The Role of Blessing and Cursing in Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanism among the Hadiya People, Southern Ethiopia

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Abstract

Hadiya people have maintained their indigenous mechanisms of governance system known as "Seera". This article addresses the role of blessing and cursing in conflict resolution among the Hadiya people. To achieve this objective, a qualitative method with an exploratory study design was employed. A total of 25, purposively selected, key informants have taken part as a primary source for this study. Besides, secondary sources have been used to substantiate data obtained from the primary sources. The major findings were that Hadiya traditional institutions have been playing a significant role to solve different local conflicts where the practices of blessing and cursing are very important enforcing tools that elders use to easily approach the individuals or groups in conflict, to investigate crimes which are committed in the absence of eye witness. Speaking truth is an essential principle that is expected from the disputants and the elders who manage the resolution process to save oneself from the curse. Men and women have a significant role and mostly every meeting begins and ends with blessing and cursing. Cursing is implicit in every day but it takes place on the last day if the suspect does not reveal the truth about the case. Concerning the link, the FDRE constitution recognized the preservation of cultures and practices of each society within its indigenous institutions. The similarity between the formal and informal is also found as in both institutions the witness begins by swearing an oath which is a part of the cursing on oneself if he or she lies or tries to falsify the truth related to the case. Lastly, the practices of blessing and cursing have been affected by different factors like individual differences over the decisions of elders or negative attitudes towards the value of the practice; sometimes the corrupt behavior of some elders. Awareness creations for youth concerning elders' honor and value, and their roles in conflict resolution and for elders, on the other, about the importance of their work and the disadvantages of malpractices are part of the recommendation.

Keywords: *Blessing, Conflicts, Cursing, Hadiya, Traditional Resolutions*

Introduction

In any society, conflict is one of the major factors negatively affecting development (Singer, 1990). It diverts resources that could have otherwise been used productively and is regarded as undesirable in many societies. In its violent form, it claims the lives of many people, destroys property, and diverts human as well as financial resources away from development. Concerning conflict resolution, conflict can be managed through strategies as per the nature and function of institutions (*Ibid.*). The conflict management process through strategies encompasses reconciliation, adjudication, and alimentation; these strategies demand the conflicting parties' commitment to reconciling with one another and their commitment to accept the decision of

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the third parties. The ultimate objectives of these strategies are to handle and minimize conflict among parties who have different demands (Roberchek, 1990).

Nebiyu (2011) stated that every society has its mechanisms of handling disputes/conflicts. Ethiopia is a country in which various ethnic groups live together for a long period. As conflict is inevitable, these ethnic groups have experienced conflicts of various types at different times. Alula and Getachew (2008) pointed out that customary conflict resolution mechanisms are prevalent throughout the country at the local level and it is the dominant justice system in the country. Ethiopia is one of the countries characterized by multi-ethnic, multilingual, and multicultural societies. Ethnically, diverse societies are living in Ethiopia (Merera, 2003). As to Mellese (2008), conflict is inevitable, each ethnic group has experienced conflicts of various types at different times and each has developed its own respective of indigenous resolution mechanism when dealing with different conflicts. Southern Ethiopia is the home of many multilingual and multicultural societies, and Hadiya is one of them. Hadiya society has its history, culture, traditional institutions, and way of life which directly and indirectly contribute to the survival of the community. Within the traditional institutions, one is their indigenous conflict resolution mechanism which is broadly called "*Seera*" (Alebachew & Samuel, 2010). In the Hadiya conflict resolution mechanism, different practices contribute to making the process of conflict resolution easy. From the practices, this article mainly intends to assess the role of blessing and cursing in conflict resolution among this society.

Rationale and Objectives of the Study

Conflict is manifested through adversarial social action, involving two or more actors with the expression of differences often accompanied by intense hostilities. The conditions of scarcity, for instance, caused by soil degradation or depletion of water in river basins or lakes and value incompatibilities can become a continuing source of contention. Most significantly, protracted conflict arises from the failure to manage antagonistic relationships (Ho-Won, 2010).

Accordingly, there are different types of conflicts in the study area in particular, as well as in various parts of Ethiopia in general. Each conflict, if it is not properly handled, could result in destruction. The biggest challenge confronting human nature is not about the occurrence of conflict, but how conflicts are fully resolved whenever they occur to prevent them from further escalation (Bukari, 2013). In this regard, Ahmad (2011) noted that humans have sought, as long as there has been conflicting, to handle it effectively, by containing or reducing its negative consequences. Alula and Getachew (2008) also argued that the resolution of the

conflict is crucial for day-to-day coexistence as humans are in constant search of resolution mechanisms of conflicts. According to Alula and Getachew (2008), indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms are prevalent throughout the country at the local level and it is the dominant justice system in the country. Indigenous conflict resolution mechanism emanates from the custom of the people as practiced over a long period, accepted by the community as governing principle, and hence binds the society, a breach of which entails social reaction and even punishment (Dagne & Bapu, 2013).

Hadiya people have an indigenous conflict resolution institution called *Seera* which has been served as a basis for the political administration, social interaction, and means of conflict resolution (Alebachew & Samuel 2010). Accordingly, few scholars have tried to discuss the traditional conflict resolution mechanism of the Hadiya people. For example, Braukamper (2012), in his study about the *Fandano* religion of the Hadiya people, attempted to explain the role of this religion in the politics and socio-cultural affairs of Hadiya society (*cited in*, Ethiopia in Broader Perspective, 1997). Ersido (2007) is one of the native researchers who attempted to show a general overview of the politics of the Hadiya people in his study. Abbink (2000) who has been cited by Worku (2019) stated that it is well understood in recent years that adequate research has not been recorded about the societies in the Southern Regions, including the Hadiya. To this end, this study is meant to explore the role of blessing and cursing in the traditional mechanism of conflict resolution. In so doing, it especially aims at: i) describing the processes and procedures followed during the practice of blessing and cursing in conflict resolution, ii) identifying the advantages of blessing and cursing in conflict resolution, iii) assessing the challenges facing the blessing and cursing practices in conflict resolution, iv) exploring the role of women in 'blessing' and 'cursing' as conflict resolution in the study area, and v) examining the relationship between the tradition of blessing and cursing in conflict resolution with the formal state judicial framework.

Literature Review

There are different ways of explaining the concept of conflict in academic literature. The word 'conflict' is derived from the Latin word '*confligere*', which means, to strike together 'or to clash, engage in a fight' (Schmid, 2002). Accordingly, conflict happens when different opposing groups compete to achieve their intended goals. In other words, it refers to a confrontation between individuals or groups, resulting from opposite or incompatible ends or means. Conflict is not a new phenomenon that takes place at different levels of human

interaction and relationships. It may occur most frequently at individual, family, neighborhood, and community, group, national, regional, and international levels. It always exists as long as human beings live together and it is an inevitable part of human experience or existence (Francis, 2006). Yet, the types, causes, actors, intensity, frequency, and scope of conflicts vary.

According to Zartman (2000), a competition for resources, among others, is a major cause for conflicts that may arise between/among individuals and nations at large. The conflict has sometimes a devastating effect when it is particularly violent. It is undeniable fact that violent conflict kills quite a mass of people arbitrarily. Again, it destroys property and diverts human as well as financial resources away from development (Singer, 1990).

Conflict management takes into account implementing strategies to confine the negative factors of conflict and to increase the positive factors of conflict. Furthermore, conflict management aims to enhance learning and group outcomes (effectiveness or performance in an organizational setting). It is not referred to as eradicating all conflict or avoiding conflict. Conflict can be valuable to groups and organizations. It has been proven to increase group outcomes when managed properly (Rahim, 2002).

As the name implies, conflict resolution involves the diminution, elimination, or termination of all forms and types of conflict. In practice, when people talk about conflict resolution, they tend to use terms like negotiation, bargaining (good deal), mediation, or arbitration. To simplify the concept, conflict management does not necessarily imply conflict resolution. "Conflict management involves designing effective macro-level strategies to minimize the dysfunctions of conflict and enhancing the constructive functions of conflict to enhance learning and effectiveness in an organization" (Rahim, 2002).

Lederach (2003) stated two approaches to conflict management: constructive and destructive approaches. In the *destructive approach*, partners engage in warfare and violent conflicts. The objective of the disputing group is to score the victory over its counterparts. And for conflict resolution, the approach focuses on "peace by force" in which one of the conflicting parties will be the victim/loser (win-lose relationship). Conversely, the *constructive approach* predicts conflict as an ecology that is relationally dynamic with ebb (conflict de-escalation to pursue constructive change) and flow (conflict escalation to pursue constructive change). As Francis (2006) argued, in conflict transformation, violence, not conflict, is the problem, and the goal is to pursue non-violent social change, or, in other words, to transform destructive conflicts into constructive ones. In a constructive approach of conflict resolution, disputing parties focus on

the mutual benefit and social value after de-escalation of conflicts (win-win output for both groups).

Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms comprise social, economic, cultural, and religious-spiritual dimensions following the entirety of traditions, customs, and world views of society within the different spheres of societal life. The methods involve negotiations, mediations, and reconciliation based on the knowledge, customs, and history of the community (Nwolise, 2005). According to Pkalya, *et al.* (2004), traditional social entities such as chiefs, elders of the community, extended families, lineages, clans, tribes, religious brotherhood, local institutions, and ethnolinguistic groups remain important in the resolution process of conflicts. Brock-Utne (2001) indicated that indigenous conflict resolution enhances harmony through the active involvement of all the stakeholders involved in the disputes. The main aim is the transformation of conflict in which both parties are satisfied and willing to "let go their pain and forgive each other." In congruence, Ndumbe (2001) pointd out that, indigenous conflict resolution strategy is not only a healing of the wound and psychological trauma but also a product of consensus building, integration of ex-combatants back into the society, and an avenue for promoting community development.

Africans, like other people elsewhere, have developed their unique system of administration and governance for a long time. As part of their strong and viable system, they had also and remained to have, effective and practically workable conflict resolution mechanisms that sustained and solidified them together within their respective communities. As Francis (2006) put, Africa is the cradle of humanity. It, therefore, makes sense that Africa had from time immemorial, evolved its own mechanisms and institutions for managing and resolving disputes and conflicts in ways that preserved the fabric of society, and encouraged peaceful co-existence.

According to Bahru (2002), Ethiopia is "the museum of peoples". It is a country of diversity harboring varieties of languages, different religions, and faiths as well as quite many nations and nationalities with their philosophical perspectives and unique cultural practices. Indeed, many Ethiopian ethnic groups as their African counterparts have traditionally age-old and time-tested administrative and conflict resolution institutions at the grass root levels. For instance, Hamdesa (2000) and Assefa (2005) have written that *Gada* is an effective institutional system to manage any source of conflicts among the Oromo so that harmony, peaceful co-existence, and smooth relations would be maintained in the society.

There is also another such similar multipurpose institution of the Hadiya. This traditional institution as to Alebachew and Samuel (2010) is known as *Seera. Seera* is everything to the Hadiya society. It serves as a basis for the political administration, social interaction, and means of conflict resolution within the territory of the society. The territorial or tribal councilors function according to their respective *Seera*. Love affairs, marriage and family relations, peer group association, work, and entertainment parties, games and sports, hunting bands, etc. are all bound by *Seera* relevant to the specific activity. Elders in this regard, according to the rule of *Seera*, are considered to have the most esteemed and graceful status. It is believed that it is with the lifelong experiences and accumulated knowledge of the elders because of which *Seera* would appropriately function (Alebachew & Samuel, 2010). Again as Worku (2019) explained, in principle, the village council leaders are assumed to be wise, oratory, and patient. As a part of indigenous conflict resolution, the mechanisms of blessing and cursing are very important instruments to investigate hidden truth when the elders handle the case of conflict in Hadiya people. Therefore, this study focuses on appraising the role of blessing and cursing in line with the conflict resolution mechanism among the Hadiya people.

Materials and Methods

This study is based on an exploratory research design along with a qualitative research approach. The reason for the selection of the qualitative approach is that it helps the researchers to investigate the role of blessing and cursing in the traditional mechanism of conflict resolution among the Hadiya people. The researchers used both primary and secondary sources. Secondary data were obtained *via* a review of articles, books, proclamations, reports, and other documented sources. In-depth interviews and observation were the tools used to obtain primary data. Purposive sampling technique was employed to explore in-depth qualitative information from relevant respondents who are well-versed in empirical knowledge about the conflicts in the study area. Accordingly, 25 (twenty-five) informants; 18 men and 7 women elders were purposively selected on the basis of their experience and age (see the appendix at the end of this article). The data collected through interviews, observations, and literature review were critically analyzed by using narration, explanation, and interpretation. Wherever the direct quotations are used in this article, personal names are not mentioned for ethical reasons.

Results and Discussion

The Processes of Blessing and Cursing in Conflict Resolution

Different communities have various traditional or informal institutions to manage disputes that may arise within the same or between groups of distinct societies. Hadiya society also has its

own indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms. As Alebachew and Samuel (2010) stated, Hadiya has a traditional institution known as *Seera*, which is everything to the society. *Seera* has six institutions in the hierarchy from bottom to top: i) *Minee* (family), ii) *Nafara* (members are from Hadiya and Non-Hadiya mainly from neighbors), iii) *Mollo* (a combination of two or more *Minee*), iv) *Sullo* (comprised of two or more *Mollo*), v) *Giichcho* (comprised of two or more *Sullo*) and, vi) *Giiraa* (the highest institution in the hierarchy). Each institution is assigned to perform the specific task according to the nature and severity of the cases. It is essential to define briefly the specific role of each institution before dealing with the mechanisms of blessing and cursing under *Seera*. The following information is derived from the interviewees, researchers' knowledge of the study area, and secondary sources.

Minee Institution

Minee is the smallest local institution among the Hadiya community. It constitutes members of a close lineage. Head at *Minee* level cannot be assigned through election; rather, it is through age. Here, the eldest of the *Minee* member can be the head. The head of *Minee* is usually of the male member. If the head of *Minee* cannot lead the institution due to old age or death, the second eldest member will take the authority.

Minee deals with various forms of disputes which occur among the members. These include managing disputes which arise between husband and wife, and neighboring individuals. There is a provision of counseling and advice for individuals who do not have knowledge of *Seera*, or who violate the rules of *Seera*.

Nafara Institution

According to the structure of the local institutions of Hadiya, *Nafara* is an institution that comes in the next higher-order above *Minee*. *Nafara* is formed from two or more *Minee*, also known as *Minuwwa*, and other neighboring non-Hadiya groups. *Nafara* is different from the rest of the institutions by the following characteristics.

The first is that it is an inclusive institution *i.e.* its members are not only from the Hadiya community; rather it includes the minorities and outsiders. Secondly, the elders that constitute the institution should not be necessarily from the Hadiya ethnic group/clan. Instead, they consist of a mixture of Hadiya and non-Hadiya groups and can be from the ethnic-minorities or other groups of the Woreda. Thirdly, the heads are not necessarily from elders; rather, any individual who can manage problems, administer and guide the members can be head of

Nafara. Besides, the institution has many sub-institutions under it. These include *Idir* or locally *Idiro*, and *Equb* or *Huquba*. Therefore, the institution is identified as an inclusive that brought together the Hadiya and the non-Hadiya groups.

Mollo Institution

Mollo is situated in the third place. It is formed from the combination of two or more *Minee* (*Minuwwa*). Among the Hadiya people, there are multiple numbers of *Mollos* or *Molluwa*. They are led by their respective heads locally named as *Moll-Daanuwwa* or singular form, *Moll-Daana*. The head of *Mollo* must be male and elected by the general consent of the members. To be the head of *Mollo*, he should have deep knowledge of the Hadiya community and *Seera* in general and that of *Mollo* in particular. He should have the skill of managing conflicts and administering the members, etc.

Mollo can perform various tasks for the communities. These include handling the issues of very serious nature including land conflicts (involving severe wound or murder), burned houses, collection of money for the victims, or other compensation, etc.

Sullo Institution

Sullo is formed from two or more *Mollo/Molluwwa*. In the hierarchy of structure of *Seera* and its role in conflict management, *Sullo* comes to the next higher-order above *Mollo*. Like its predecessors, the head of *Sullo* should be male. He will be elected from the members of a given *Sullo* based on the will of the whole *Sullo* members. The head of *Sullo* is could be referred to as *Sull-Daana, Woshaaba, Daadicho, Masaalicho or Magaaba* (Alebachew & Samuel, 2010, p. 149).

The *Sullo* elders and members undertake several important tasks, which include: mediating and resolving disputes which may arise among community members over land right; investigating and deciding on referred issues from *Mollo*; and mediating issues of murder and serious conflicts among the members, and make a decision and resolve land-related disputes.

Giichcho Institution

Giichcho is formed from two or more *Sullo*. Among the institutions which are found in Hadiya, *Giichcho* is one and an influential institution. According to the *Seera* structure of Hadiya, *Giichcho* comes at the next higher order above the *Sullo* institution. *Giichcho* has its own procedures in the administration, the election of authorities, and decision making. The

individual who is going to be elected as 'head' (locally known as *Anjaancho*, *Abaagada*, *Daana,* and *Garaadaa*) of *Giichcho* should fulfill the following formalities (Alebachew and Samuel, 2010). These are: having critical understanding, analysis, and evaluation of situations that will happen among the communities; being able to predict the consequence, understand analyze and evaluate things; being wealthy enough and having vast lands and big houses; being able to predict the future (locally known as *Hiraagaa*) and translate it to the community, etc.

The functions of *Giichcho* are mainly determined at the general assembly of *Giichcho*. Issues related to the boundary demarcation are discussed, and if the disputants are ready to accept the decision of *Giichcho*, new boundary demarcation will be made. The boundary is locally called as *Gabala*, which is demarcated by planting local trees, immovable stones, and grasses. Decisions that have been made at the level of *Giichcho* are very serious/strong (based on the level of dispute). If one of the disputing groups is identified as a criminal or a violator of the border, the punishment will be very high when compared with the cases of lower institutions. After payment of punishment cost for violating the boundary demarcation, both conflicting groups are ordered to stand in front of the judges who are highly respected elders. It is mainly done to show the end of the conflict between the two disputing groups and finally to end with the blessing of elders.

Giiraa Institution

In the hierarchy of *Seera* structure, *Giiraa* is the supreme institution that incorporates the whole Hadiya ethnic group (*Hadiyyi-Minaadaba*). This institution may not perform daily tasks/small scale disputes; rather, it calls for the whole members in the heavy challenges like war, massive drought, and the like to defend the whole Hadiya together. This institution did not have an elected head; rather, it is led by highly respected clan/*Giichcho* elderly/senior heads locally named as *Immama*, *Adilla, and Garaada* (Alebachew & Samuel, 2010, p. 152).

As far as the roles of the *Giiraa* tribunal in managing land-related conflicts among and between the communities are concerned, the institution does not involve in such cases. It is because any form of conflict including land is managed by its predecessors. But if the conflict is at the macro-level and if the dispute is with the neighboring ethnic groups, the institution has a high responsibility to manage the conflict. Accordingly, *Giiraa* can wage the war or agree with the neighboring ethnic groups.

The behaviors of trickery, fraudulence, and deception are highly rejected by the elders at all levels of the *Seera* structures. A disputant in the process of investigation has to swear by saying: '*I fore waa'i, I maara uulli aa'one*' which means "Let my soul and body will not be received by God and Earth respectively if I tell a lie." This indicates that blessing and cursing are the mechanisms applied by the elders at each level of hierarchy in *Seera*.

According to one of the respondents, blessing and cursing are important tools that elders use to easily approach the individuals or groups in conflict in *Seera* governance system. The respondent indicated that the elders who gather to resolve conflicts begin by saying: "We bless you if you speak the truth but if you hide what your heart knows and try to trouble us in search of truth and to upset the elders' spirit, it is not good for your future life" (Respondent M3).

From the above admonition, what we understand is that there is a belief in the society of Hadiya that there will be something good (bless) if the suspect confesses the truth and if he/she refuses to tell the truth, he/she will face something bad in the future (curse). Concerning the procedure of blessing and cursing, as most respondents said, it begins when conflict occurs and the victims call the elders for help. As the respondents explained that for the elders to run the meeting, there is no fixed place to sit. For this purpose, the sitting arrangement is made, most of the time, in front of the elders' house. According to Worku (2019), the traditional council offices (*dummichcha*) are inherited from ancestors. As the writer said, the offices do not have a physical house assigned for this purpose. However, the elder's house and his compound (*nafara*) serve as a reference point in Hadiya. Accordingly, one of the respondents informed: "Before the selected elders begin the case to investigate, they ask some amount of money from the individuals or parties in conflict. The very reason to do so is to control them during dialogue and not to allow them to speak without a given turn or to punish if they interfere" (Respondent M2).

It could be argued that the respondents have similar understanding of the situation as to how blessing and cursing take place. They indicated that meetings begin and end with the blessings of the eldest person/persons. In the process, mostly blessing is explicit and cursing is implicit. For example, an elder says that "let God give you and your family health and wealth because you have not troubled and tired us during the investigation of the case" and therefore, "let your life be free from any trouble" (Respondents M9). This time, people gathered there feared that the suspect who failed to reveal the truth under investigation will be cursed (Respondents M6,7,9,12 & 15, and F2, 4, & 6).

From the researchers' critical observation, blessing takes place by the elders at every step of conflict resolution as a motivation or enforcement to raise the expectation of the conflicting parties to reach on convention or agreement without going long procedure. At the same time, cursing becomes the last resort to the elders when the parties in conflict hide the facts and make the case complex which, of course, takes a long procedure and consumes much of the time of the elders. The cursing is not mostly done by elders but the suspect him/herself will be made speak bad words on him/her while taking an oath.

As the respondents revealed, the most important aspect of the elders' work is that the offender is publicly held responsible for his or her wrong-doing; thus, signaling such behavior is unacceptable. At the same time, the offender is treated with respect and is given assurance by the elders as: "You are one of us and we accept you back among us". In this way, the damage caused by the wrongdoing is repaired and the offender is reintegrated into the community. Based on the response from the interview, if the situations in conflict are serious, the end will be in two different ways.

The first is part of blessing when solutions are being found to resolve the conflict. During this time, a public ceremony is being organized by the conflicting parties to signify the end of the conflict and resumption of peace. As part of the peace-process, conflicting parties will be drinking and eating together, singing and dancing together, and breaking spears and arrows. These activities express the commitment and trust of conflicting parties not to turn back to the same situation in the future.

The second is part of cursing when a solution to resume the peace is not achieved because of the refusal of either of the conflicting parties. As the respondents said, in such a situation, oath takes place in different ways;

    i) Swearing (*Hidiro*): The suspected person is enforced to swear an oath by saying, '*Moo'umoyyo, i ill qooqe*' '*Macceesumoyyo, imaccgawwe*'. That is, he or she wishes blindness and deafness if he or she did wrong.

    ii) Touching black animal/thing *(Heemahchca amadimm)*: It is a method of touching stone or killing a black animal with a spear. This method is believed to be very dangerous not only for a person who did wrong or crime but also for his close relatives and next generations.

The Advantages of Blessing and Cursing in Conflict Resolution

The informal system of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms through the use of blessing and cursing has become more capable of replicating the role of the formal court. As Worku (2019) noted, the people of Hadiya assume that they receive a blessing (*maaso*) and cursing (*duunchcha*) from ancestors: the former for their good deeds and the latter because of their bad deeds. Without the two concepts, the entire village traditional council becomes irrelevant to the Hadiya people. Most of the respondents agree that serious disputes related to issues such as domestic violence, divorce, inheritance, and marriage are normally settled among the disputants themselves and/or within the family.

> *Most people here resolve their disputes through the elders. In fact, conflict resolution through the practice of blessing and cursing helps us and the local people a great deal by doing the jobs that courts in the woreda are unable to do because the elders' decisions are enforced by the community through social pressure* (Respondent M4).

Based on observation, the conflict resolution services provided by elders in Hadiya generally follow the principle of restorative justice. This justice aimed at rebuilding relationships among people and enabling them to continue the existing friendly relation within their local communities. It ends enmity through apology or forgiveness. Another advantage that the researchers observed is that elders who practice in these conflict resolution mechanisms do not take any formal training on conflict resolution skills but they develop through experience. They bless people to agree and put them in fear of curse using wise locutions or proverbs. This helps to reduce the cost of training and the work burden of the formal justice institutions. Another important factor for the conflict resolution through this way to be taken into account is ending conflict without punishing the offender through imprisonment which also punishes the entire household. The chance of distortion in the process of delivering justice is reduced because it is run by the elders who know the local population and conflict situation.

The Challenges of Blessing and Cursing in Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution practices by elders in Hadiya have been facing different challenges. As one of the respondents said:

> *Conflict resolution by elders in our society is traditionally considered as the primary function of community elders with great motivation and other participants who attend the mediation process between the conflicting parties used to give high value and honor. However, such motivations (from the elders' side), value, and respect (from society side) are now at risk. The resolution practices are being affected by corruption though it is petty* (Respondent M6).

The above response indicates that conflicting parties may have the power to reject any settlement that they are not happy particularly if they lack trust in elders' decisions because of the informed corrupt behavior. Hence, conflict resolution is based on voluntary consensus and agreement and it will be real when parties in conflict express their goodwill with trust in elders. Respondents revealed that the trust of the society towards blessing and cursing in conflict resolution differs from one another. This is the challenge in the situation where all do not have equal faith in the decision of the elders. In the wave of modernization and increment in the urban way of life, such institutions are losing their relevance besides lack of purity in the indigenous justice system. Based on researchers' empirical knowledge of the study area, no power structure provided authority to community dispute resolution and that approved the decisions made by the elders. Because of this, the case which already got its end sometimes tends to rise again in the formal justice system or court. This further erodes elders' authority or limits elders' ability to enforce a resolution.

The Role of Women in Traditional Conflict Resolution in Hadiya

Women do not have an equal position with their counterparts, but it does not mean that they have no roles to play in society. According to the data obtained from one of the respondents:

> *Women among Hadiya society are subjected to discrimination in dispute resolution activities. They are considered inferior or have less ability in handling conflict. They have no right to hear cases, negotiate conflicting parties, and give a political decision, and it is strictly forbidden for women to sit with men in any type of social gatherings. Furthermore, men use different negative connotations that can reflect their supremacy or that discourage the participation of women in conflict resolving affairs. No women have been elected as a traditional judge for the best knowledge in our community in particular and in the Hadiya society in general* (Respondent M7).

However, as some respondents have said which is also corroborated by the observation of researchers that women have their own strong traditional institution which is called *Heffichcho*, where all adult women gather to pray or to speak the words of blessing for the well-being of the community and the country or to curse evil. Women have been contributing and playing a significant role in conflict resolution by gathering together in this institution.

The role of women in this institution begins from home or family. For example, women have a cultural right to protect themselves from violations. If a wife usually experiences a harsh punishment from her husband, her age-mates arrange a meeting and command the husband to abstain from this act. They also have the right to punish this kind of individual if such behaviors are repeated in the future. The nature of punishment is mostly in kind, such as ordering to

slaughtering the cattle. Then, finally, peace is resumed in the family and chances are less to reoccur.

Out of the family, when there is a much escalated ethnic or tribal conflict between the community, women get in between the conflicting parties and beg them in the name of *Heffichcho* by making their *elelta* (ululation) very loud. They bring a very long stick and stand between the conflicting parties. By so doing, most of the time, the intensity of conflict calms down to pave the way for further communications in realizing peace.

Furthermore, when evil things happen in the community, women in the *Heffichcho* curse, and when there is a lack of rainfall and drought begins, they pray. When there is a sickness in the household, or if the community is confronted with different social problems, the society members come to *Heffichcho* for prayer and to receive the blessings. Even those women who are married and are unable to have offspring, they also used to come to *Heffichcho* for blessings.

The Relationship between the Blessing and Cursing and the Formal Judicial Framework

There are several relations between the tradition of blessing and cursing in conflict resolution in Hadiya society with the formal/modern-state judicial framework. According to the constitution of the FDRE and the regional constitution of the SNNPRS, Article 39 sub-article 2, the nations, nationalities, and peoples have the right to preserve, promote, and develop their culture. So, blessing and cursing in conflict resolution as part of the culture of the society has recognition by the constitution. Some similarities are observed when elders in the tradition of blessing and cursing in conflict resolution in Hadiya society and the Judges in the formal judicial framework use the same procedure of taking an oath to investigate the crime. In line with this, some of the respondents agreed that, in both systems, in order to identify the innocent and the criminal, the eyewitnesses are expected to speak the truth and they will be asked to swear an oath in front of the elders and judges before they give their testimony (Respondent M1, M8, and F7).

Concerning the relation of the practice of blessing and cursing in conflict resolution with the formal judicial framework, Worku (2019) said that the ruling government does not interfere with the traditional authority as such because the role of elder members of indigenous institutions does not have a clandestine function of holding or checking a political system. So, the above discussion tells us that both systems work cooperatively in the process of conflict resolution. However, the fundamental difference is found at the point of binding or

implementing its decisions upon the conflicting parties. If the parties in conflict are not satisfied with the decision of the elders, they have the right to move to the formal institution to seek justice.

Based on the analysis, the following are major findings of the study. Blessing and cursing are very important enforcing tools that elders use to easily approach the individuals or groups in conflict to investigate crimes that are committed by the parties in conflict and to reach an agreement. Speaking truth is an essential principle that is expected from the disputants and the elders who hold the case in order to be saved from the curse. On the other hand, men and women have their respective roles and they run the practice of blessing and cursing in different situations. Mostly, every meeting begins and ends by blessing whereas the cursing is implicit every day but it becomes explicit only on the last day if the suspect does not produce real evidence or lies to the elders. Regarding the dynamicity, the practices of blessing and cursing have been challenged by individual differences such as attitude towards the value of the practice, lack of coercive force for elders to support their decisions, and corrupt behaviors of some elders which reduce the trust that the society has on them. Lastly, there is a link between the traditional conflict resolution in general and the practice of blessing and cursing in particular. For instance, to ask the witness, the systems begin by the oath which is part of the cursing on oneself if he or she tells a lie. Again, the government recognized the cultures of each society and motivates that practice.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study identified the role of blessing and cursing in the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms among the Hadiya people. Thereby, the major findings show that Hadiya traditional institutions have been playing a significant role to solve different local conflicts and the practices of blessing and cursing are very important enforcing tools that elders use to easily approach the individuals or groups in conflict, to investigate crimes which are committed in the absence of eye witness, and reach on an agreement. Speaking truth is an essential principle that is expected from the disputants and the elders who hold the case in order to save oneself from the curse. Men and women have their respective roles and they run the practice of blessing and cursing in different situations. The constitution recognized the cultures of each society and motivates that practice. The practices of blessing and cursing have been challenged by individual differences like the attitude towards the value of the practice. They also lack coercive force in the hands of elders to implement their decisions effectively which must be binding

upon the conflicting parties. Furthermore, because of the corrupt behavior of some elders, the trust of society is declining. However, the role of blessing and cursing under the different institutions of *Seera* is still prevalent and of high significance in the conflict transformation of Hadiya society. The mechanisms adopted by the elders can best be suited to 'constructive' (*i.e.* nonviolent) approach to conflict.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were drawn:

- Concerning the importance of elders' honor, value, and their roles in conflict resolution by using the enforcing tools of blessing and cursing, there has to be an awareness creation program by elders themselves with the help of other stakeholders for the youth in the society because it has been challenged by diversified views or even the acceptance level of the disputants from the side of the society.

- Hadiya's traditional conflict resolution mechanism in general and the role of blessing and cursing in conflict resolution, in particular, should be included in *Hadiyyisa* textbook curriculum to create awareness among the students of the school throughout the zone.

- Elders who work in such affairs need some awareness-raising training from the concerning bodies particularly from the side of the government against corrupt behavior. This behavior is against the values of the society and does not teach a good lesson to the youth because it is against the law as the judges in the formal court even are expected to only obey the law and to use their moral conscience in search of justice.

- The local government and Hadiya people should encourage and preserve indigenous knowledge and value of blessing and cursing as one of the social capitals of Hadiya society.

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Appendix: List of Informants

S.N.	Respondent's Code	Age & Gender	Date of Interview	Place of Interview
1.	Respondent M1	62, Male	28/11/2019	Hossana, Ethiopia
2.	Respondent M2	55, Male	28/11/2029	Hossana, Ethiopia
3.	Respondent M3	63, Male	28/11/2019	Hossana, Ethiopia
4.	Respondent M4	62, Male	30/11/2019	Hossana, Ethiopia
5.	Respondent M5	65, Male	30/11/2019	Hossana, Ethiopia
6.	Respondent M6	56, Male	6/11/2019	Homecho, Ethiopia
7.	Respondent M7	53, Male	6/12/2019	Homecho Ethiopia
8.	Respondent M8	47, Male	6/12/2019	Homecho Ethiopia
9.	Respondent M9	58, Male	7/12/2019	Homecho Ethiopia
10.	Respondent M10	50, Male	10/12/2019	Ginbichu Ethiopia
11.	Respondent M11	70, Male	10/12/2019	Ginbichu Ethiopia
12.	Respondent M12	46, Male	10/12/2019	Ginbichu Ethiopia
13.	Respondent M13	65, Male	11/12/2019	Ginbichu Ethiopia
14.	Respondent M14	68, Male	11/12/2019	Ginbichu Ethiopia
15.	Respondent M15	62, Male	15/12/2019	Lemo, Ethiopia
16.	Respondent M16	58, Male	15/12/2019	Lemo, Ethiopia
17.	Respondent M17	50, Male	18/12/2019	Lemo, Ethiopia
18.	Respondent M18	70, Male	18/12/2019	Lemo, Ethiopia
19.	Respondent F1	65, Female	30/11/2019	Hossana, Ethiopia
20.	Respondent F2	68, Female	30/11/2019	Hossana, Ethiopia
21.	Respondent F3	62, Female	7/12/ 2019	Homecho Ethiopia
22.	Respondent F4	46, Female	7/12/2019	Homecho Ethiopia
23.	Respondent F5	58, Female	11/12/2019	Ginbichu Ethiopia
24.	Respondent F6	44, Female	18/12/2019	Lemo, Ethiopia
25.	Respondent F7	48, Female	18/12/2019	Lemo, Ethiopia