

# Hadiya Women Approach to Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in Ethiopia: A Cultural Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of Hadiya women in traditional peacemaking practices in Ethiopia, specifically focusing on how their gender impacts conflict management. A qualitative research method with an ethnographical research approach was used to accomplish this study. The data for this study was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Hence, In-depth interviews, FGD, observation, and document analysis were employed to gather the information. The results of the study show that even if women are excluded from traditional Hadiya leadership positions, they are highly respected and have a great role in peacemaking when conflicts arise within the community. The findings further showed that in the Hadiya culture, women play a great role in conflict resolution and peacemaking situations through exclusive women-owned indigenous conflict resolution methods such as Landisikka/refined stick/, Landimachcha/loincloth/ and Hiffichcho/spiritual power or authority of women/. Therefore, the Hadiya women's exemplary role in indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms and peacemaking should be well documented and recognized as well.

**Keywords:** Conflict, Gender, Hadiya, Peacemaking, Traditional, Women approach

## INTRODUCTION

Conflict occurs when two or more parties compete for the same limited resources (Mikael S. and N. Swanstrom., 2005). Conflict is also defined as the impression of divergent interests among people (Thompson L., 1998). When two or more social entities individuals, groups, organizations, and nations interact to achieve their goals, their connections may become incompatible or inconsistent (Rahim, M. Afzalur, 2001). Relationships between such entities may become inconsistent when two or more of them demand a similar resource that is in short supply; when they have partially exclusive behavioral preferences regarding their combined activity; or when they have distinct attitudes, values, beliefs, and skills (Bahjat Eid Al-jawazneh ., 2015).

The definitions presented above tell us that conflict can be defined as a contradiction or dispute between two or more parties that results from misunderstandings, struggles for resources, power, and prestige. Conflict resolution is a set of tactics that can be utilized to meet the human desires of security, identity, self-determination, and quality of life for all parties involved in a conflict (Sanson A. and Bretherton, 2007). Other methods of conflict resolution involve addressing the root of the dispute and restoring past relationships among the disputants (Ramsbotham, O., Woodhouse T. and Miall H., 2005). Accordingly, this study provides insight into the role of women in conflict resolution, focusing on indigenous knowledge.

It is known that gender plays a crucial role in conflict management and peacebuilding efforts, with women often contributing unique perspectives and approaches to resolving conflicts within their communities. Substantiation from around the world and across cultures shows that including women and gender concerns in peace-building processes promotes democracy, good governance, long-term stability, and development. Incorporating gender perspectives into conflict analyses can help not only improve knowledge of conflict dynamics but also emphasize the links between development and poverty challenges (Wold, B.G., 2028).

In the context of Ethiopia, Hadiya women have long been recognized for their significant role in traditional peacemaking practices. The historical and cultural context of Hadiya society provides a rich foundation for understanding the roles and responsibilities of women in managing conflicts and promoting peace building. By examining the traditional peacemaking methods employed by Hadiya women, we can gain insights into the effectiveness of these approaches in fostering reconciliation and sustainable peace within the community. Hence, this study focuses on exploring the involvement of Hadiya women in conflict resolution processes and the impact of gender dynamics on peacebuilding initiatives in Ethiopia. By recognizing the valuable contributions of Hadiya women and promoting gender equality in conflict management, we can work towards building a more inclusive and peaceful society in Ethiopia.

## OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of this research is to look into the role of women in traditional conflict resolution methods among the Hadiya society in Ethiopia. The following are the specific study objectives: –

1. To examine the historical and cultural context of the Hadiya women's involvement in traditional peacemaking practices.
2. To point out the ways in which the Hadiya Society women problem-solving and peacemaking system operates.
3. To identify challenges and opportunities for the empowerment of Hadiya women in peacemaking processes

## REVIEW LITERATURE

Women make a qualitative difference to peace-building by enabling access to and fostering trust within and between communities. It is the creation of these informal linkages and webs that lead women to play active roles in peace-building. In their primary roles as wives, sisters, daughters, and mothers, women interact with the people at the grassroots level and build situations of trust. This traditional route seems to be the best option open to women engaging and influencing decision-making for peace-building.

Because of their traditional customary roles, women have a unique insight into the needs of a community and a special role to play in promoting the interests and aspirations of the citizenry. Women often are key mediators in community tensions and support their solution of local issues before hostilities become violent. Grassroots movements such as the Women waging peace Network demonstrate the power of women joining collectively to promote peace-building within their communities (Phyllis, 2012).

Different scholars conducted research about women's roles and empowerment in various issues, including conflict resolution and peacemaking in Ethiopia. For instance, Wold, B.G. (2028) about Kaffa Society traditional conflict resolution mechanism; Astatik Alem, (2018) about Dokko community women's role in indigenous conflict resolution in Gamo zone; Jemila Adem, (2024) about women's traditional conflict resolution institutions in Oromia regional state; Bedria Tune, (2022) about women's conflict resolution

institutions in Oromo Arsifocusing on Atete institution; Samuel Kemeso, (2021) about Hadiya women's history; Adane Woldeab Shanko, (2020) about women's role in traditional conflict resolution focusing on useful traditional practices; Teketel Leredo Hankebo, (2022) about Kambata women's role in maintaining peace within the community.

The findings further showed that in the indigenous system, women play an indirect role in conflict resolution and peacemaking. It can be concluded that Ethiopian women play a pivotal role and are still working to maintain peace and security across all Regions of the country. Therefore, women should be respected, as they have a significant role in indigenous conflict resolutions, and they should be empowered to be involved in peace promotion and peacemaking at the regional and country level.

## **METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

This study used a qualitative research method with an ethnographical research approach to understand the Hadiya women's role in traditional peacemaking practices among disputants. Qualitative research aims at interpreting perspective in terms of the meaning that the subject expresses (Thyer. B.A, 2001). On the other hand, sampling in qualitative research usually relies on small numbers intended to study in depth and detail(Tuckett, A., 2004)

Since the study follows an ethnographic approach, the researchers conducted fieldwork in to two rounds/phases to become aware of different customer methods of conflict resolution, focusing on the Hadiya women's peacemaking practices. The first phase was a pilot survey. In this stage, the researchers familiarize themselves with the target population and society in general in specific villages (kebele) from six woredas (districts) of the Hadiya Zone/Central Ethiopia. The reason behind focusing only on six woredas, namely Lemo, Soro, Misrakbadawacho, Shashogo, Misha, and Gibe, is that they are more permanent than the others, which were established recently. Conducting and interacting with society in the aforementioned ways took the researchers a good number of months.

The second phase was the main data collection period. Hence, both purposeful and snowball sampling techniques were employed, which are part of the non-probability sampling method and commonly used sampling technique in qualitative research that would enable the researcher to produce important ideas and gain a deeper understanding of the research phenomena by selecting the most informative participants that are satisfactory to its specific needs. Based on the designed sampling techniques, 35 elders were selected considering the gender ratio, which is 15 men and 10 women, for both the in-depth interview and the FGD. Furthermore, participatory observation was employed to gather information involving with society, especially during the first phase of data collection.

Secondary data were collected through document analysis. Documents are a valuable source of information in qualitative research. Documents consist of public and private records that qualitative researchers obtain about a site or participants in a study, and they can include newspapers, personal journals, books, and others (Creswell, J. W., 2012). These sources provide valuable information in helping researchers to understand a central phenomenon in qualitative studies, and they represent public and private documents (Ibid.). For this study, data were collected from published and unpublished research, magazines, journals, and some documented videos from Hadiya TV main office.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **The Role of Hadiya Women in Conflict Resolution: Historical overview**

A different literature shows that women have played key roles in Ethiopia society throughout history. From

military competence to diplomatic skills, Ethiopia women have made significant contributions. For example, in ancient Ethiopian history, Queen Sheba (Mekada), the most famous lady in history, affected Abyssinian politics (Budge, W., 2000). During the medieval time, Prince Gudit (Yodit), a Falasha queen, was memorized. Prince Yodit founded the Zagwe dynasty, which dominated Ethiopia for hundreds of years. In the early modern period, Ethiopian Queen Eleni (1450-1522) had important political roles. Queen Eleni was trusted as regent for three successive young kings because to her outstanding political leadership and diplomatic talents.

According to history, between 1464 and 1468, under King Zara Yaqob's reign, women's advancement into governmental posts became more obvious. Some historian like Richard Pankhut investigated that Zara Yaqob formed a women's administration by appointing his daughter and relatives to essential provinces. Zara Yakob's wife, Queen Eleni, would become an accomplished diplomat and military strategist. She was the daughter of Mehamed Garaad (King) of the Hadiya. According to Ethiopian history, a Hadiya noble woman who was gentle, religious, and a good Christian theologian played a significant role in the coming of the Portuguese as one of the first diplomatic missions in 1520.

Some women have been known to advocate for women's rights and challenge patriarchal values, such as banning polygamy and forced marriage. Furthermore, women in traditional Ethiopia civilizations have actively participated in socio-judicial decision making process, demonstrating their leadership and status in their communities. Despite enduring hurdles and discrimination, Ethiopian women have proven resilience and agency in defining their cultural and historical context.

On the other hand, according to Meron Zeleke Eresso (2021), Ethiopia's strong cultural values among in different community support elements of discrimination about women's participation in decision-making at various levels, as evidenced by common Amharic saying such as "A mother plans for the day; a father plans for the year" and "A women doesn't know anything, but gives birth to a knowledgeable child". The family management duties enshrined in saying and cultural ethos highlights men's and women's distinct spatial aspect of existence. Such discriminatory gendered family management responsibilities are often articulated in terms of culturally established gender stereotypes; with frequently contribute to the exclusion of women from decision-making, thus developing men's expectations for women's commitment and subservience.

However, UN, Resolution 1325 aimed to increase women's representation at all levels of decision-making in national, regional, and international institutions and processes for conflict prevention, management, and resolution. Resolution 1325 underlines women's involvement in dispute resolution, peace negotiation, peacebuilding, humanitarian assistance, and post-conflict reconstruction (UN Security Council, 2000).

This document reveals that women play important roles in resolving disagreements within the nuclear family, neighborhood, village, tribe, and even at the national level. On other hand respondents' information and someof literature sources shows that throughout history though have patriarchal dominance; Hadiya women have played significant roles in peacemaking within their communities' indirectly. Their contributions have been instrumental in resolving conflicts and maintaining harmony.

## **A Women-led Customary practices for Conflict resolution and Peacebuilding**

### **the culture of Hadiya-Ethiopia.**

Information gathered from both primary and secondary sources reveals that there are three women's traditional institutions in Hadiya cultural peacemaking practices. These institutions have a great role in conflict resolution and sustaining peace in the community. The nature and ways of how to practice are discussed as follows:

## **Heeffichcho /Spiritual power of women/**

According to oral tradition, women gathered in their communities to form women's traditional spiritual organizations known as "*Heeffichcho*", which is a set of women's associations with spiritual power and authority. It exclusively includes married women's involvement in and active participation in community affairs. They organized monthly or annual prayer meetings in each community during ethnic disputes, wars, natural disasters, and man-made casualties.

As the elders said, "*Heeffichcho*", was a traditional Hadiya women's socio-cultural and religious institution made up entirely of Hadiya married women. It excludes all women who are not members of Hadiya ethnic groups. Unmarried women were not permitted to become members of the "*Heeffichcho*", institution or participate in any activities associated with membership. All members of "*Heeffichcho*" were responsible for following the standards of Hadiya traditional religious spirits, gods, and their leaders' orders. In "*Heeffichcho*", and Hadiya traditions, elder women were highly regarded and given priority for blessings and prayers.

Samuel Kemeso's (2021) study shows the "*Heeffichcho*", institution combines the Hadiya women's traditional religious and ritual practices. The spiritual woman or man known as *Ayyaa'inManichcho*/the highest spiritual leader/, would deliver messages to "*Heeffichcho*", women and bless all of the Hadiya. In "*Heeffichcho*", and Hadiya traditions, elder women were highly regarded and given priority for blessings and prayers.

The communities also believe that once "*Heeffichcho*", prays and sacrifices animals to the ancestor spirits, the issues of rain shortage, drought, flood, disease, and conflict will be resolved. "*Heeffichcho*", thought that the Women's Spiritual Authority, with its spiritual force, could tackle both natural and man-made problems. Women also participated in the traditional "*Heeffichcho*", meeting principle known as "*Guffa-Guddimma*", which translates as tying grasses. The obligations of this traditional practice are viewed as providing barriers for their opponents to enter into perilous situations during ethnic battles and halting undesired happenings in society.

According to the respondent's information and self-observation, at present, even the traditional religion of the Hadiya has disappeared, and most of the people are followers of Christianity. In the tradition of the Hadiya, the role of "*Heeffichcho*" women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution hasn't been so easy until now. If conflicts happen between clans, families, and particular groups and they aren't resolved peacefully, it may result in additional damage. During such dangerous battles, the "*Heeffichcho*" women call each other from their different living villages and intercede between the opposing parties to make peace by preventing the harsh actions of one against the other.

Our respondents stated that if the case of destruction continues in a series, "*Heeffichcho*" women will come from both disputed parties and make an "ululation" which means a howling or wailing sound for the pleasure of the battling groups in order to stop murdering each other or destroying villages. If those battling groups refused to stop their damaging action and disrespected the women's requests, all women warned the male groups by singing "*Heeffichcho*", which means "we are women" or "we are female," to stop the destruction. When the battling parties hear female ululations and animosities, they stop attacking and killing each other.

If male groups do not pay attention to women's requests and desist from fighting, women will not enter their husbands' homes until all disputed and warring male groups apologize for rejecting and disrespecting *Heeffichchos*' norm in community peacebuilding. As a result, "*Heeffichcho*" women's institutions have been highly respected and feared by all Hadiya men and women since they gained spiritual authority and



ceremonial power.

In general, the women's cultural practice "*Heeffichcho*", which was seen as the supreme institution, used the most authority in putting a halt to ethnic warfare and enforcing a war restriction, as the elders said. However, as they said, women are unable to make public decisions in the assembly in the same way that men could. There were no women's councils or representatives in the Hadiya customary administration system. The only elder male groups convene the disputed parties and make decisions at a public gathering called "*Dummichcha*" /the assembly/ at "*Haffa*"/the assembly place/. Elderly male councils would identify the case and judge its authenticity based on the evidence and witnesses. The families and ethnic councils then made decisions based on the witnesses' testimony and the elders' consensus.

### **Landisikko /refined stick/**

According to the respondents' information, "*Landisikko*," refers to the thin and soft (refined) stick that women hold after marriage. Among the Hadiya people, this represents the stick power given to a girl. If a girl requests to stop conflict between conflicting groups during the escalation of the conflict, no individual will cross the stick and get into a conflict in the culture of the Hadiya. By creating a favorable environment for negotiation and discussion, women contribute significantly with their land-based powers using this customary institution.

### **Landimachcha / waistcloth of married women/**

In Hadiya "*Seera*" customary administration system, "*Landimachcha*" used only in the clan where they were born as a power given to a girl child. In Hadiya culture, the word "*Landa*," represents the girls, and on the other hand, it refers to women and relations through women in general. From this point of view, it refers to the rights and authority that a girl has over her relatives even after she is married. For example, if a woman begs to disentangle her loincloth in the name of her family, if any problem or conflict occurs between her relatives, the possibility that the request will be accepted immediately and lead to a solution is very high.

In addition to this, it gives her the right to get the property that she needs from her relatives who can afford it. In general, in the "*Seeraa*" customary administration system of the Hadiya, "*Landimachcha*" is believed to be the power given to the daughter as compensation for denying her the right to inherit her parent's property, so she is highly respected and feared.

According to FGD "*Landisikko*" and "*Landimachcha*" have a great place and are respected in the Hadiya culture. This is because "*Landisikko*" and "*Landimachcha*" are women's traditional institutions that play a major role in maintaining peace and unity in general and particularly in reconciling individuals and groups.

Based on the respondent's information and self-empirical knowledge, *Landisikko* is a combination of the two terms of the Hadiyyisa language. "*Landa*" refers to the girl or whole female both unmarried and married, whereas "*sikko*" refers to the thin, soft, refined stick. Similarly, "*Landimachcha*" is a combination of two terms. Such as "*Landa*," refers to a girl, and "*Machcha*," refers to a two-meter-long piece of cloth worn by Hadiya women around their waists. In short "*Machcha*" is a loincloth.

As the respondents said, in the Hadiya culture, "*macha*" has a great social value. All individuals of the Hadiya nation fear and respect the "*Landimachcha*" traditional institution. This is because a woman has a cultural power to bless or curse her birth father's lineage with a "*machcha*" cultural power. Both "*Landimachcha*" and "*Landisikko*" play a great role in conflict resolution. When the Hadiya woman blesses the others, she ties a loincloth from her waist. The implication of this cultural practice is that to show her blessing is from the bottom of her heart and a good will. In "*Landimachcha*" practices, people believe that

those who are blessed will be blessed, and those who are cursed will be cursed.

When the Hadiya woman reconciles the group or individuals, she puts the piece of cloth and refined stick in the direction of the sun rising, and if the groups and individuals reject what she says, she puts the “*macha*” and “*stick*” in the sun-set direction. The implication is for those who respect her word and voluntary to reconcile, a good thing will be like sun shining and for those who reject her words things became dark like night time darkness. In general, “*Landimachcha*” has a great role in investigating the hidden crime reconciliation process, it foster peace and unity, and it used to solve curse that comes from forefather.

Therefore, the words of women are highly respected in the Hadiya culture. When women talk, all parties or individuals who are in the conflict, respect women’s words, and immediately go into reconciliation. As the informant elders said, no one can ignore women’s words in the Hadiya culture while they talk to reconcile. This result shows that women of the Hadiya have a great role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding within the community. Hence, moving forward, embracing and supporting the pivotal role of women in peacemaking will not only contribute to the resolution of conflicts but also pave the way for a more harmonious and inclusive society within the Hadiya community in Ethiopia.

### **Challenges faced by Hadiya Women in Conflict Resolution**

Hadiya women face patriarchal obstacles in decision-making, with traditional norms often relegating their role in resolving conflicts. In the history of Hadiya, women were the most oppressed and dominant class in society because of long-standing traditional and cultural influences. Culturally, but not legally, they have no rights to inheritance, ownership, or possessing property such as land, cattle, or other properties of their parents.

According to FGD, sometimes, irrelevantly, women are seen as violent, provocative, and conflict escalators rather than as messengers of peace. Some proverbs illustrate this point they made. For instance, “A man sent by a woman is not afraid of death.” This expression describes women as contributors to conflict and thus affects their participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding activities.

Like other societies, culturally in Hadiya society, men make decisions without the active participation of women. Women are less likely to participate in the public decision-making process. As with any other issue, women are also excluded from peacebuilding. Traditionally, women are not given the opportunity to engage in the public affairs of their communities. Even they can’t participate in the traditional elders’ council called “*Dummichcha*”. The Hadiya “*Seeraa*” traditional governance system does not involve women in various positions of authority.

On the contrary, in Hadiya culture women are given special respect and a place alone. In Hadiya “*Seeraa*,” women play an important role in maintaining peace and promoting social unity by participating in their customary institutions of dispute resolution and peacebuilding. Therefore, by addressing the challenges faced by Hadiya women, empowering them through awareness creation among the society to minimize male dominance. Capacity-building initiatives and advocating for gender-inclusive policies in all aspects, there is a unique opportunity to enhance the effectiveness of conflict resolution efforts among the Hadiya people.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Although Hadiya traditional governance, “*Seeraa*,” does not involve women in various positions of authority and still there is patriarchal attitude in the society, in Hadiya culture, women are given special respect and place. In Hadiya Sera, women play an important role in maintaining peace and promoting social unity. Accordingly the study on Hadiya women approach to conflict resolution and peacebuilding based on cultural perspective concludes that *Landimachcha/loincloth/Landisikko/refined smooth stick/* and

*Heeffichcho/spiritual authority or power of women* plays a significant role in conflict resolution, crime investigation, and peacemaking within the society. They are an institution of women's conflict resolution system that dates back to the classical age of the community. The ceremony involves symbolic rituals and materials that hold cultural significance and are essential for maintaining the integrity of the practice.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Hadiya communities to create a more inclusive and peaceful society.
2. Extensive education and promotion of the Hadiya women traditional conflict resolution institutions and rituals throughout the study area and beyond.
3. Increased awareness among elders about the impact of women's involvement in the conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes

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