

Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanisms among the Konso Community, Southern Ethiopia

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Abstract

The Konso community has been practicing indigenous conflict resolution systems and mechanisms to maintain the values of peace, justice, tolerance, cohesion, and respect since time immemorial. This paper centers on the significant components of the socio-cultural milieus of the Konso community that are in any way linked to conflict and the indigenous conflict resolution mechanism. It examines the process of conflict resolution, its value, and its principles. It highlights the importance of the conflict resolution mechanism, some of its weaknesses, and the need to subsume the usage of surrogate conflict resolution by all contestants. It finds that the Arrara mechanism of the Konso people is the most effective cultural method of dispute resolution, though it is not inclusive in terms of gender. The study thus suggests the reinforcement, support, and promotion of indigenous conflict resolution institutions and mechanisms based on the principles, norms, and values of conflict resolution and peace building.

Keywords: Arrara, Conflict resolutions, Indigenous mechanisms, Konso, Peace building

1. Introduction

Conflict is a natural, fundamental, intrinsic, and inescapable part of human life. It can occur everywhere and at different levels and stages. It can take place at the intra- or inter-individual, intra- or inter-family, intra- or inter-organizational, intra- or inter-clan, intra- or inter-ethnic group, intra- or inter-regional, intra- or inter-national, intra- or inter-continental, etc. levels. In general, conflict occurs when at least two actors chase opposing objectives, one of the actors suffers harm, and the other one either purposefully causes the harm or chooses to ignore it (Wolff, 2006). It is an expression of the diversity of interests, ideas, and values that emerge as new formations created by social progress arise against inherent limitations (Miall et al., 2005). As long as there has been conflict, people have devised different conflict resolution mechanisms and tried to manage it well by minimizing or lessening its harmful effects. As people and

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communities are constantly looking for ways to resolve conflicts, conflict resolution is, therefore, essential for day-to-day coexistence (Pankhurst & Assefa, 2008a).

Conflict resolution mechanisms are often classified into two categories: formal and informal. The former include those mechanisms that are designed based on a legal framework and are enforced by state justice systems, while the latter are developed based on the culture and history of a specific community and are enforced by concerned communities (Pankhurst & Assefa, 2008a). Haile Selassie I first adopted the formal conflict resolution mechanism in Ethiopia in the 1960s and subsequently through various collections of legislation issued by succeeding governments. The main goal was to develop a thorough set of laws and modernize the legal system to better serve contemporary Ethiopia (Assefa, 2012). On the other hand, the majority of Ethiopia's legal system is made up of the informal dispute resolution methods, also known as indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, which have been around for a very long time (Jembere, 2000).

Most countries in the world use indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms in conjunction with formal state-endorsed processes (Macfarlane, 2007). Indigenous conflict resolutions are cost-effective, require no literacy, and are more reachable to the public than the formal justice system. Indigenous peacemaking wisdom stands out as the best and most efficient means of resolving disputes in a nation like Ethiopia, where the majority of the population is impoverished, illiterate, and has little access to the legal system (Gowak, 2008). Since they are recognized as guiding principles for peaceful coexistence, almost all ethnic groups in Ethiopia have unique conflict resolution techniques that derive from their own customs, values, norms, beliefs, laws, and rules (Jembere, 2000; Pankhurst & Assefa, 2008a).

The Konso people have their own indigenous method for resolving disputes. *Arrarra*³ is one of the outstanding aboriginal conflict resolve mechanisms in south Ethiopia, practiced by the hardworking *Konso* community. The *Arrara* mechanisms effectively manage almost all types of communal conflicts, from minor infractions to murder cases and ethnic clashes.

While indigenous dispute resolution techniques are becoming more widely accepted across the nation, recent studies have shown that they are nonetheless underutilized, improperly acknowledged by the state, and poorly organized (Ajanaw & Hone, 2018; Bantayehu, 2016; Endalew, 2014). However, there has been growing attention in recent years, as demonstrated by an upsurge in publications and policy curiosity by the government. Besides, while indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms have some common features, their practices and applicability are context-and culture-specific and thus differ from area to area and community to community. This situation calls for context- and culture-specific detail studies that could inform policy decisions and contribute to the body of knowledge. The key aim of this article is, therefore, to explore the practices and challenges of the *Konso* homegrown conflict resolution mechanism

³ *Arrara* is a local language referring to the mechanisms via which concerned bodies make individuals, families, or groups of people friendly and peaceful after they quarrel.

(*Arrara*). It specifically focuses on exploring the nature and processes of the *Arrara* mechanism, its core values and principles, and its strengths, weaknesses, and challenges.

The following reasons make this study important. In the first place, the study offers insightful knowledge on the *Arrarra* mechanism; secondly, it assists in identifying the mechanism's shortcomings and suggesting potential fixes; and thirdly, the study has the potential to add to the body of knowledge on Ethiopian indigenous dispute resolution.

The remaining sections of this manuscript briefly explain the concepts and empirics, the methodological approach employed, present and discuss results, and provide conclusions and recommendations.

2. Brief review of Concepts, Empirics, and Theories

2.1 Definition of Concepts

Conflict is defined from a variety of angles, and no single term is universally accepted. However, by examining the literature, one might spot common characteristics of conflict. In general, conflict is an inherent and inevitable part of social change and is often considered as the chase of incompatible interests, aims, and values by various groups (Amiara & Omeje, 2019). In this study, we adapted Francis's definition, which says conflict is disagreement that results from differing interests, values, goals, ideas, ideologies, perceptions, and orientations in social life (Francis, 2008). Furthermore, we defined conflict resolution as a process that pursues discovering the core reasons for a conflict in order to halt it and uphold lasting concord. Conflict resolution often focuses on finding genuine, true, and proper solutions that satisfy, benefit, and provide lasting peace to both sides (Best, 2006).

Indigenous mechanisms of resolving disputes include social, economic, cultural, and religious-spiritual elements that take into account all of a society's traditions, conventions, and worldviews within the various sectors of societal life. Drawing on the wisdom, tradition, and yesteryear of the society, the approaches involve dialogues, mediations, and reconciliations (Chuks & Sikibo, 2017). The main goal of indigenous conflict resolution is to turn a conflict into a condition where both parties are happy and ready to "let go of their pain and forgive each other" (Boege, 2006). Traditional or indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms can be defined as the use of all-inclusive community-based traditional methods and procedures to resolve disputes in a way that results in real reconciliation, social harmony, and lasting peace (Lanshima, 2016). These mechanisms, which are ingrained in society's culture and history, emphasize communal harmony, individual or group reconciliation, and peaceful reintegration into society (Best, 2006). We, therefore, operationalized indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms as aboriginal conflict administration techniques and systems embedded in the culture and history of the Konso community undertaken by elders, lineage heads, and other cultural actors to settle conflicts fully that bring true reunion, societal harmony, and lasting peace. In the context of this study, *Arrarra* is defined as an indigenous conflict resolution mechanism of the *Konso* community, performed by elders, lineage heads, and other cultural actors, aimed at attaining comprehensive and sustainable peace that brings true reunion and societal harmony.

2.2 Empirics

Empirical studies have shown that aboriginal conflict resolution mechanisms have multiple advantages in settling and preventing conflicts (Belew, 2021; Boege, 2006; Genet, 2023; Pankhurst & Assefa, 2008b; Yimer, 2021). They are found to be effective in upholding sustainable peace and restoring harmony in various communities in Africa and elsewhere (Asmare, 2021; Boege, 2006; Dahal & Bhatta, 2008; Dodo & Chakeredza, 2019; Eneyew & Ayalew, 2023; Kirby, 2006; Kwaku & Rankopo, 2012; Mohammed et al., 2017; Olowu, 2018; Pankhurst & Assefa, 2008b; Sinha, 2011; Yusuf & Shittu, 2022). However, despite wide acceptance and efficacy, aboriginal conflict resolution methods are criticized for not addressing gender equality, contradicting universal human rights principles, being open to abuse, neglecting individual rights, ignoring children's voices, lacking uniformity, and having a limited sphere of applicability (Boege, 2006; Pankhurst & Assefa, 2008b). These limitations suggest that in order to acquire in-depth insights, lessen, or perhaps eliminate the constraints, indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms and processes need to be studied in the context of a specific nation, community, and/or culture. Therefore, this research is initiated to explore *Xhonsita's* conflict resolution mechanisms (*Arrara*) within the context of the *Konso* community.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 Social Capital Theory

The first theory that we considered to guide our research is social capital theory. Humans are social animals with a shared set of values that compel them to coexist. They are linked to one another via a variety of networks. By recognizing this aspect of human nature, some scholars such as, Coleman (2000), defined social capital as everything that encourages group or individual activity and is based on social norms, reciprocity, networks of relationships, and trust. Putnam (1993) has similarly defined social capital as the combined worth of all "social networks" and the tendencies that result from these networks to support one another. It entails reciprocal duties, trust, norms and networks, civic consciousness, and communal duty. By enabling coordinated efforts for reaching mutually beneficial ends like peace, it can enhance social cohesion and increase societal efficiency (Phillips & Pittman, 2014; Putnam, 1993). This implies that, when properly nurtured, developed, and applied, social capital can be used as an instrument to ensure peaceful coexistence, harmonious relationships, and the efficient operation of communities.

Negative externalities, or undesirable outcomes, can also arise from the use of social capital by individuals or groups who prioritize their own interests over the good of society. Some scholars even go further and strongly connect indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms to social capital (Fred-Mensah, 2005). As mentioned above, *Arrara* is *Konso* people's indigenous conflict resolution mechanism that is established based on social norms, mutual understanding, and the trust of the community to take collective action and restore peace and solidarity among the *Konso* and other neighboring people. The values of respect for one another, understanding,

communication, compromise, and reconciliation uphold the social cohesiveness and bonds that exist within the community. Therefore, social capital theory could be useful at this point to investigate how dispute resolution processes within the *Konso* community are carried out by elders, lineage leaders, and others to repair and preserve social bonds, social solidarity, community relations, and ensure sustainable peace.

2.3.2 Ubuntu Perspective

Ubuntu is an African cultural perspective that seeks to catch the core of what it is to be human (Murithi, 2006). It is an African theoretical scheme that emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships, the interconnectedness of all things and beings, people's spiritual nature, their collective and individual identity, the collective and inclusive nature of family structure, and oneness of mind, body, and spirit (Mungai, 2015). It is established on the expression of humanity via, among other things, the ideals of hospitality, sympathy, harmony, solidarity, sharing, and compassion (Mupedziswa et al., 2019). The central tenet of the *Ubuntu* worldview is that individuals exist because of other individuals (Mungai, 2015). It argues that we are human because we participate, share, belong, and live via others (Mungai, 2015; Mupedziswa et al., 2019). The practical application of *Ubuntu* can be summarized as follows: it plays a crucial role in fostering social cohesion, harmony, and a sense of community; it also plays a crucial role in promoting team work and consensus-building; and it plays a crucial role in mediating and resolving conflicts (Hailey, 2008).

Particularly, the view of *Ubuntu* illuminates the significance of resolving disputes and promoting peace via the values of inclusivity, reciprocity, and a sense of shared destiny. Its implications for peacebuilding and conflict resolution are as follows: by accepting and internalizing *Ubuntu's* core principles, we can help establish harmonious and healthy relationships, including intra- and inter-person, intra- and inter-family, intra- and inter-community, and intra- and inter-nation, based on the web of humanity. *Ubuntu* also emphasizes how crucial it is for the whole society to get involved in bringing about peace because doing so strengthens social cohesion. In order to mend past wrongs and preserve community bonds, social cohesiveness, and harmony, *Ubuntu* societies created mechanisms for settling conflicts and fostering reconciliation and peacebuilding (Hailey, 2008; Murithi, 2006). The principles of *Ubuntu*, such as empathy, restorative justice, sharing, cooperation, and humanity's oneness, are deeply ingrained in the culture of the *Konso* people. We, therefore, adapted the *Ubuntu* framework to examine the *Arrara* mechanism's principles, procedures, and effectiveness in resolving conflicts, restoring harmony, and fostering positive community ties among the *Konso*.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Description of the Study Area and Community

The *Konso* people, known as “*Xhonsita*,” are located in the southwestern part of the southern regional state at a distance of about 590 and 361 kilometers, respectively, from Addis Ababa and Hawassa cities (Menbere et al., 2013). Adjacent to the Oromia area on the south, *Alle* zone on

the west, *Derashe* zone on the north, *Amaro* zone on the northeast, and *Burji* zone on the east, the *Konso* zone is situated in the Great Rift Valley. After going through several governmental structures, such as *Woreda* and *Liyu-woreda*, it underwent a harsh, peaceful, and methodical battle to become the Zonal Administration in 2017. With four administrative *woredas* and "*Karate*" serving as the zonal administrative center, it spans 2,354.3 km² and is home to around 421,000 people.

The *Konso* people speak "*Afa xhonso*," a language that is part of the Cushitic language family. *Afa xhonso* has common vocabularies with *Dirashe*, *Borana*, and *Gawada* (Alle), which constitute 67%, 44%, and 26%, respectively (Hallpike, 2008). There are nine exogamous clans (*Kertita*, *Tokmaleta*, *Ealayta*, *Saudhatta*, *Pasanta*, *Ishalayta*, *Mahaleta*, *Tikesayta*, and *Arkamayta*) believed to come from one father in the *Borena Oromo*, *Liben* area. Marriage within the same clan is forbidden because all clan members are siblings of the same *Poqqola Tumma*, who is responsible for the cultural and spiritual ceremonies.

The *Konso* people are well-known around the world for their hard work and agricultural system. They cultivate their fields using natural manure, construct, and maintain stone terraces as part of a unique and sustainable agricultural method. Most of the population practices agriculture, with the main crops being sorghum and maize, along with some root crops, mainly *Mokkata* (cassava). Every *Konso* household owns many *Moringa* trees, known as *Shelqahta* in *Afa xhonso*, *Moringa stenopetala* in science, and *Shifera* in Amharic, within their fields and around their compounds. *Konso* is a key point on Ethiopia's southern tourist circuit and has an excellent collection of *Morras*, *Wakkas*, *Paleta Kasarkiyo* (a New York tourist site), *Paletas*, *Kawata* (terracing), and *Konso* cultural landscapes (one of the world's heritages) that make it a must-see area (please see the following pictures).



Morra: public place for conflict resolution and other cultural ceremonies



Shelqahta (*Moringa stenopetal*)



Kawata (Terracing)



Wakka (Monuments)



Paleta (Village)

Source: Social Media and field captures

3.2 Research Approach

Given that the main aim of this study is to explore the nature, mechanisms, and guiding principles of the *Konso* people's traditional dispute resolution practices and methods, a qualitative research approach was used. Study participants were selected via purposive sampling technique, which enabled the researchers to pinpoint and contact individuals with deep and rich knowledge about the *Arrara* mechanism of the *Konso* community and have direct involvement in the same. Following this, six knowledgeable senior individuals (two elders/clan leaders who handle conflicts in *Konso* and beyond, two religious leaders who work together with both customary and formal systems, two customary councilors responsible for mediation and reconciliation) and two young leaders who experience and observe conflicts were selected. Primary data were collected using key informant interviews from selected participants and observation. The interviews were conducted over the phone (lasting for 37–53 minutes) and in person on major causes of conflict, the nature and procedure of the *Arrarra* mechanism, and values and principles guiding *Arrarra*, among others. Further, personal experiences of the researchers and their knowledge about the '*Arrarra*' mechanism as well as observation have been incorporated into the study. The authors are native *Konso* who were raised in their community's customs. However, the authors have tried to place their own knowledge in the context of other data sources to any avoid bias. This paper is mainly aimed at exploring the indigenous conflict resolution mechanism of the *Konso* community (*Arrarra*) by addressing the process and fundamental principles, strengths and shortcomings, challenges, and finally forwarding possible recommendations for the problems. A key informant interview checklist was prepared to collect the data. The data were analyzed using content analysis based on the basic themes identified during the interview checklist preparation and interview transcription stages. Observation and document review were also used to supplement the interview method.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Conflict and its Major Causes

Every society experiences conflict on a regular basis, and most have their own methods for resolving it based on ingrained traditions and ideals. The Latin word "confligere," which literally means "to strike together or to clash, to engage in a fight," is where the English term "conflict" originates (Macfarlane, 2007). The *Konso* (*Khonsita*) have clashed with *Borana*, *Alle*, and *Derashe* communities at different times mainly due to: boundary disagreements, poor governance, poverty, and resources (such as water and pasture for cattle) (SNNPRS 2014; Menbere, Feye, and Getahun 2013). However, *Konso* and its bordering communities have similar lineage and belong to the same family, which contributes to ease the conflict resolution between them (Key Informant 5, June 2023, Karat).

Further, the informant's opinion assured their fellowship with the neighboring people of Oromo and *Derashes*, and the disputes with them are mainly lack of good governance and over pasture and plot lands (Key Informant 6, June 2023, Fasha). As per Informant 4, the main cause of conflict with *Derashe* people is political and lack of good governance. Other principal causes are quarrels over borders, grassland, water, theft, conflict over claims of a girl, and insult (key informant 2, June 2023, Kaho). From these descriptions, it could be said the most recurrently occurred type of conflict is inter-personal conflict. The nature of conflict can appear as verbal or physical aggression, or it can be concealed internally as hatred. Bantayehu (2016) summarizes the root causes of conflict as socio-cultural and psychological factors, politicization of ethnicity and ethnic mobility, and mismanagement of economic resources.

4.2 Nature and Processes of the Arrarra Mechanism

The types of conflicts that are being addressed by the mechanism start with husband-and-wife issues, land claims, families and adjacent communities, murder, theft, robbery, and ethnic conflicts. Because the *Arrarra* mechanism is founded on cultural concepts, principles, and procedures that are easily understood and accepted by the community itself, the *Konso* people employ it to resolve their disputes in their entirety (Key Informant 3, June 2023, Karat). Restoring good relations between the parties, resolving the root causes of conflict, and promoting harmony and goodwill among community members are among the key objectives of the *Arrarra* method. The majority of key informants concur that issues are resolved in a way that maximizes benefits for all parties—that is, by ensuring that everyone gets what they want and minimizing bad feelings. The process of conflict resolution starts with accepting the dispute claims, setting preconditions, assessing the conflict, conducting discussions, addressing the root cause, giving a decision, and conducting a reconciliation ceremony.

Conflict resolution methods and processes differ based on the nature of the conflict. For instance, elders of the lineage resolve conflict between husband and wife, and the *Poqqala Mugula's* (lineage head) of the plot area resolves that of land claims. Similarly, the dispute resolution places could be in their house, *Morra* (a specified cultural place that has a meeting place and shelter), in front of the lineage leader's house, and village places. There are several

ways to present the conflict case to the *Kimotas* (elders) and/or *Poqqala Muklas* (lineage head): the individuals involved, their families, any outside observers from the community, and the police (Key Informant 3 and 4, June, 2023, *Karat*). It is considered dishonorable for the victim's side to initiate the use of traditional conflict resolution procedures rather than seeking revenge, which is why the victims of a terrible crime chose not to petition for the *Arrarra* process in this case. In this instance, the perpetrator and their family, if not elders, would visit the victim's and/or their family's residence to urge them to settle the dispute amicably.

When there is a problem between husband and wife at night, a husband is forced to leave his home and sleep at *Morra*. In the morning, they discuss and resolve their dispute, or the compliant call three elders from their lineage to resolve their issue. As far as conflict between lineage members is concerned, the first person to hear a problem between two lineage members is the *Poqqala Mugula*. A *poqqala Mugula* is the head of a lineage that performs rituals for his lineage, mediates in quarrels between members of his lineage, and often gives advice in settlement matters. If he cannot solve the problem, the issue is discussed with the elders of the lineage in front of the lineage leader's house. Equally, when there is a dispute between members of different lineages, the *Poqqala Mugulas* of the respective lineages are typically involved and the matter is brought up and debated by the elders of the community or village.

If the matter is complicated, though, it may be sent to the village's general council of elders, who will handle and settle it. At this stage, the offended should provide *Xhorata* (some amount of money or even something in kind like sheep or oxen, depending on the case and the capacity of the claimant) as a precondition to the *Abba Timbas* (the elder's representative). The elder's representatives will summon the village elders to discuss the issue. If the issue is not harsh and/or urgent, a convenient day (mostly Sunday morning) is arranged for the dispute settlement, and the offender is told to prepare the money equivalent of the claimant. On the arranged day, the offender should avail the noted birr as a precondition to resolve their case under the feet of the elder's representative with *marga* (green leaf of runner) (*mahanta*). At that time, the meeting place is the villages (*Morra*), and the assembly will be opened by three representatives from those clans with *Xhelta* (a group of age-grade that oversees village administration). However, in case the offender(s) fail to attend the assembly, the assembly passes a decision to isolate the offender(s) and his or her family from social activities named *dhufana*, which is equal to an embargo. Until the offender submits to the assembly, he and his family will not involve in social activities, the villagers did not take responsibility to carry them to medical centers, defend them from any injury, and even declines to bury their dead body. One elderly key informant the procedures as follows:

Even though most cases are solved before that stage, when cases are heard in a morra, the elders are in charge of hearing the cases of wrongdoing and setting the punishment. The penalty could be below or above the Xhorata based on the case; however, some money is always returned to the offender from the penalty to show the elders consideration for the offender depending on his behavior and prerecorded wrongdoings. Open communication between the two parties,

negotiation between the parties, gathering information about the conflict's origins, making decisions, and concluding with a ceremony are the methods used to resolve conflicts. After the truth has been established, the perpetrator should shake the victim's hand and kiss the Xhelta's knees as a sign of admitting guilt. From the fines, some amount of money could be divided between elders and all the participants (based on age grade and meeting duration), and the rest of the money is put aside to resolve communal duties. Fines are levied not only for engagement in conflicts but also for not obeying social orders, like failure to attend a funeral or neglecting to work on wall repairs and other social activities when called to do so by the Xhelta (Key Informant 4, May 28, 2023, Karat).

The three types of actors that have often been participating in the *Arrarra* mechanisms include the conflicting parties, dispute settlers (elders and clan leaders), and the gathering. The gathering comprises any fascinated persons or supporter of disputants. According to the authors' observation, the crowd is free to discuss the case but is not involved in making decisions. The positions of elders are open to all *Xhonsita*, who could be farmers (*Etanta*) and merchants (*Xhawuda*), who are matured and have community influence, familiarity with customs and culture, and a reputation for being wise counselors. However, now a day's potteries and butchers (who previously denied eldership due to cultural matter) have been given chance to be an elder.

One important preference of the indigenous system over formal courts is its ability to expose truth in the absence of a witness. The elders use a highly complex and methodical process to look for the truth using many approaches. One of the techniques is *Affarsa* (an investigation mechanism of a community for identifying transgressions committed by individuals or groups of the community) when a theft or murder occurs in the absence of witnesses. In this case, every person, including children over seven years old, is forced to attend the assembly, and no one is allowed to miss the meeting. If the victim has suspicions about certain persons or groups but there is not any evidence to support them, the victim or a community leader would explain the situation to the assembled people and ask them to come clean. The suspect is tested by various probing questions to get clues, and a chance is given for the suspect to discuss the case with his clan leaders and report the final decision to the assembly soon. If the suspect fails to accept his or her guilt, the elders will gather any additional information and give everyone a final chance to confess. Failure to do so may force elders to curse the suspected person. In the *Konso* community, there is a well-established belief that the elders curse works immediately, and the suspect fears this curse and admits any guilty (Key Informant 2, May 2023, *Kaho*).

In *Konso*, especially the *Kenna* area, each clan has its own respected land area (*Hamanta*), and claims over that area are resolved in front of the space of the clan leader (*Poqqola Mukula*). In cases of murder, the murderer is required to pay blood money (*Kumma*) either in cash or in kind to the parents or relatives of the deceased. The *Kumma* differs from *Kebele*⁴ to *Kebele* and

⁴ *Kebele* is the lower (fifth) level of government in the Ethiopian governance system. It is equivalent to a village.

based on the cause of the murder. However, in cases of conflicts between *Xhonsita* and other neighboring communities, the *Poqqola Tummas* participate to ease the conflict, and the wise men selected from the elders are assigned to handle the case. Nevertheless, as noted earlier, most *Poqqola Tummas* have weakened throughout time, and *Kalla* is still the active *Poqqala Tumma* in *Konso* and stands frontline in dealing with ethnic disputes. However, some people suggest that *Kalla* was made *Qagnazmach* by Emperor Haile Selassie, which may increase *Kalla's* influence (Kimura, 2004).

The final resolution processes are accompanied by certain ritual ceremonies that involve elder's blessings, prayers, shaking hands, drinking *Chakha* (the *Konso* People's favorite native drink) together, eating *Dhama* (the *Konso* People's favorite food made with *Moringa*) together, and beast sacrificing. The local people make offerings to their divinities (*Waqqa*) as a symbol of reconciliation because this is ingrained in their cultural beliefs and heritage. The ritual power rests mainly with the clan leaders (*Poqqala Mugula*). The *Poqqala Mugula* performs rituals for his lineage, and the *Poqqala Tumma's* perform rituals for the settlements and regions. Rituals take place either in a household or at a *Morra*. The ritual ceremony may differ based on the type and harshness of the wrongdoing. In other words, some minor offenses and crimes committed among close relatives may only demand an apology or forgiveness without compensation or ceremony.

For collective peace, social cohesiveness, and social order to be effectively restored in the society, the two parties' honest approval of the process is crucial. Though the mechanism has no written law, it has a well-organized cultural structure for resolving conflict and enforcing its decisions. The elders use oath, blessing, cursing, embargo or exclusion (*Dhufana*), and expulsion (*Qitassa*) from the community to enforce their decision. Conflicting parties are generally more likely to obey elders' commands because the decisions made by elders are supported by societal force. However, these days, some elites, government structures, and Christians are questioning the enforcement of the *Arrarra* mechanism. Some of the reasons are explained in sections 4.4 and 4.5 below.

4.3 Values and Main Principles of the Arrarra Mechanism

Studies have shown that the principles followed to manage conflicts significantly affect the processes of their resolutions (Mwagiru, 1999). The principles of justice, forgiveness, reconciliation, and truth are at the core of the *Arrarra* mechanism. The nucleus of the indigenous dispute resolution process is the idea of reestablishing social harmony, peace, and reconciliation within the society. These ideals are vital to the community's overall health as well as the wellbeing of its members (Key Informant 1, June 2023, Kaho). One of the main principles of the mechanism is investigating the truth and making decisions based on that truth. In *Konso* community belief and experience, God (*Waqqa*) curses those elders who made intentional counterfeit decisions, and even their children could be partakers of the curse (Key informants 1, 3, and 5).

The disputing parties are permitted and encouraged to freely exchange information and present their issues to elders and the crowd. These parties are more satisfied and obedient to decisions made when they are involved in the decision-making process, have the chance to understand each other, and have flexibility when it comes to setting resolutions. The *Arrarra* mechanism uses both coercive and non-coercive methods of conflict management. The key informants emphasized that the goal of indigenous conflict resolution is the renovation of past relations between the disputing parties, not the punishment of the offender. One of the key informants said, "The *Arrarra* mechanism, by establishing order and averting any state of lawlessness, is a more potent human tool for maintaining sustainable concord than contemporary law enforcement mechanisms."

4.4 Strengths and Shortcomings of the Arrarra Mechanism

Many scholars argue that aboriginal dispute resolution systems and mechanisms are fair, accessible, transparent, and more effective and efficient than formal (state-run) ones (Lanshima, 2016; Macfarlane, 2007). In this study, we have tried to explore the key advantages that the *Arrara* mechanism has over the state apparatus. The points raised by the interviewed elders and youth regarding the benefits and strengths of the *Arrara* mechanism of the *Konso* community over the state law enforcement mechanisms are summarized in the subsequent section.

- **Easy to access justice:** the resolution mechanism is practiced by local elders located within the community and is accessible without any transportation cost, and it overcomes the barrier of illiteracy.
- **Low cost of conflict resolution:** contrary to formal court procedures, the *Arrarra* mechanism plays a significant role in lowering the cost and delay of conflict resolution because it allows many impoverished people to access justice despite being unable to afford the costs of transportation, lodging, and legal representation during the proceedings.
- **Fair and transparent decision:** the formal courts are corrupted and full of nepotism, which increases the difficulty of getting justice within the formal court system. However, the *Arrarra* mechanism is better at giving fair decisions for complicated crimes, even revealing crimes committed without witnesses, and enforcing fair punishment for the crimes committed.
- **Effectiveness and efficiency:** for resolving specific conflicts, such as those involving families, neighboring communities, ethnic groups, land claims, and murder, the indigenous conflict resolution mechanism is more successful and efficient than the legal system.
- **Capacity to restore harmony:** the indigenous system reduces the possibility of retaliation and appeal while having the power to bring the community's cohesion back. As a result, conflicting parties can coexist peacefully and cooperatively in society. However, state courts focus on finding guilty and innocent parties and prioritize individual good over the collective good of the whole society (Lanshima, 2016).

However, some scholars, such as Endalew, indicated that "though the customary dispute resolution mechanisms are useful tools for administering justice in Ethiopia, they are not without

shortcomings (Endalew 2014, p. 149) According to the information from the informants and our experience, the shortcomings of the *Arrarra* mechanism are summarized as follows:

Similar to the many institutions of traditional conflict resolution, the mechanism remains male-dominated, with the possibility of female discrimination. However, the key informants support the *Arrarra* mechanism, claiming that the indigenous system typically involves male community members to lead the reconciliation process in order to lessen the load on women to take on household chores. In *Konso* culture, elderly women (especially grandparents) have more responsibility for taking care of domestic issues, and men elders have responsibility for handling social and cultural issues. On the other hand, grandpas entertain by playing *Tasha* (*Gebet*) and handling disputes as part of job for the elders. Nonetheless, it is clear that, in comparison to men, women's involvement in conflict management and rebuilding procedures is extremely restricted. One key informant interviewee explained as follows: “Females are not allowed to participate in the discussion unless they are the conflicting parties or summoned as witnesses. However, the elderly women are highly encouraged to give suggestions during disputes within similar clan and family issues.”

The *Arrarra* mechanism's second drawback is that it violates human rights norms, especially when it comes to the unequal treatment of men and women. According to informants (1 and 4), some decisions are reversed by the formal courts, especially those related to women. As an example, in *Konso* culture, *Morras* are specified cultural and spiritual places, and women's are not allowed to pass through them. The formal court often negated the elders' decision, stating that women and men are equal and there should be no discrimination against any woman. Further, the indigenous conflict resolution practice forces the disputants to take part in the conflict resolution ceremony, which is seen as demonic and unworthy by most youth and protestant Christians. As a result, most protestant Christians prefer formal courts and ignore the ceremony after the conflict resolution.

Its lack of attention to encourage the youth in dispute settlement and transfer the practices to the younger generations is the final shortcomings. The elders are less involved with youth in the dispute resolution practices and processes, and the elders perceive youth as reluctant to accept and preserve their older values.

4.5 Challenges of the *Arrarra* Mechanism

Although the indigenous conflict resolution mechanism is essential to preserving law and order, societal peace, and order, it faces some challenges that the government and other relevant organizations must give careful consideration to. The main challenges are:

A gradual weakening of the indigenous institutions comes as the first line of political intervention. According to the interview with the informant (Key Informant 3, May 2023, *Karat*), the indigenous conflict resolution mechanism was weakened by the Emperor Haileselassie's introduction of '*Balabat*' (landlordism) at the expense of *Poqqolas* and local elders, who in turn introduced peace-making committees. However, as Kimura (2004) noted, political interference started when *Konso* was incorporated into the Ethiopian Empire by the

armies of Emperor Menelik II in 1897. Similar practices were observed under the Derg and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front regimes, wherein indigenous institutions were either disregarded or rendered incapable of resolving disputes. One of the key informants also emphasized the current political interference, saying, "After things get worse, formal state-run institutions are tasked with resolving the conflict; the end result is the mishandling of the conflict, which may not teach the community any lessons" (Key Informant 2, May 2023, *Kaho*).

Although the Ethiopian Constitution permits citizens to apply religious or customary laws in cases of personal and marital disputes under Article 34, Sub-Article 5, it restricts their application to personal and family matters and excludes their application to criminal matters, despite the fact that they are actually serving as legal defense for a variety of crimes. There are also contradictions between modern and indigenous institutional courts. For instance, sometimes individuals convicted through the *Arrarra* mechanism appeal to a formal court and are released without any punishment. Besides, there is no proper attention given to protecting the *Arrarra* conflict resolution system, a lack of an organized system to nurture and promote the indigenous dispute resolution processes, and an absence of documentation of the best practices in resolving conflicts.

Further, the major challenge of the *Arrarra* mechanism is low acceptance by the youth and protestant Christians. The youth prefer formal courts, and most youth perceive elders as old-fashioned ideologists. One informant affirmed this account, saying that "the protestant Christians undermine our cultural values, and some ignore the cultural power of the elders and cultural leaders." In some *Konso* parts, there are no *Arrarra* mechanisms, and church elders or the formal administrations solve conflicts due to a lack of elders who could take responsibility for undertaking cultural ceremonies after conflict resolutions. Protestant Christianity is rapidly expanding in the settlements, and most of the youth are adherents of protestant Christianity, who look at the conflict resolution ceremony as demonic and some cultural values as worthless.

Finally, capacity issues need serious attention. According to the informants, even though there are some capacity-building training initiatives for the elders, the training selection criteria and the training itself are more politicized and dominated by nepotism. In the eye of the elders, there is low intention to the cultural leaders and elders to shape the *Arrarra* mechanism due to the dynamic nature of conflict and social aspects.

5. Conclusion

This article clearly demonstrated the significance of the *Arrarra* mechanism in dispute resolution and peacebuilding in *Konso*, southern Ethiopia. Depending on the kinds and form of conflict, the *Konso* community uses different conflict resolution mechanisms. Conflicts are mainly caused in *Konso* because of socio-cultural, economic, and political factors. The *Arrarra* mechanism shows that it is very difficult to separate conflict from humankind, and it is unconceivable to think of a society without conflict. The *Arrarra* mechanism resolves all kinds of conflict, from marriage issues to murder. The conflict resolution process starts with accepting the claimant and ends with performing a cultural ceremony. The *Arrarra* mechanism's guiding principles emphasize how

crucial it is to provide the offender with compensation, restoration, reconciliation, and reintegration into society after the conflict has been resolved. Although conflicts are an inherent part of life, they must be handled carefully. Though it deteriorates occasionally, most *Xhonsitas* prefer cultural conflict resolution to modern ones in many situations. Elders are sufficiently close to the effects and management of the conflict because they live and work in the community.

The *Arrarra* mechanism's acceptability, restorative potential, and accessibility were its main advantages. On the other hand, the most noticeable flaws in the system are its exclusion of women from conflict management, time-consuming or prolonged appointments, and discrimination against women. Though it is difficult to conclude that indigenous conflict resolution is perfect and without weakness, it is appropriate to draw the conclusion that because indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms are rooted in the culture, customs, and traditions of the *Konso* people, they are practical, economical, and easily accessible for all segments of the population (mainly the impoverished rural people). However, the benefits of the indigenous dispute resolution mechanism may be quite limited if the government, cultural leaders, and civil society do not work together to promote and safeguard it.

6. Recommendations

- Political interference should be limited, and the government should take on the role of developing the capacity of the elders and clan leaders. Trainings that focus on how to pass decisions that respect the human and democratic rights of youth and women should be conducted. To support an integrated approach to peace, security, and development, it is necessary to capitalize on the strengths of both traditional and governmental institutions in conflict resolution.
- It is necessary to alter the Constitution to include a specific clause acknowledging the applicability of customary dispute settlement procedures to criminal cases. Furthermore, appropriate institutionalization or organization of the traditional dispute settlement procedures is required.
- The preservation, development, and promotion of the *Arrarra* mechanism are more important than ever. Incorporating the indigenous conflict resolution mechanism into school curricula is necessary for its promotion, especially to raise the awareness and involvement of youth in conflict resolution. Further, the elders should work on increasing the participation of the youth in the *Arrarra* mechanism and try their best to transfer their knowledge to the next generation.
- It is imperative to undertake the necessary actions to mitigate the constraints linked to the *Arrarra* mechanism and ensure its alignment with modern human rights doctrines. Specifically, this calls for giving seniors the training they need to stay informed about and cognizant of the international human rights treaties and constitutional principles that Ethiopia has ratified. But the instruction shouldn't be given in a way that disregards long-standing cultural traditions.

- To deal with the changing nature of conflict and globalization, the government should assist young people and indigenous researchers to study the *Arrarra* processes in detail and organize indigenous knowledge and wisdom. It is necessary to conduct more research to find out how church leaders and elders may collaborate to create enduring peace without undermining one another. It is important to have conversations with protestant church leaders on how to strengthen the *Arrarra* mechanism's influence without compromising the religious freedom of protestant Christians.

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Declaration of Interest Statement

We declare that we do not have a conflict of interest to report.

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