



EXAMINING TRADITIONAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE AFAR COMMUNITY: THE ROLE OF BIDU SULTANATE

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Abstract

This study explores the traditional conflict management and resolution mechanisms among the Afar people, with a particular focus on the Bidu Sultanate in the Afar regional state, northern zonal woreda. The research aims to describe the power hierarchy involved in traditional rituals to overcome conflicts, the mandate of the sultanate in controlling conflicts, and the processes of resolving various types of conflicts within the Afar community. A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing ethnographic tools such as observations, Key Informant Interviews, and Focus Group Discussions with four distinct groups. The researcher also reviewed relevant literature and books to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject. The findings reveal that the Afar people have established traditional conflict management and resolution institutions characterized by a hierarchical power structure. These institutions include knee leaders, clan leaders, father of the tree, and the sultanate or kingship dynasty known as the Bidu Sultanate. The sultanate holds a significant mandate as the reconciler of the 'makabanna' system and uses the 'bur'ili' customary law to address crimes and violence. Various types of conflict cases were identified, including theft, adultery, homicide, injury, insult, and physical assault. These conflicts often arise between clans, related to 'Absuma' marriage, inter-tribal revenge, and inter-clan avenging. The study highlights the intricate and culturally embedded mechanisms the Afar people utilize to maintain peace and social order within their community.

Keywords: Traditional Conflict Resolution, Afar Community Bidu Sultanate, Customary Law, Dispute Resolution.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Some of the scholars evidenced that, traditional conflict management and resolution mechanism are best in lawful virtue for the community because those traditional conflict management systems are very feasible and concern with the cultural practice of society and gives a great opportunity for involvements of the conflicting parties and it has special features of handling conflicting parties and permit them in participation stated (Hannah, 2008)

According to (Bukari, 2013) every community has their institutions which closely covered by sociocultural setting and economic realities and lifestyles. Not only this but also every society has their unique way of practicing conflict management in using institutions in-depth with the history and culture of the people and structure of those contexts are not the same from society to another society

Conflicts are inevitable or difficult to control as appears in the people's life. The conflict can sharply start from the differences of interests and conflict management and resolution mechanism is always means established by human being through different medium depending on their cultural and historical context, economic, power relation that exists in certain situation of the conflict. In any continuous stretch of moment, it is possible easy can differentiate between modern conflict resolutions exist in schools, curriculum and traditional conflict management more concerned with culture context centered and knowledgeable indigenous system is traditional conflict management and resolution mechanism (Hannah, 2008).

The research aimed to specify traditional conflict management and resolution mechanisms that exist in Afar people in mainly Bidu sultanate. The typical conflict management and resolution mechanism used by Afar people is locally known as 'makabanna' which the general reconciliation name is given to conflict management system in Afar language. The process of coming to solution mechanism is also called 'malbo' system that people indigenously practice to solve conflict. Therefore, the central focus of the research title or thesis is how conflict management and resolution mechanisms are exercised in Afar rituals, the role of 'makabon' (mediators) and procedural of conflict management and resolution which goes through the initial stage of 'makabanna' up to the higher institutions such as clan leaders and father of tree which literary called 'Harah' abba. Local people use those clan leaders and father of tree (harah abba) medial level managers whose has acceptance and authority to use legal system for the conflict. Last but not least there is also another higher institution called sultanate of Afar



people which handle over all the system of reconciliation and conflict management and resolution as a whole and it is system that believed in the last level of management that amend the whole system were assessed.

The researcher intends to assess conflict management and resolution mechanism in Afar people specifically in Bidu sultanate. Bidu sultanate one of the traditional institutions have over all authority in conflict management and their power of delegation in social organization and the ways of resolving different conflict types, further compensation methods sultanate use for resolving conflicting parties. It seems society in that locality has traditional systems to manage conflict and make decision on conflict cases based on their hierarchal level still practice traditional conflict management and resolution mechanism among Afar people. moreover, reconciliation assemblies of sultanate called makabanna system. Furthermore, researcher interested to segment mandate of sultanate in conflict resolutions, rituals applied when dealing in different conflict resolution and use of customary law called Bur'li mad'a. Bidu wareda which is one of the districts that inhabit in northern part of Afar regional state on the boarder of Eritrea. This means doesn't the sultanate has only scope in managing conflict of one district but it held vast area and has institution literary called burah abba (father of home), kedoh abba (clan leader) haxah abba (father of tree) sultanate or 'Arkayto'(kingdom). This is level of organization to manage the conflict and resolution from bottom to top layer of institution.

Specific objectives

The specific objective of this study will have seen in the following ways:

Outline the power dynamics of traditional rituals employed by the Afar people to resolve conflicts

To examine the authority of the sultanate in managing conflicts and implementing customary law for addressing crimes

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher has used a qualitative research approach which is more humanistic and a description of using ethnographic research to a proof a study conducted on conflict management and resolution in Afar people to draw knowledge from the valid scientific procedure Bidu sultanate. The research followed schools use the qualitative research design to collect independent data from any bias to collect data from indigenous people who only know their inner situation of conflict resolution knowledge and to minimize the replication of the data validation to get real and rational data. Collection criteria were employed for the improvement of research validity to gather correct data from Afar people's conflict management and resolution mechanism hence it is the software part of the tradition that only indigenous people were described.

Outline the power dynamics of traditional rituals employed by the Afar people to resolve conflicts

In this finding, the researcher has found that Afar people have traditional institutions to resolve conflict cases including conflicts in interpersonal level, interclan conflicts, intertribal conflicts, interethnic conflicts in neighboring regions and Afar people has their traditions institutions to overcome all those conflicts as described in interviews there are knee leaders, clan leaders, father of tree and sultanates are those institutions resolving, arbitrating, negotiating and mediating conflicting parties based on their power of hierarchy. There are ways of protocolling conflict management and resolution mechanisms.

"Most of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms in Ethiopia, aimed at resolving conflict, can be attained by all interested individuals. The actors who participated in the conflict resolution process in indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms can be divided into three types. These are the conflicting parties (plaintiff and defendant), conflict resolver (elders), and the crowd. The crowd consists of any interested persons or sympathizers of disputants. These actors in a conflict resolution process have their duty and rights" (Mellese, 2008, Daniel 2016, Kelemework 2005, Ambaye 2008) similarly current study has found that there are actors who participate in conflict resolution based on the arrogancy level of victims and those social democratic organizations such as clan leader, knee leader, tribe leader, father of tree and then proceed to the sultanate in this traditional institution every single subject and lastly get the solution to reconcilers' assembly system 'makabana' and 'malbo' called Qarkayto/Kingdom which steals yet not mentioned in any research work.

The clan leader is the person who is traditionally elected in the clan to lead the clan in the community Afar has many clan divisions and every clan has its leader. This leader in each clan reconciles contact in Intra-tribal level or if clan member commits homicidal in Intra clan rape abduction get manage with the wife of other man committed. clan leader has the mandate to resolve those conflicts inside clan and also among the clan as mentioned above many clans are living together in some communal life and then if those crimes are committed by members, the clan leaders come together and held reconciliation assembly make a decision together on the wrong does.

Harah Abba is reconciliatory in most cases of conflict in afar people harah abba has an authorial role of solving the conflict in inter-clan level and clan leader together has tried to solve conflict and then if it is getting difficult to resolve conflict and then in clan leader level the case refer to high level reconciliatory who is responsible for

resolving conflict like homicide in inter clan level. At this level harah abba has the power to resolve types of conflicts rape, abduction, trans-border conflict are resolved by reconcilers harah abba.

concerning the crimes committed between tribes is exercised to get resolution or reconciliation by sultan or Qarkayto. Crimes such as Homicide, rape, abduction, transboundary issues are getting reconciliation in the level of higher-level clan leaders and 'qarkayto' and every member of the Acauto family respected in conflict resolution the procedure of 'Hammadu siirat' as well as in the procedure of 'makabanna' system in inter-tribal level, inter-clan level. Finally, makabon has gathered from different clans such as makabons in clan level, tribal level, and knee level has attended the malbo process (process of making reconciliation assembly procedure) fellow up and then the case is seen from by leaders and then king or arkayto make the decision over issue of conflict through the help of customary law known as burqili sultanate.

Similarly conducted by Desalagn, Mukand, et al., (2005) "examine indigenous systems of conflict resolution in Oromiya, Ethiopia. They are concerned with the Gada system, the institution developed for guiding the social, political, economic and religious life of the Oromo people". This leads the researcher to believe that Afar people have indigenous conflict management institutions called Arkayto and the institutions based on their power hierarchy. the power hierarchy of those traditional institutions to overcome in different level are conflicts are: as knee leaders, clan leaders, father of tree and sultanates and the delegation of power between groups are important to resolve the conflict and avoid dynamic outcomes of the social conflict. Informants have added conflict in the minor case reconciled by knee leaders, kadi and other individuals, or group actors.

On the other side, according to a study conducted by (Mellese (2008)), in his research on the role of elders in resolving conflicts, the case of Walayta people of southern Ethiopia, says the traditional institution of handling conflicts in Walayta is called awassiyal literary meaning reconciliation. Similar to current researcher tend to found Afar people have conflict managing procedure and every conflict case are investigating by the mediators and apply rituals for conflict resolution and reconciliation process in malbo assembly and makabanna jurisdiction. The major actor involve in the reconciliation system are makabons literary called reconciliation. Girma (2009), showed the hierarchical nature of the court system in his study of indigenous conflict resolution mechanism, the current researcher found that hierarchy assemblies in solving conflicts major cases of conflict can resolve by makabans such as clan leaders, knee leaders, and sultanate whereas minor conflicts such as the conflict between wife and husband have resolved by kaadi court system.

Examine the authority of the sultanate in managing conflicts and implementing customary law for addressing crimes

The mandate of Bidu sultanate to control conflict in using customary law in the following ways:

According to a key informant Bidu sultanate use burqili customary law to overcome conflict and jurisdictions accordingly as constituted in 'Burqili' customary law. Since 'Burqili' customary law is one of the first established customary laws in Afar people maintained and has been used in the whole Afar until the 18th century in the whole Afar territorial boundary gradually though time customary law has been customized some tribes have been formulated their customary laws such as 'Bidato baxih madqa', 'debnek weeqimah madqa', 'afkiqek maqadih madqa' and 'Bodoyta meelah madqa'. That customary law was established and localized based on the territorial features and pastoral life of the people and conflict has been managed conflict among individuals, groups, inter-clan, inter-tribal level based on those customary laws using their territorial boundary.

Similarly, Abera (2000) argues that these indigenous conflict resolution institutions of different ethnic groups were the major body of law in Ethiopia for centuries. The norms and the laws existing within traditional territorial boundaries are managed sultanate court and arbitrations that fit conventional framework and in situations where minority or other dissident groups develop nonconformity with state institutions, domestic courts, lawyers, and public officials tend to treat conflict issues.

Similarly, the study conducted Greenidge and Demessie (2012:91) according to him Afar "traditional conflict management and resolution institutions handle different conflict cases and their customary law", but he missed to mentions the mandate of those institutions to control conflict specially Bidu sultanate. Differently, the current study shows the sultanate has a special deal in conflict management and reconciliation using customary law called Bur'li. This data support evidence that the study conducted by argued in (Ashami 1985, p. 32; Chedeville 1966 p. 178 – 179) state that" there are descendants in Bidu sultanate "Sambolakuli's descendants established the damoohoyta Sultanate of biru/Griifo. Therefore, the current study proofs that Afar people use customary institutions to handle conflict in violent cases such as homicides, intertribal acts of revenge, interclan conflicts using written customary law called bur,ili mad'a. key informant according to Burqil customary law different compensation mechanisms are used by sultanate and malbo assemblies apply for different victims based on types of the conflicts. If anyone committed the crime of killing a person, he must leave or isolate from the area including his family or relatives and he requires compensation of 100 camels, and if female compensation requires 50 camels.



According to Mulugeta (1988) in his MA thesis, —the Oromo Sere Chefe in “view of conflict in Ada Leben worded has described the Oromo Sere Guma. The Sere Guma conflict resolution mechanism handles effectively conflicts related to homicide”. Similarly, the data obtained in the research shows Bidu sultanate has an overall mandate of conflict resolution and taking preservation for the further possibility of conflict using authorized power and institutions to underline conflict case and reconciliation incorporation with its social democratic organization. Lastly, the assembly procedure is proceeded through its social organization and then lastly by sultanate conflict in the high level of arrogance are managed and resolute by the sultanate.

Main resolution mechanism using customary law are inter-tribal revenge compensation requires (diya) or paying back lost or death and negation of conflict tribes and sultanate conclude conflict in closing it with peaceful ceremony and saying apologies. And in case of abduction, the mechanism of compensating abductees pays ox or goats. Informant forwarded that compensation of hitting is differ based on the types of stick you hit someone. If the stick has tattooing, compensation is considered very serious and the person who committed the crime of hitting is compensating with the number of tattooing in the stick, this because it is believed that stick with tattooing has serious damage and wounded body might not cure and compensation requires several goats.

As narrated above examples their many compensations as animals and materials but in most cases, in Afar people victims of the crime require animals since Afar people are pastoralists and ‘bur’ili’ customary law articulates compensations in concertation of pastoral people. Moreover, the customary law is applicable by the sultanate since the sultanate has the mandate in resolving conflicts incur at the intercultural and intracultural level. “The use of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms in Ethiopia is deeply rooted in the custom, culture and tradition of various ethnic groups, which could play a big role in resolving violent conflict” (Daniel, 2016, p). therefore, currently found, that people use their own traditional conflict management system called ‘makabanna’ and customary law to compensate victims. Those traditions are highly respected assembled by the sultanate.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms of the Afar people, particularly within the Bidu Sultanate, play a crucial role in maintaining peace and social order. The power hierarchy in these traditional rituals is intricate and deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of the Afar community. The Bidu Sultanate, also known as Hamadi ‘Siirata’ Sultanate, holds significant authority in the Afar society. Historically, figures such as Hammed introduced principles that evolved into the customary law known as ‘Burqil mad’a’. This law forms the backbone of conflict resolution, with the Sultanate having the mandate to control and manage conflicts at various levels. Key institutions within the Afar society, such as ‘harah abba’ (clan leaders), ‘gulub Abba’ (family leaders), and other communal leaders, work collaboratively to address disputes. These leaders have specific roles depending on the nature and severity of the conflict, ensuring that resolution processes are inclusive and culturally appropriate. The Sultanate’s authority extends to major conflicts, including blood feuds, inter-clan and inter-tribal disputes, and other significant issues. The process involves isolation of the conflicting parties, mediation by neutral clans, and comprehensive reconciliation efforts involving all relevant leaders and community members. Overall, the traditional rituals and power dynamics of the Afar people are designed to promote harmony, accountability, and justice, preserving the social cohesion and cultural integrity of the community.

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