Folk Media as A Platform for Conflict Resolution
The case of Gedeo, Ethiopia

Nigussie Meshesha

Background

The study of conflict resolution has become a major concern for academics and research institutions due to its political and social significance for many peoples. Consequently, researchers from various disciplines – including communication and media studies – have studied conflict resolution from different perspectives. It is believed that, although conflicts arise for different reasons, a key feature is the breakdown in communication between the parties involved. This is because communication is the lubricant, or fuel, for any social process, but its poor handling can create social friction and lead to conflict.

Consequently, studying the communication system of a people in lieu of conflict resolution becomes highly important because, first, it is thought that the people's communication system provides the better way to address conflicts that occur in a society. Second, the people do value their cultural communication system in resolving conflicts more than what has been induced by the modern legal system. Second, the people mostly use their customary practices so as to come up with pragmatic solutions for the conflicts that break out. Third, the people's communication system is central to them so as to resolve conflicts in a socially acceptable and natural setting of the people. Finally, the overall rubric of the political, social and cultural system is tied up to the folk ways of the people, which are revealed through their communication system. From this vantage point, it is appropriate to see the folk communication system in general and their folk media in particular as part of their customary practices.

Mainly, the study of folk media is useful since it is a forum of public discussion and debate like what is done by the modern media. Folk media provides the platform for social interaction and the means through which cohesion is maintained, consensus created, and cultural values reinforced (Tadesse 2004; Finnegan 2012). This media can be used in the society in the act of bridging the leeway in the overall political, social and cultural process. Though there are disagreements about what folk media are, they can be best understood as indigenous equivalents of exogenous mass media (Valbuena 1986; Nigussie and Yri 2016). They include the rituals, festivals, plays, puppet shows, dance, song, storytelling, poetry and others used in different social practices (Finnegan 2012). These folk media are 'the corpus of orally transmitted [communicated] material which address […] specifically to the recounting of the past' (Vansina 1985: 13), but much relevance to the current life.

The place of folk media in conflict resolution can be better understood from our understanding of what causes conflicts. Basically, the causes of conflict are varied, but communication gap takes the major part. Some conflicts are linked to human nature,

that is, to people's physical and psychological needs and the gap between expectations and materializations. Some are caused by economic, value and power factors (Fisher 2000). Competition for resources certainly plays a part, but value and power conflict are often intertwined and sometimes predominate. Economic conflict involves competing motives to attain scarce resources. Value conflict involves incompatibility in ways of life, ideologies – the preferences, principles and practices that people believe in, and power conflict occurs when each party wishes to maintain or maximize the amount of influence that it exerts in a particular relationship and social setting, which can be resolved through effective communication.

At the same time, Fisher has identified conflicts occurring at the interpersonal, intergroup, multiparty and international levels, which bring communication as a central point (Fisher 2000). Interpersonal conflict occurs when two people have incompatible needs, goals, or approaches; it is marked by a communication breakdown. Role conflict involves very real differences in role definitions, expectations or responsibilities between individuals who are interdependent in a social system. Intergroup conflict occurs between collections of people, such as ethnic or racial groups, between departments or levels of decision-making in the same organization, and between unions and management. Multi-party conflict occurs when different interest groups and organizations in a society have varying priorities over resource management and policy development. International conflict occurs between states at the global level (Fisher 2000). In all cases, negotiation is one of the major characteristics of customary or traditional approaches to conflict resolution. The study presented here suggests that alternative methods often produce more satisfactory results and are more efficient than modern or legal methods in negotiating settlements to disputes, even though there it could be contended that 'alternative dispute resolution techniques may lead as readily to socially unjust outcomes' (Shmueli u.d).

This indicates that cultural, social and political problems are resolved using traditional cultural and communication means. As a result of this, the present study emphasizes the use of folk media for maintaining peace and order among the Gedeo people. This is done by investigating how folk media is used as the platform for addressing political, social and cultural matters. There are, of course, situations in which the folk media is used differently, for example, to perpetuate stereotypes and prejudices (Finnegan 2012), but such acts are little appreciated in societies as it is evident in the 'modern' media. Generally, however, folk media are useful for maintaining social cohesion and helping to avoid conflicts since they are often used in the various conflict resolution or settlement mechanisms.

Problem statement

The Gedeo people are known to have long-standing cultural and social practices that are transmitted through the generations through their folk ways, which are woven into their way of life. This is evident in their cultural and ritualistic activities, agro-ecological practices, and historical heritages, whose cultural, social and political significance is expressed in their folk media.

There are a handful of studies on the indigenous agro-ecological practices and cultural and historical heritages of the Gedeo. Most of these focus on the people's knowledge system and agro-ecological practices. Yirefu, Wondawek and Bogale (2016), for instance, have studied the woody plant species grown in the different agro-forestry zones man-

aged by the Gedeo, thereby indicating the indigenous agro-ecological practices of the people. Setegn et. al. (2016) have studied the reaction of Gedeo farmers to newly introduced water and soil conservation practices, eventually suggesting that there was a need to adapt these new practices to the local practices of the people. Getachew and Mamo (2015) have studied the Gedeo's indigenous ecological knowledge system and local ecological management. Birhane and Melesse (2015) have made an evaluative study of the Gedeo's land-use patterns in different agro-ecological and slope classes. Meanwhile, Kiros, Samuel and Dagne (2014) have researched the Gedeo community's living situations and highlighted the cultural, biological and socio-economic perspectives of the people. Abiyot, Bogale and Baudouin (2013) have undertaken a study on the indigenous agroforestry knowledge transfer system, focusing on the youth in Wonago Woreda, Gedeo Zone. Finally, Mesele (2007) has studied the management and livelihoods of Gedeo's agro-forests, focusing on the ecological knowledge system and indigenous practices.

With regard to the topic under consideration here, Wedekind (1977) can be mentioned for his analysis of Gedeo work songs in the context of the 1974 Ethiopian revolution. As can Asebe's (2007) analysis of the ethnicity and inter-ethnic relations between the Guji and Gedeo. Even so, aside from some attempts made by undergraduate students in various universities in Ethiopia, only a limited amount of research can be found on socio-cultural and literary aspects of the Gedeo. In particular, there has been no study to date on the folk media and communication practices of the people. This is the gap that this study aims to fill.

Objectives

The general objective of this study is to analyse the use of folk media as the platform for the Gedeo's conflict resolution practices. Specifically, the study aims to:

- reveal how the Gedeo use their folk media as a platform for conflict resolution;
- indicate the role of folk media in social mobilization and change among the people;
- identify whether the people prefer the use of folk media over modern approaches to conflict resolution.

Theoretical and conceptual framework

This study is grounded in narrative theory and the theory of discourse analysis. According to narrative theory, people tell stories to do some kind of actions. Johnstone (2004) highlights cross-cultural differences in the functions of narrative, drawing on the work of Scollon and Scollon (1981), who claim that stories are the primary source of knowledge as reality is socially constructed through narrative. Folk narratives carry the same or similar meaningful actions, helping the Gedeo convey social messages like that of the modern media, making narrative theory particularly relevant. As is discourse theory, whose 'basic premise', according to Karlberg (2005: 1), is 'the ways we think and talk about a subject influence and reflect the ways we act in relation to that subject'. The discourse made in orally transmitted messages is contained in the speech we utter, and tells the conventionality, actuality and intentionality of the speech. This is based on John Austin's idea of the speech situation as outlined in his speech act theory; according to which, there must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conven-

tional effect where certain words are uttered by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further, some action is invoked with certain thoughts and feelings to convey some meanings in the participants' minds (Oishi 2006).

Materials and methods

The study took place in Dilla and Wenago towns for a period of four weeks and was undertaken with the financial support of Hawassa University. The methodology of the study includes data collection through interviews, focus group discussion in the field and participant observation in social settings, such as during various folk performances. Local elders, traditional religious leaders, and experts from cultural bureau were interviewed. Elders and cultural club members from Gedeo Zone were included in focus group discussions. The snowball sampling method was used to find people who were knowledgeable in describing or performing cultural practices. Finally, important socio-cultural songs and performances were recorded, transcribed and translated with the help of a translator who has linguistic and cultural competence. The data were then interpreted and thematically analysed.

Analysis and Discussion

Folk media and history

Folk media is the platform by which the Gedeo people tell their history. According to their oral folk stories, the Gedeo people came from a place called Harsunke, south of their current land, and settled in the area of Hawaxxa around Ballayyaa – which is around Bulle Woreda. The oral history of the people offers no indication of the time when the Gedeo people came from Hursunke and settled at Hawaxxa.[1]

   According to their folk communications, the Gedeo people settled in their current place in perhaps the sixteenth century, and perhaps in connection with the movement of the Sidaama and the Oromo. In other words, their settlement situation today could possibly be related to the movement of the Oromo and the settlement of the Sidaama in the highlands east of Abaya Lake and west of the Bale Oromo. The Gedeo origin myth is communicated to the young through the following folksong:

Harrsunki fuleeni Hawaxxa dangenni.	From Harsonke [they] came to Hawatta.
No'o jelaatee kea	With feast they moved to.
Ho! Ho! Ho!	Ho! Ho! Ho!

Today, the Gedeo live in the Southern Nations Nationalities People Regional State (SNNPRS) in the vicinity of Dilla, which is the capital of Gedeo Zone as it is currently constituted by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (EPRDF). They were formerly under Sidamo province, which was called Gedeo Awraja. Their language is Gedeogna. Though some say the Gedeo's ancestry is not well known, others trace their origin to the aboriginal tribe called Murgga-Gosallo (Tadesse 2002: 22), perhaps the earliest people to have lived in the area. The Gedeo elders also tell that Gedeo have descended

---

1 An old Gedeo man, about 70 years old, and others in closer age groups narrated the history of the Gedeo in a marketplace in Wenago.

from the ancestral roots through their social grading. The people installed their own *baalle* (social grading), a tradition similar to the *gada* tradition of the Oromo, which is a system of government based on grades and ranks according to age classes (Tadesse 2002).

Gedeo society, folk media and conflict resolution

Gedeo folk stories do indicate the interrelationships among the clans in the society. The Gedeo tell that they have seven clans, which are classified into two groups: *sholle baaxxee* (group of four) and *sassee baaxxee* (group of three).[2] The clans are Darasha, Gorgorsha, Daba'a, Hanuma, which form the group of four, and Lomeda, Henba and Bakarro, the group of three. According to respondents from all the subgroups, Darasha is the most respected and privileged subgroup among the Gedeo. In Gedeo's mythology, the Darasha is ranked highest in Gedeo's clan hierarchy. Respect for the subgroups depends on their position in this hierarchy. After Darasha comes Gorgorsha, Daba'a and so on until Bakaro, which has the least respect. Tadesse (2002: 23) mentions these hierarchical relations and social relations, stating that Daraso, the founding father, is said to have had seven sons from two wives. From these were descended the seven Gedeo tribes: Doobba'a, Darashsha, Gorggorshsha, Hanuma, Bakarro, Henbba'a and Logoda. These are organized into two classes or 'houses': *sholle baaxxee* (the senior), to which the first four belong, and *sassee baaxxee* (the junior), to which the last three belong.

Though there is no concrete evidence for this division into two groups, some mythological sources indicate that the formation of these hierarchies was probably the cause of conflict between the *sholle baaxxee* and the *sassee baaxxee* over boundaries and ownership of resources.

Conflicts in Gedeo can be grouped into different types: domestic, boundary, etc. The traditional conflict resolution of the Gedeo is performed at *roga* (district administrator) level. The cases are brought to *ardenxxe* (local elders), who cross check the ill deeds and sinful acts.

The *hutetiki hyiticha* (chief judicial administrator) of the *roga* acts as chief judicial functionary within the *gosa* (group) and works in collaboration with lower *hyiticha* (wise men or leaders) on appeals drawn from sub-clans. Being close to the society, the assistant *hyiticha* services play a role in the societies about their spiritual and social wellbeing. They examine the nature of any conflict and try to settle low-level quarrels and disagreements in their administrative domains at the *songo* (gathering). This is, of course, communicated to the society at large using the existing hierarchy.

Each of the *songo* has its own successors, called *batitiki hyiticha* (village level administrator), and its *dobalicha* (prospective successor) and *mura* (local messengers). The *batitiki hyiticha* works under the *huletiki hyiticha* (land administrator /allocates land). The local elders usually assist the *batitiki hyiticha*, who judges in cases of martial conflict, boundary quarrels, destruction of wealth, theft or assault.

The conflicts among the Gedeo people are usually resolved within the administrative circle. The Gedeo *gada* system also works in the domain of the *hyiticha* who are chosen

---

2 *Sholle baaxxee* and *sassee baaxxee* indicate the social organization and the communication system of the Gedeo.

based on the number of the clans. If the number of the clans is many, the number of *hyiticha* will increase with their social organization. This can be related to the modern representative form of government. Then, the folk media are used for conflict resolution within the involvement of the *roga*, the *hyiticha* and *ardenxxee*. This is done by folk media such as folk narration at the social and political gathering, the *songo*.

The Gedeo's approach to conflict resolution is often culturally valued by the people, and according to the research informants it is found to be highly useful in settling disputes over marriage relationships, farm boundaries and boundary disputes among the sub clans, clans and ethnic groups. This indicates that the Gedeo prefer to use their strong social institutions to resolve conflicts using institutional rules and norms. These institutional rules and norms are established and maintained through the orally communicated messages using indigenous communication platforms, which can be labeled as folk media. The people have their own well-established traditions of governance and communication systems, which generally enable them to accommodate peacefully to change, unlike those who do not have this and are more likely to buckle. This demonstrates that the folk media has a central place in Gedeo because they use their folk media for resolving various types of disputes in the society.

Resolving marriage conflicts

Conflicts within married couples are resolved at many levels. For example, the husband may try to suppress a misunderstanding with his wife by persuading her, by punishing her or by advising her with the help of his family. However, if the conflict cannot be resolved at home, it will be taken to the local elders. Mostly it is the woman who presents her case to the local elders and, after listening to her case, the elders interrogate the husband over his maltreatment of his wife. The wife might say he severely hit her, insulted her, etc. Based on the words of the wife, the elders ask him if he has committed the crime or not. In fact, the husband never denies the crime because to do so would bring misfortune in his life, wealth, or children. Hence, he confesses, but he defends him by claiming that he did it because she does not serve him food properly or on time, she comes home late, she lies to him, and so on. Depending on the graveness of the matter, the elders advise and order both of them to be good husband and wife. Then, the husband is required to ask for an apology and then the elderly give their blessings for a happy life, to bear children, etc.

However, if the wife is dissatisfied with her husband because he has married another wife, the elders ask the husband why he did so. The husband says that he married again because his first wife does not serve him food, is preoccupied with house chores and childcare, is infertile, etc. Having examined the case and learned the truth of the husband's claims, a decision is made to resolve the conflict. In most cases, the husband is not punished,[3] but if the elders find out his failure to meet his wife's wants after discussions with her family and his, he will be made to pay *murra* (compensation). Usually the women do not take every issue to the verdict of the local jury or the elderly; they rather express their dissatisfaction through insulting and sometimes cursing of their husbands using oral songs, as a psychological communication or approach to console themselves through a kind of intrapersonal communication.

---

3 Polygyny is allowed to the husband, if the woman fails to meet her husband's needs.

The following folksong epitomizes the psychological communication approach to dispute resolution. This song is often sung by youth and women when they perform housework, do agricultural activities, or sit together. Through the song, they criticize those who go to urban areas and do something considered as a social taboo. Those who do so are often considered to have demeaned the culture and such acts often lead to ostracization. This is actually to teach the women to act positively in her marriage and even the man is allowed to punish her if she shows ill acts.

Dilli manna	People of Dilla
Dillassine meluu ganna	They hit their women /hit them "dill!"
C'affee beele	is there
Melalle birte uteele	The women finish up the hotel's food
Koo Gonnocco	You, Gonnocco,
Gobake'ni gannassi odolco	put the pot round your neck!
Haweyyo hawee	You have you
Hawawi sa'ne gadoogali	You spent the night shouting outside people of Dilla, you can't hit the women who is out of her mind

In the above folk poem, it is possible to say that the husband can punish his wife if he finds her doing wrong. As a conflict resolution system, such media are used to convince either party to be obedient to the culture. Those women who eat in hotels are cursed for their actions as is customary and may be banishment from their village or community. Women, on the other hand, express their dissatisfaction and explain why they may be quarrelsome using a different folksong:

Daamme da'enneki bulle afebaa.	The stone I grind on has no flour.
Heerunmenne manji butte afebaa.	The man I married has no property.
Badala da'enne gummatika.	I grind maize for your feast.
Badadee afenne summa atika.	I got your name in trouble.
Baabbicco marraatti' dikko hiyyote.	B.- to go there means to go to the market.
anti'i dayyo dagge, Lippo-yyote.	My sister L. came.
Gomara hinjaaladdu qee'lo malee'e.	I don't like those who marry except for the youngest (He's big but bad).
Aayya baddu.	I am sorry (in Guji-Oromo).

The discourse in this folk media is about a woman's dissatisfaction at home as a result of poverty and her husband's incapacity to feed his family. The women in Gedeo use folk media for socializing the young and as informational and mobilization tools. Usually media has informational, educational, correlation or socializing, continuity of cultures, entertainment and social mobilization functions (McQuail 2000). The women vent their grievances using the poem. In reality, the social and cultural injustice felt by the women, as depicted in the poem, is not heard. Consequently, through the poem, the women oppose this cultural silence by questioning the culture and refusing to accept its continuity. Thus, the poem is used to call for social change and challenge the status

quo. Similar cultural practices can be seen among adjacent ethnic groups like the Guji Oromo (Tadesse 2004).[4]

The Gedeo women also use poetry to show their role as equal contributors to society.

Labbalinssha hunji inda	Like men we work and eat
Labbalinssha	You men
Faraccokee ora qolce	The horse runs along the way
Koo Halacayyee Abba Doggee	You H. father of D.
Aloo Shaafee	It is very nice
Gogee Golloo	(Name)
Hallo Shaafee Faraccikee	Your horse is brave
Oo! hayyaa	Oh! Sorry

The poem was recorded in the marketplace in Wonago town. The song is usually sung by women to criticize social inequality. The poem indicates the psychological conflict that women face as the dominated. The discourse is about the braveness of men and implies that women have the capacity to behave like men. Even though it is played from men's perspective, the poem demonstrates women's perception about their inequality to men. The superior and subordinate relations seem to have led to psychological conflict between them, and the conflict is only resolved through conforming to the existing power structure.

Marriage in Gedeo is a blessing and there is particularly great respect for fertile women. As the women are said to give birth to *gada* (a king), they have respect from their clan or society, but it seems true that their voices are not heard. The above poems indicate that songs are the means through which women condemn, insult and sometimes curse men for the ill treatment of women. One can take folk songs or poems as weapons of the weak, as a medium for addressing their problems. There are conditions under which a woman may get some kind of compensation – such as new clothes from her husband – through the Gedeo' conflict resolution process. The elders often belief that she became quarrelsome because of her husband's failure to comply with the family's needs. This suggests that males' economic domination often leads to women's subordination, and to conflict. The conflict is resolved sometimes through negotiation between the parties, and often with the mediation of the local elders. In the process, different folk media – such as oral stories and poems – are used to educate, inform and sometimes warn the offender so that the victim's physical and psychological wound is healed. Such folk media are also used to convince the wife. This is the common form of resolving family conflicts in Gedeo because the women prefer abide by the customary practices to resort to modern legal practices. In the cases of serious family conflicts that involve relatives or neighbours, *malawo* (a local drink made of honey) is served to the parties and

---

4 This connection is epitomized by a distinct linguistic feature observed in the poem: the use of *aayya baddu*, which has a close phonemic link to *aayyabade* (meaning 'I am sorry') in Oromo language. Though this is just one instance, it would, perhaps, be possible to determine through a study of etymology of words and linguistic structure that there is relationship between the Gedeo and the Oromo languages. In a similar vein, Wedekind (1977: 7) states that: 'The closest relations of the Gedeo people have always been those to the Guji people. Gedeo songs have to a large extent been borrowed from the Guji inventory, and the texts of many Gedeo songs contain Guji words.'

the elders after the issue is resolved. The *malawo* is usually a symbolic communication about the peace achieved and the sweetness of life afterwards.

Resolving Boundary Conflict

The system for resolving boundary conflicts is different. Usually the people of the neighbourhood are called to the *songo*.[5] According to Tadesse (2000: 27), 'Gedeo always refer to the m*ageno* (the creator) who created these beings (rivers, hills or trees)' and the *songo* in each Gedeo village calls for *mageno* whenever conflicts arise in their locality. This is done by mass *qeexala* (prayer), directed towards resolving conflicts. On such occasions, the elders and *hyiticha* (people of wit) are invited. As a conflict resolving mechanism the case is brought in front of *rago* (the leader or the successor) and the elderly fathers. The *huletiki hyiticha* and *batitiki hyiticha* sit in the adjudication place at the centre, with the opponents sitting on either side. The accuser presents his words and case and, based on his words, the accused defends or accepts the claim. The elders consult the *hyiticha* and determine the guilt or otherwise of the accused.

Depending on the nature of the conflict and its seriousness, the elders decide to demand *murra* (compensation) or draw up the correct boundaries. If one of the parties does not accept the decision reached by the elders, he is excommunicated from the clan. So everybody abides by the *serra* – the social laws or regulations of the group.

The *hultetiki hyiticha* are responsible for allocating land and for deciding on any kind of conflicts over land within the society. However, in fact, farm boundary conflicts between two are more or less resolved by local elders. The local elders lay down stones to mark the boundary mark, cursing anyone who throws the stones away, saying:

Kinjjioo gosshittikee gooshommi	The one who throws away the stones
Lemissetekee leemiattii	Be cursed and thrown out of life

As the society fears the curses of elderly people, nobody dares to defy them. After the elders make the demarcation, they give their blessings, which everyone accepts. If someone does disobey the decisions reached, the fear that something bad will occur is strengthened by the proverb:

Galddee galdamalle	It could be late
Haree warrabe sinittee	But it occurs one day donkey is the dinner for hyena

The proverb is told as a warning that disobedience will lead to some kind of disaster sooner or later.

Boundary conflicts between two individuals can be a source of conflict between clans. The mechanism for resolving clan conflicts will be discussed in the following section.

Resolving Clan Conflict

Clan relations and community affairs do have deeper meanings to the Gedeo. According to Wedekind (1977: 32):

---

5 It literally denotes meeting, but can be taken as a participatory communication media used to resolve social conflicts and other issues.

> … the Gedeo texts – more than texts from other cultures – are concerned with "Community" (other persons, social places), with the "Social negative" (anger, sadness, attack, destruction, death and difficulties, and negative evaluation in general).

Wedekind states that the Gedo texts focus on 'getting and retaining' and 'family' (kin, children). Thus, this reveals that clan relations have an important place in the society. According to informants, as it was discussed earlier, the Daraso have seven sons from two wives, who formed the seven Gedeo clans. These are organized into two classes or 'houses': *sholle baaxxee* (the senior), to which the first four belong, and *saasse baaxxee* (the junior), to which the last three belong (Tadesse 2002). The *sholle baaxxee* comprises more than twenty-five sub-class, and the *saasse baaxxee* consists of ten sub-tribes. In Gedeo, marriage within the same sub-tribe is forbidden. Each of these clans is led by local elders with *hyiticha* and *roga*. The people's social relations and harmony are governed by *serra* (the law). If conflicts exist, the *roga* (the nominated elder) and *hyiticha* sit to decide a solution. The *roga* is the main person in the resolution of disagreements in the *gada* system. The *gada* leads the people and is from a pure family. The person who becomes *gada* is told by *hyiticha* and chosen from the clans. The *gada* can be young, as his appointment is based on lineage and genealogy, and he is the most respected person in the social structure. Nobody, for example, dares to cross the road before the *gada* father. Some sources indicate that once some girls laughed when the *gada* was around them. Then the *gada* cursed the girls, saying:

Laballo hanno hassimalle	Look after men
Laballi hanno hassokkee	Let not men search for you
Tolaango heirumme	Just get married without dowry.

This folk narrative tells about marriage practices among the Gedeo. The discourse is that men took dominion over women. The expression 'look after men' communicates the subordination of female to male in marriage, particularly around the choice of bride and the payment of the dowry, which of course has not exceeded eighty *birr* (local currency) since it was set by the *gada* father. The *gada* curses if someone does wrong, but he blesses positive practices or acts by individuals or groups.

Clan conflicts occur in many ways. One cause could be *bootta* (abduction), which is a form of marriage among the Gedeo. Marriages in Gedeo are not made between members of the same clan; a man must marry a woman from another clan. If a marriage is performed by the will of the female's family where male's family does not come into agreement, it threatens the relationship between the clans and conflict may break out. Those who are from the male's family side destroy houses, cut their rivals' *washo* (enset), take their cattle and herds, etc. When such a conflict occurs, the women in the clans come between the rivals to plead for a peace settlement. Of course, when the women intervene the fighting stops and the parties involved sit for the negotiation with the representatives of the elderly from both clans and the *roga*. Meanwhile, the *gada* father prays to *magano* in thanks for stopping the war. This folk media solution is preferred to the modern legal system.

Resolving Ethnic Conflict

Though the Gedeo share similarities with the Guji, Borana, Arsi and the Sidaama, especially in the structure and function of the *gada* system, they have been involved in a series

of conflicts with their neighbouring groups (Asmarom 1973; Tadesse 2004; Lubo 2012). Most of the available narratives and discourses indicate that the Gedeo people have strong links with the Guji and the Sidama. Tadesse (2002: 25) has noted that 'the Gedeo have maintained close cultural and economic ties with their neighbours, the Guji and the Sidamo'. This is perhaps because the Gedeo are bordered by the Sidaama in the north and the east and by the Guji Oromo in the south and west. However, since the three groups share common boundaries, conflicts occur, mainly over access to grazing land.

As the population of the Gedeo is rapidly increasing because of high fertility, the land in Gedeo is densely populated and each farmer family has only a few hectares of land. At the same time, the adjacent population of the Sidaama fall in shortage of grazing land, and the same goes for the Gujj Oromo. This population pressure has resulted in conflict between the neighbouring ethnic groups.

Conflicts can reveal themselves in several ways among these people, but how they are resolved is quite pivotal. The Gedeo have their own conflict resolution mechanisms, based on the culturally constituted institution of the *gada* system as it has been passed through generations using the folktales, folksongs, poems and other folk media. These folkways, among other things, reveal the recurrent conflicts between the Gedeo and the Guji Oromo. For example:

Daddessi dagale	You pound enset
Liqinsi Labane	Drink straight gun
Nunti wore Shaara	We are Shaara people (Nunti-Gujji)
Ha'no wofe aada	You should be finished (killed)
Kallacci Gangallo	K. (name)
Maa-ttatte qalqallo?	What do you say, you 'sack' (fat man)?

In the poem, the Gedeo insult and curse their Guji enemies. The poem indicates that the Guji take their land, as enset is an indigenous plant well-known to be a staple food in Gedeo. Enset is preferred by the Gedeo because of the shortage of land (Tadesse 2002: 20). Thus, pounding enset is a very serious matter for the Gedeo. The poem depicts the Guji robbing the Gedeo and taking their property, and reveals the Gedeo desire that they be killed by gun – the gun may symbolize 'war' among the people.

In fact, the Gedeo often express their hatred of their enemies using folk poetry. The following poem reveals this social reality:

Ittettekaa hiissi!	Return what you eat!
Koo Ayyala Siissi!	You destroy Ayele!
Aqurqazhe Siisi!	Destroy the suppressors!
Gattemmatt'a ffiis	Finish the remaining ones!
hoo siis!	

The discourse in the above is about feudal and tenant relations. *Aqurqazhe* is a borrowed word from Amharic language and is an ideological term, signifying the 'feudal lords' who used to suppress and manipulate the Gedeo people and their wealth. This is a protest song sung by the people to ventilate about their grievances and past agony,

and at the same time communicating the community to take revenge on them. Though this is antagonistic, it is a kind of hate speech which bases itself on win-lose situation as expressed in the folk media. Of course, according to Fisher (2000), conflict resolution between ethnic groups takes different forms: win–lose, lose–lose, and win–win. Indeed, the Gedeo apply various ways to resolve their conflicts with other groups. They implement the win–lose approach by condemning their suppressors at a psychological level, as in the above poem, and sometimes through physical violence, though it is usually followed by social cursing done within the social hierarchy. The lose–lose strategy is used to smooth over conflict through compromises reached through the words of the elders. And, there are cases in which they may take the win–win approach so as to maximize the goals of both sides through collaborative problem solving.

The Gedeo do resolve any kind of ethnic conflicts using the *serra* (legal) system. The Gedeo *serra* puts sanctions if conflict breaks out, and urges the parties involved to negotiate. When conflict arises, the *hyiticha*, who are considered as spiritual fathers advise the people to pray. The *gada* father then prays for peace and prosperity among the Gedeo people. The *rogas* and *hyiticha* call for a *songo* to resolve the dispute between the groups. The local elders are sent to the bordering ethnic groups to learn the cause of the conflict, and these messengers communicate with the opposing side. They negotiate and finally come to an agreement.

The Gedeo cherish peaceful coexistence with their neighbouring ethnic groups. The Gedeo spiritual fathers (the *gada*) preach about peace and they try to bring the opponents into agreement.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In Gedeo, the 'traditional' conflict resolution system as folk media has become a good way to make peace and is vital in addressing the social and political issues of the people. This is because it is an indigenous knowledge and communication system, which is transmitted mainly through indigenous communication channels: indigenous organizations, folk media, etc. The Gedeo have a traditional administrative system called the *gada* system. The social fabric of the people is the product of the people's values, beliefs and traditions (Tadesse 2002), which are maintained through folk media. The communication system of the Gedeo works within the tenets of their ancestral wisdom and values. Gedeo's folk media are loaded with the people's philosophy or thoughts; consequently, they demonstrate the values, traditions, norms and belief system that form Gedeo culture. The Gedeo use their folk media to address marriage, boundary, clan and ethnic conflicts. The folk media in Gedeo, perhaps, like elsewhere is part of 'the ritual points of human experience when groups of people must agree on a minimum program of feeling or action' (Wedekind 1977: 2).

The Gedeo, prefer their folk ways or media to modern systems. This is perhaps because they represent the inherent quality of the people's culture and demonstrate the strong bound between the people and their culture. Besides, the desire to keep the indigenous knowledge and communication system intact is highly evident in Gedeo like in other oral societies (Finnegan 2012). And Gedeo's folk media are invaluable in trying to learn and understand the socio-cultural, political and religious thoughts of the

people (Finnegan 2012). Since many of the development efforts fail because of a lack of understanding of the societal beliefs, custom, traditional and social thought of a people, it would be advisable to give due attention to the studying of the people's folk media. Thus, studying and preserving folk media is important, not only in order to preserve cultural heritages and the ancestral wisdom of the Gedeo (Asebe 2007), but also to ensure sustainable development and the successful implementation of modern systems. But of course, it requires effort to take into account people's folk media and customary practices alongside modern media and legal systems.

The analysis and discussion made so far on the folk narrations, particularly the folk poems above, indicate that the Gedeo use various ways to resolve conflicts. Gedeo's folk media are vital in addressing psychological and social conflicts. The discourses made through these folk media help smooth over social and family feuds, and help address societal problems since they are the means through which consensus is built, peace is maintained and conflicts are resolved.

References

ABIYOT Legesse, BOGALE Teferi and Axel BAUDOUIN

2013   *Indigenous agroforestry knowledge transmission and young people's participation in agroforestry practices: The case of Wonago Woreda, Gedeo Zone, Southern Ethiopia*. Dilla: Dilla University.

ASEBE Regassa

2007   *Ethnicity and inter-ethnic relations: The 'Ethiopian experiment' and the case of the Guji and Gedeo*. Tromsø: University of Tromsø.

ASMAROM Legesse

1973   *Gada: Three approaches to the study of African society*. New York: The Red Sea Press.

BIRHANE G/Hiwot and MELESSE Maryo

2015   'Evaluation of land use patterns across agro-ecological and slope classes using GIS and remote sensing: The case of Gedeo Zone, southern Ethiopia', *International Journal of Advanced Remote Sensing and GIS* 4(1): 1385–1399.

FINNEGAN, Ruth

2012   *Oral Literature in Africa.* London: Oxford University Press.

FISHER, Caroline J.

2000   'Like it or not … Culture Matters. Linking Culture to Bottom Line Business Performance'. *Employee Relations Today* 27: 46–49

GETACHEW Senishaw and MAMO Hebo

2015   'Indigenous knowledge system and local ecological management in midland Gedeo: The case of Mekonisa Kebele', in: ASEBE R. Debela et.al. (eds.), *Indigenous peoples rights, indigenous knowledge nexus development*, 35–63. Dilla: Institute of Indigenous Studies, Dilla University.

JOHNSTONE, Barbara

2004   'Discourse analysis and narrative', in: Deborah Shiffrin, Deborah Tannen and Heidi. E. HAMILTON (eds.), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* 635–649. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers.

KARLBERG, Michael

2005   'The power of discourse and the discourse of power: Pursuing peace through discourse intervention', *International Journal of Peace Studies* 10(1): 1–23.

KIROS Birhanu, SAMUEL Erkato and DAGNE Shiberu

2014   *Community Situation 2013 Adado, SNNPR.*

LUBO Teferi

2012   'The post 1991 "inter-ethnic" conflicts in Ethiopia: An investigation', *Journal of Law and Conflict Resolution* 4(4): 62–69.

McQUAIL, Dennis

2000   *McQuail's mass communication theory.* Washington D.C.: SAGE Publications.

MESELE Negash

2007   'Trees management and livelihoods in Gedeo's agroforests, Ethiopia'. *Forests, Trees and Livelihoods* 17(2): 157–168.

NIGUSSIE Meshesha and Kjell Magne YRI

2016   'Socio-political discourse and communication in Sidaama folk media', *Oslo Studies in Languages* 8(1): 339–357.

OISHI, Etsuko

2006   'Austin's speech act theory and the speech situation', *Esercizi Filosofici* 1: 1–14.

SCOLLON, Ron and Suzanne B. K. SCOLLON

1981   *Narrative, literacy, and face in interethnic communication.* Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.

SETEGN, Kifle, BOGALE Teferi, ABARAHAM Kebedom and ABIYOT Legesse

2016   'Factors influencing farmers decisions on the use of introduced soil and water conservation practices in the lowlands of Wenago Woreda, Gedeo Zone, Ethiopia', *American Journal of Rural Development* 4(1): 24–30.

SHMUELI, Deborah F.

(u.d)   'Approaches to conflict resolution', in *Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems* (EOLSS). Retrieved on 25/01/2018 from https://www.eolss.net/sample-chapters/C14/E1-40-03.pdf.

TADESSE Beriso

2000   'The riddles of number nine in Guji-Oromo culture', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 33(1): 49–66.

Tᴀᴅᴇssᴇ Jaleta

2004   *A contextual study of Guji Oromo proverbs: Functions in focus*. MA thesis, Addis Ababa University.

Tᴀᴅᴇssᴇ Kippie

2002   Five thousand years of sustainability? A case study on Gedeo land use. PhD dissertation, Wageningen University.

Vᴀʟʙᴜᴇɴᴀ, Victor T.

1986   *Philippine folk media in development communication*. Singapore: Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre.

Vᴀɴsɪɴᴀ, Jan

1985   *Oral tradition as history*. London: James Currey.

1965   *Oral tradition: A study in historical methodology*. London: Penguin Books.

Wᴇᴅᴇᴋɪɴᴅ, Klaus

1977   Gedeo work songs in the context of the Ethiopian revolution. Addis Ababa: SIL International.

Yɪʀᴇꜰᴜ Tefera, Wᴏɴᴅᴀᴡᴇᴋ Abebe and Bᴏɢᴀʟᴇ Teferi

2016   'Woody plants species diversity of home garden agroforestry in three agroecological zones of Dilla Zuria District, Gedeo Zone, Southern Ethiopia', *International Journal of Fauna and Biological Studies* 3(3): 98–106.