

I have reconciliation idea

Title: Siheta

Place: Wolayta Zone

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6/14/2020

Personal detail

I am Abenezer Adisu. I was born and raised in Wolayta Sodo city. Currently I am 5th year mechanical engineering student in University of Wachamo. I spend most of my time reading books and writing poetry as a hobby. I am not engaged or married.

After the outbreak of corona pandemic I returned home and started voluntary association named Giske Keha, which works in helping the poor and disabled, who are unable to meet basic needs due to the pandemic. In addition to this I am also launching member of a team named MEGA/YGRA (make Ethiopia great/ youth generation renaissance association) . this team mainly works around youth empowerment and creating peaceful youth generation in order to brighten the future of Ethiopia. We have been doing this job for two years through social media and face to face.

Acknowledgement

First I would like to thank God. Then I would like to show my gratitude to everyone who contributed that I can't list their name.

I'm grateful to Wolayta zone cultural, tourism and communication affairs office for their hospitality. I also owe thanks to Mr. Adane Ayiza for helping me find the book about history of wolayitta.

I also owe great deal of gratitude for Mr. Abrham Bachore and Mr. Daniel Yaya, elder ship leaders, for giving original information from what they saw in their life. Also my gratitude is great for Pastor Yohannes Basana religious leader leader for giving me current information.

I would also like to thank Dr. Aklilu Abera, from department of linguistics in wolayitta sodo university, for helping me in basic Wolayta language forms.

Abstract

In a society living together peace is the most important condition for longer coexistence. However while living together disagreements and conflicts between individuals can distort the peace in the society. In regaining peace, culture played great role in human race. Culture is the essential part of conflict and conflict resolution. In Africa, where culture is the guiding factor of the society, traditional conflict resolution and reconciliation systems are widely practiced. Rwanda genocide between uttu and tutsi tribes was reconciled by indigenous traditional method called Gacaca. This is also true in Ethiopia where many nations and nationalities live together, from which Siheta reconciliation system practiced in Wolayta is studied in this article.

Siheta is indigenous reconciliation system, with the aim of settling conflicts and returning peace in traditional Wolayta. The process is mainly led by elderly and religious fathers, because of the belief of no one is beyond these individuals. In this process women also participate in some conditions, and also they can be eye witness. Youth are not involved in decision giving, however they can participate the process, in order to save the culture for the future.

Traditional reconciliation is now getting endangered in Wolayta, and also in Ethiopia as whole. And also there is misunderstanding of this tradition currently. It needs a deep follow up, and also sharing of this culture between different nations and nationalities could save this indigenous and the most important way of life.

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CHAPTER ONE

Description of Study Area and Community

Wolayta, which is the study area of the article, is one of the zonal administrations in Southern Nations nationalities and people's regional state (SNNPRs) with administrative center Wolayita Sodo, located 350Km south of the capital of Ethiopia Addis Ababa. The name Wolayta stands for both the people and the area. Wolayta is one of Omotic speaking people, inhabiting Omo river basins and north of Lake Abaya.

1.1 Geographical, demographical, and topographical background

1.1.1 Geography

Absolute location of Wolayta is 6°51" and 7°35" North Longitude; and 37°46" and 38°1" East Latitude. It is located at about 330 KMs south west of Addis Ababa, and 160 km from Hawassa, the Southern regional capital. Relatively, Wolayta borders with Gamo Gofa zone in the south, With Dawro Zone in the west, with SidamaZone in the east, with Kamabata & TamabroZone in the northwest, with HadiyaZone in the north and with Oromia region in the northern east.

1.1.2 Demography

Wolayta is one of the fourteen zones of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State (SNNPRS), which also has eight Weredas. Based on the 2007 Census conducted by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA), this Zone has a total population of 2,473,190; with an area of 4,208.64 square kilometers, Wolayita has a population density of 356.67. While 172,514 or 11.49% are urban inhabitants, a further 1,196 or 0.08% are pastoralists. The largest ethnic group reported in this Zone is the Wolayta (96.31%); all other ethnic groups made up 3.69% of the population. Wolayta is spoken as a first language by 96.82% of the inhabitants; the remaining 3.18% spoke all other primary languages reported. 71.34% were Protestants, 21% of the population said they practiced Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, and 5.35% embraced Catholicism.

1.1.3 Topography and Weather

The topography of Wolayta zone is composed of rugged undulating mountain, rolling hills, plateaus and plains that extend up to low land of Lake Abaya. In terms of agro ecology the area is 9% highland (Dega), 56% midland (Weinadega) and 35% lowland (Kolla). The altitude ranges from the lowest at the foot of Omo river valley 501 MASL to highest 2,950 MASL at peak of Mount Damota. The average temperature varies from minimum 15.10c to maximum 31.0c. Wolayta Zone has a total square area of 4,208.64 square km-among this 57% well cultivated, 7% can be productive if labor added and 11% grazing land and 19% is covered with forestry. Totally,

it is estimated land covered with forest is 8.9%. Maximum rain fall is received from July to September and ranges from 801 -1,600 mm, which compares favorably with many other places in the country. Depending on the climatic condition/nature, Wolayta Zone is categorized under rift valley crop producing position.

1.2 History, Culture, and Language

1.2.1 History

The people of Wolayta had their own kingdom for hundreds of years until 17th century. This kingdom was led by kings called “kawo.” The earlier name of the kingdom was “Damot” and the first dynasty that ruled was known as “wolayta malla.” In the late 17th century this kingdom was defeated by Emperor Menilik and unified as one nation of Ethiopia.

1.2.2 Culture and Language

People of wolayta have their own cultures which are the images of the people. The main cultures of wolayita people include;

- Cultural foods like *mucho*, *gurdo*, *sulso* etc
- Cultural close which is well known called “*hadiya*”
- Wolayta traditional dance
- Wolayita traditional new year celebration known as “*gifaafaa*”
- Traditional wedding ceremony
- Traditional cattle counting ceremony etc..

Wolayta is one of the Omotic language speaking families in Ethiopia and the language is called “*wolaytato doona*.” Almost 85 percent of the people living Wolayita speak the language. The people use proverbs and quotes widely to express ideas and thoughts.

CHAPTER TWO

SIHETA RECONCILIATION SYSTEM

2.1 Introduction

In a traditional society of the world, conflict obviously exists due to incompetence of events which in turn results in “win-lose” character. However this situation is changed to “win-win”, because of the traditional resolution, transformation and management of conflict. Mostly in Africa, where indigenous societies and ethnic groups co-existed for a longer period of time, traditional methods of management of conflicts is the basic value that ties them together. Ethiopia is one of these nations, where many nations and nationalities live together, with diversified ethnic and cultural groups. As studies show almost all of these nations and nationalities use their own way of reconciliation system to settle disagreements and uphold the values of peace, tolerance, solidarity and respect for one another.

Wolayta is one of indigenous nations and nationalities in Ethiopia. The traditional practice of reconciliation system to resolve different types of conflicts and disagreements in a society is widely applied for longer period of time. This reconciliation system is known as “*Siheta*” meaning sewing up the thorn. The name was given on behalf of the belief of the society that is quoted as, “when disagreements and conflict arise between two individuals or a group, two different sides occur and peace and stability gets thorn apart (*pooshetees*), and anything that is thorn becomes weak and loses its perfection.” *Siheta* is the result of this problem as a solution and it has its own unwritten rules and regulations, which are derived from cultural and moral values.

Siheta reconciliation process is led by elderly (*cima*) and religious leaders, who are experienced in arbitration, respected and wise. The place where Siheta takes place is known as “*kuha*” meaning shade. This place is under sycamore tree or plum pine tree, which is selected as an icon of peace due to its shade that covers wide area and unending shade for every one without discrimination. The chairs used for Siheta are different from ordinary chairs called “*shidda*” which is made from the leaflets of *Uutaa* or *Enset* (false banana). The chairs represent the thought “the problem happened between should be solved by us”, and the decisions made by individuals sitting on *shidda* should be respected. Day and time for the process is selected by agreement between each of individuals that participate, and everyone should be there on time.

Women also participate in decision making behind the Curtin at home by giving ideas and also they influence younger generaion at home by teaching about peace. Youth are allowed to attend the process if they issue concerns them and also if they want to learn about the reconciliation process.

In Wolayta Siheta takes place mostly beginning from October or second month of the year, because the first month of the year or September is a month with great value for the people. In September, there is a big new year festival in Wolayta known as “*Gifaataa*”, before the beginning of this celebration, anyone with hate, disagreement, and conflict should settle peace and if not the people believe the new year will be filled with curse named “*gumaa*”. So August, Pagume, and first days of September are named as reconciliation month of the year.

2.2 Siheta Process

Siheta has been practiced for longer period of time in Wolayta. When conflicts, violence, and disagreements happen, the first and the main alternative solution used in Wolayta is Siheta reconciliation. In the present days Siheta plays major role in solving civil code problems before the cases go to the court house.

The main problems addressed by Siheta reconciliation are:

- Marital disagreements
- Boundary conflicts
- Denial of borrowed money
- Murder
- Racial based abuse
- Inheritance problems
- Insult

2.2.1 Murder case

From the listed conflicts and violence types murder takes the bigger weight, because they believe that if it is not settled quickly it will be disastrous. Murder case is reconciled in three different ways:

A. Gondooro

“*Gondooro*” is one of Siheta reconciliation system when family members from different tribe members committed murder on each other. This system is used to settle hate that lived for longer period of time and to stop the disaster widening from time to time.

First elderlies and religious leaders are selected away from both tribes and start to discuss about the problem and the solution. Then they convince both families to prepare for settling peace. Then after selecting day for reconciliation, every male family member from both sides brings spears known as “*muramurua*”, and then they put spears in zigzag pattern and cross it saying “*Gondooro*” to show “we are no longer enemy.” Women who are above fertility age are invited to show that “our problems are no longer active” and this women represent the ladies in both

families. And then an infertile cow is slaughtered they ink the blood on foreheads of each other to show “the blood shed between us is dried and no longer active.”

B. Cuuca Chaaca

When murder is committed between individuals from different tribes, Siheta (sewing up) reconciliation process used is called “*cuuca chachcha*.” When such kind of condition happens in the society, the case is solved by giving critical attention before it leads to tribal conflict.

First 7 elderlys are selected out of the two tribes. Then they make the killer hide from the surrounding until the victim’s families are calm. Then the selected elderlys (arbitrators) start begging the victim family members to accept the reconciliation and stop thinking about revenge. This process is known as “*awaasiyaa*” (arbitration). After several convincing the victim family members agree as there is nowhere to go from the society. Then the family members of the guilty with the guilt individual come near to victim family house and ask for forgiveness by sliding on the ground, crying and kneeling. In this situation no one is allowed to walk. Finally the victim family tells them to stand and a day is selected to finish the reconciliation where many individuals from the surrounding and from the family gather together and slaughter cattle prepared by the guilt family and share it together.

C. Gumaa

This process is used to reconcile murder case in between closer family members (similar tribes) and or between individuals related by marriage, the killer pays compensation for the victim’s family. The direct meaning of “*gumaa*” is compensation for the murder which is unacceptable deed. The payment is known as “*marcuwaa*” which means money. The amount is decided by “*cimaa*” or the elderlys who were following the case. If the man who is found to be guilty is unable to pay his/her family members are obliged to pay.

First elderly selected from both sides discuss without any interference from external body. Their main goal is to settle the case so when they agree to finish the case by compensation, the elderly from the victim’s side gather the family of the victim and convince them to take the compensation. If the family are willing to accept, the elderlys immediately select day and time by taking in to consideration both sides of the family. Then they come together in the sycamore tree, and the reconciliation process begins with prayers and blessings of religious fathers. Then the elderlys from both sides describe about the belief of both sides, to forgive and to beg for it, and to pay and to accept compensation, in order to correct the wrong deed. Arguing is not allowed in *gumaa* process.

The amount of the money most often decided is an overlap of coins known as “*marcu*” with equal height to the guilty, to show that money can’t replace the lost soul and to teach it should not happen again. At the end of the *gumaa* process, they share table together by cattle beef with

cultural coffee ceremony, known as “*oyasa tukee*” (coffee with butter) to show they no longer hate each other.

2.2.2 Others

Disagreements and conflicts other than murder are settled almost in similar way in Siheta. The society of Wolayta prepared similar solutions for problems that occur frequently. This includes marital problems, boundary conflicts, race based abuse, denial of borrowed money, insult and rape etc.

First elderlies called “*cimma*” are selected by agreement of both sides (aggressor and aggressed) by taking in consideration will of both sides to settle peace. Then religious and spiritual leaders that can represent both sides are selected accordingly in order to put above the truth. Then both sides can bring eye witnesses to argue and show their cleanness and day and time for reconciliation is set accordingly.

All of the selected individuals including the aggressor and aggressed gather in selected place exactly at the selected time. The beginning of the Siheta process is launched by prayers and blessings of religious and spiritual leaders. Then both sides are allowed to present their issues. While one individual talking no one is allowed to talk, and a person who is aggressed is allowed to talk longer. Then after hearing both sides the leaders of the reconciliation tell both sides to go to different sides (left and right) away from the spot. Then the leaders ask the eye witnesses to exactly tell what they saw, and they tell the truth because before they witness the leaders put spears and tell them to cross by saying a bow “if i don’t tell the truth my life will be a mess.” After listening to the eye witnesses the leaders will talk to each other and decide who the aggressor is and who is aggressed. And finally both sides come to the place and the leaders explain how they understood the situation wisely and decide the aggressor to fall on the knees and ask for pardon while everyone stands up. Then finally the process ends by sharing coffee ceremony together. Sometimes if the cases are ambiguous like border or inheritance, then the reconciliation is postponed for more detailed information.

Generally in Wolayta traditional way of reconciling conflicts is practiced for longer period of time, and it is adopted by the society. The belief of the society to this culture is as strong as rock because it is based on moral values and ethic characters. At the end sharing meal and drink is the way of assuring peace, where the name changes to result or from “*Siheta*” (sewing) to “*sihetidosona*” (sewed).

Chapter Three

Current information

3.1 Siheta Nowadays

Traditions are inheritable also they are dynamic which means they change their shape with the change of life style of the societies that have been practicing (cannot stay inherent). This is what happened to Siheta reconciliation system. Before fewer decades ago, traditional Siheta in Wolayta was with its full effort and originality, and it still exists with some modifications.

Currently the main purpose of Siheta is to settle conflicts before they go to transitional justice giving place. There are individuals who are selected for eldership in different levels (from localities to zone). These individuals together with religious leaders play the main role in settling conflicts, before the cases go through court system and become more twisted. Mostly problems like marital conflicts, conflict between individuals, some of civil code laws (i.e property law), murder cases (accidental), and tribal conflicts etc. are still reconciled and settled now days in Wolayta by using Siheta.



Fig1. Recent picture of Siheta process in Wolayta zone Humbo wereda.

3.1.1 Siheta and Youth

Literally speaking almost many of youth in Wolayta have no knowledge about the original system of traditional reconciliation (Siheta) these days. But all of the youth have general sence of respect, for the leaders of Siheta called “*cima.*” Because conflicts arise between youths most frequently they become subjects to Siheta. As they have grown up looking the natural way of peace settling most of the youths prefer their problems to be settled through traditional Siheta.

3.1.2 Problems

Siheta is losing its originality and facing many problems now. The main problems include:

- Lack of originality
- Taken as alternative for modern court system
- Lack of awareness

Because of these problems Siheta reconciliation system is getting loose and it is losing its structural strength.

3.1.3 Possible Solutions

If the problems listed above are not corrected quickly, the Siheta traditional reconciliation system will be out of use or invalid. In my opinion the possible solutions or things that could be done to save Siheta include;

- Establishing neutral reconciliation organization with strong structure
- Creating awareness for the growing kids and youth, at home, through social media etc.
- Increasing the participation of women in decision making.

Chapter Four

General Observation

Reconciliation is the primary goal of many traditional justice activities, where the rules are set based on the cultural value of the society. Reconciliation always ends with forgiving, although the guilt is punished. It is the pillar that holds human race together for longer period of time. But in transitional justice system only the victim is healed, due to the punishment given to the guilt which does not create means of getting back together.

Ethiopia is a country with many nations and nationalities which are built up with strong culture and tradition. Reconciliation is indigenous culture that has been practiced for longer period among these nations and nationalities. The conflicts raised between different ethnic groups

recently in Ethiopia were solved by traditional reconciliation, and the reconciliation was effective as everyone can see now they are living together as they were before. This shows majority if the societies in Ethiopia are religious and are respectful for their traditions. But also it seems to be put aside or it needs further job to aware the youth and the coming generation. To save this tradition from vanishing;

- Launching awareness creating television or radio program with amazing reconciliation witnesses
- Preparing experience sharing programs between all of nations and nationalities
- Doing research and preparing written traditional reconciliation which is common for all nations and nationalities.

In the beginning of this project I had blur idea about traditional reconciliation and its importance for the society to live together. This project gave me an opportunity to dig out what was near me and I got to meet several important and respected individuals in Wolayta society. In addition to this I was under stress of not doing anything because of the lockdown but this project gave me meaning to my stay. In general involving in this project was a thrilling event and most of all I felt responsible for the endangered culture which is essential as our basic needs. Because when society lives together conflict arises, when conflict arises the peace gets distorted and if there is no means to settle the conflict living together will be history.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

In general traditional reconciliation is the most effective way of settling conflicts in a society. There is indigenous traditional reconciliation system called Siheta in wolayitta nation. This method is effective because the process is led by selected elderly or mediators who are respected in a society. This system kept the society together for hundreds of years. Traditional ways of settling peace also works for different ethnic groups as we have seen recently in Ethiopia. Nowadays traditional reconciliation systems are in danger so more attention should be given to save our most important culture.

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Thank you