As we know, despite the Guji's strong protest to the idea of the referendum as a means of resolving border disputes at different Conferences in the post-1995 conflict, authorities of the two regions opted for another referendum as a lasting solution for border disputes between the groups. Now no matter who (either the politicians or the concerned ordinary people of

In conclusion, the prospect for peace and harmonious relations between the two communities in the litigious areas is indecisive and a sustainable resolution to the conflicts remains elusive.

Conclusion

The Guji and Gedeo peoples of southern Ethiopia have experienced both cooperation and conflict in their relations in the past. The post-1991 political landscape in the country, however, has notably changed the pattern of conflict and its management between the two peoples. In light of this, the incident of border conflicts emerged between them in the post-federal Ethiopia. Despite the underlying assumption that federalism will improve relations among ethnic groups in the country and lessen ethnic conflicts, the diverse attempts that have been made in response to the conflict are very weak. Similarly, the use of traditional institutions in conflict resolution processes, despite the positive role it played in some way, is also very low. Adequate procedures of conflict management such as early warning and conflict prevention tools have not yet been developed. Given the unresolved dispute over the contested borders of the Guji and the Gedeo peoples, one could not rule out the possibility of conflict again in those localities.

Finally, the federal government and the authorities of the two regions need to boost their close cooperation and engagement in early warning and conflict prevention endeavors in addressing such conflicts. By the same token, strengthening of inter-state institutional cooperation to the level of local governments between the two regions is critical for managing the conflict effectively. It would also be better if the authorities at various levels recognize and empower traditional conflict resolution institutions to run parallel with 'modern' government structures to respond to the conflict quickly. In so doing, it is feasible to exploit the advantages of federalism as a flexible and innovative system of governance than it has so far been to manage such ethnic conflict constructively. This, above all, needs the

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Gedeo) seems to take the initiatives for the revival of the referendum, the irony is that the Gedeo did not learn from the counter-productive 'referendum' of 1995. It seems thus pretty simple to understand how the post-conflict peace is still typically fragile in those localities between the two ethnic communities.

development of effective and credible instruments of conflict management for restoring friendly relations between the two people.

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