Sinke Always Supported with Different Songs Depending on the Issue Arises

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF GRADUATE

INSTITUTE OF GENDER STUDIES

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION: THE CASE OF SINKE/SIQQAA IN ARSI NEGALE WOREDA IN ARSI ZONE

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A Thesis Submitted to Institute of Gender Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Gender Studies

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Acknowledgement

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Chapter One

Background of the study

Chapter Two

Overview of Related Literature and Theoretical Framework

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Conclusion and Recommendation

Appendix A   Photographs

Appendix B   Interview and focus group discussion guide

Dedication

This work is dedicated to all women of Arsi zone who have been denied of their right and security due to the near extinction of *sinke* cultural institution.

Abbreviations

CEDAW   **Convention on Elimination all forms of Discrimination Against Women**

EWLA   **Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association**

FGD: **Focus Group Discussion**

FDRE: **Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia**

FGM   **Female Gentile Mutilation**

IGAD   **Intergovernmental Authority on Development**

IGS: **Institute of Gender Studies**

NGOs: **Non-Governmental Organization**

OSSREA   **Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa**

RECWDA   **Rift Valley Children and Women Development Association**

SADC   **Southern African Development Community**

GBV   **Gender Based Violence**

Cultural Terms

Elders   **Those people who are aged and know about *sinke* culture**

Sinke   **The Oromo Women's Stick of Justice**

Kenafa   **A piece of cloth tied over the head of mothers during the Maternity period**

Gada   **An Oromo Administrative system**

Guma   **Blood money**

Idir   **Community Based Organization**

Murti amba   **The traditional Law of Oromo Society**

Shemagiless   **Community Based Judges**

Key Terms

Andocentric: Making male perspectives, beliefs and values as criteria for human Perceptions.

Feminism: Is a movement seeking the recognition of the world up on a basis of sex equality in all human relations. It refers to being aware of the oppression, exploitation, subordination, subjection of women and consciously trying to do something against it to change the situation.

Kebele : The smallest unit of local government

Matriarchy: A system in which women hold key posts both in the public and private spheres of societal life.

Patriarchy: Is a system in which men impose multi-faceted forms of oppression and exploitation on women's right and status. Men control formal power over-public decisions and private spheres.

Woreda: An area regarded as an administrative geographical unit.

Operational Definitions

Aggression: An unprovoked, offensive act of hostility, attack, or violence on the individual, communal, regional, or governmental level.

Conflict: From the Latin word 'to clash or engage in a fight', a confrontation between one or more parties aspiring towards incompatible or competitive means or ends.

Conflict

Management: Interventionist efforts towards preventing the escalation and negative effects, especially violent ones, of ongoing conflicts.

Conflict

Resolution: A variety of approaches aimed at resolving conflicts through the constructive solving of problems.

Negotiation: Communication, usually governed by pre-established procedures, between representatives of parties involved in a conflict or dispute.

Peace: Refers to justice and social stability through formal and informal institutions, practices, and norms.

Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the role of women in conflict resolution in Arsi-Negele wereda of Arsi zone in Oromiya region and identify awareness creation strategies that could help to reinstitute the traditional and cultural institution of *sinke*.

The study is an exploratory research and analytical. Qualitative approach was employed and observation, focus group discussion and in-depth interview were used as data collection instruments. The target population in this study consists of women and men elders, Non-governmental organizations staff and government officials working in the study area.

The study showed the undermined role of women in conflict resolution, along with the *sinke* traditional institution, which in the past served as a platform for women's participation in conflict resolution and protection of their rights. It has revealed the interest and demand of the study community for reinstitution of *sinke* and to make it alive. All respondents attributed the current increase in violence against women and ethnic conflict in Oromiya due to the disruption of *sinke* and traditional institutions, values, norms and the leaders of an indigenous community. Furthermore, the study found the existence of favorable legal framework to revive customary laws that fit with the ethics of human and cultural rights of a given community. The relation between this cultural institution and that of the modern ones is of competition than of complimentary.

Accordingly, this research advocates for the reinstitution of *sinke* and its replication in Oromia and the country at large. In addition, it calls for further research in the area so that appropriate policy formulation is possible. Acknowledging conflict resolution as inclusive and home grown, promotion, lobbying and networking are forwarded as areas of concern.

Figure 5 focus group discussions with men
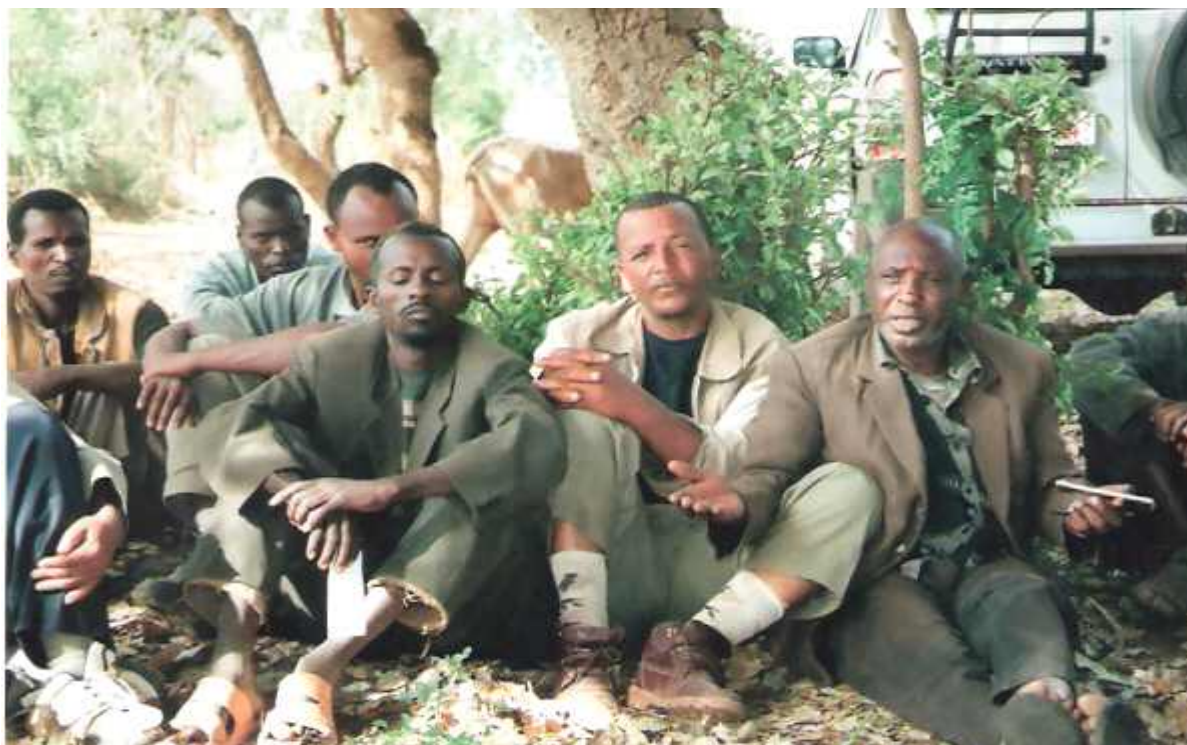
Figure 6 Interview session with key informant elders.

Fig3. Interview session with key informant elder

Figure 4 Foucus group discussion with women farmers

Fig 1   Focus group discussion with women

Fig 2 Interview session with head of Arsi Negle Women's Affairs office

Figure 7 Interview session with key informant farmers

Figure 8 Interview session with woman farmer

Figure 9 Focus group discussion with women farmers

DECLARATION

The undersigned, declare that this thesis is May original work and all the sources of information used for the study have been duly acknowledged.

Name: --

Signature: --

Date: --

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as a university advisor.

Name: --

Signature: --

Date: --

Sinke Always Supported with Different Songs Depending on the Issue Arises

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

> "Conflicts are more likely to be handled creatively and to end
> constructively where levels of participation are high, and where
> channels exist for the expression of disagreement and
> mechanisms are available for handling disagreement and
> reaching consensus. All sections of the community have a voice,
> both men and women, young and old…" (Fisher, et al, 2000:147)

Women gendered social roles as mothers and sustainers of human relationships and as the source of life has empowered them to intervene in situations of potential and actual violence, and to persuade hostile parties to negotiate rather than fight, particularly at the local level because of their affinity to their family and to the society at large.

Women's direct involvement in conflict may result in loss of access to resources and restrictions on freedom of movement. Women are also indirectly affected as wives or daughters of men involved in disputes. On the other hand, throughout Africa, women make positive contributions to conflict management. Due to gender-differentiated roles and responsibilities, women have different perspectives and needs than men do and can thus provide different analysis and solutions for conflict management. While their participation in conflict management institutions remains remarkably low, women often play an important role behind closed doors, for instance, by influencing their male kin.

Sinke, the Oromo women's stick of justice has deep respect and admiration among the society. It is held during special occasions, or to signify blessedness. Hence, a woman holding *Sinke* is respected. Women do not carry *Sinke* all the time. It is held only under special condition, such as when women face ill treatment or when gender based violence are committed against them, or when women are in desperate situations, needing help. Situations that necessitate bearing of *Sinke* are fighting, disease outbreak, severe drought, etc. The role of *Sinke* under such situations is to bring peace between fighting or warring parties, to punish those who cause damage to women, to pray to God to bring the rains during drought and to cure people in times of illness. In short, *Sinke* is carried to draw the

attention of the public to the fact that, some problems have arisen which need immediate intervention.

Sinke is carried by married women only. It is carried neither by men nor by girls. A woman begins carrying it right after the day of her wedding. The mother prepares *Sinke* for her daughter and presents it to her together with other cultural gifts given on the wedding day. Thus, *Sinke* signifies the transition from childhood to motherhood. In general, a cultural heritage as *Sinke* belongs only to women, but not to girls or children.

Sinke has numerous purposes. Concisely, *Sinke* serves as an important instrument in conflict resolution, averting bad actions, creating opportunities to correct misdeeds. For example, when a woman carrying it intervenes in tribal conflicts, where two fighting parties are engaged in a fierce battle, the fight automatically ends. A woman carrying *Sinke* rescues a wife beaten by her husband. A woman carrying "*Sinke*" averts dangers and they use it to encourage defense forces.

Even if there are harmful traditional practices that endanger the rights of women in Arsi zone, in *sinke* one also finds unique and useful practice in its cultural assets that protect and safeguard the rights of women.

In general, Sinke has numerous purposes. It serves as an important means in peace building, preventing violent actions by mediating between two fighting parties, creating opportunities to correct offensive events. It functioned even when there were no written legal provisions to protect women's human rights. The *sinke* is proof that the recognition of women was remarkable in the area where this institution existed.

This thesis is about the role of women in conflict resolution in the context of *Sinke* culture, which used to elevate and earn remarkable respect for the women of Arsi Negale Woreda in the Arsi zone of Oromiya region, but which is now under a great pressure of becoming extinct because of misunderstanding created on this traditional stick of justice among religious and the so called modernized people.

The study mainly focuses on the role of women in conflict resolution in the context of cultural practice of *Sinke* in Arsi zone. Reflections on this study tries to provide the reader

with insights into how these valuable, traditionally devised and refined peacemaking capacities can be integrated into an agenda for a culture of peace.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In most societies in Ethiopia, women are not given credit for participating in conflict resolution processes. (A case in point is the *shemagelle* process. Violence resulting from conflicts at individual household level like between father and son or between relatives and in some places in Ethiopia elderly women mediate between two conflicting clans through their father, brother or husband in the society.) For instance, it is not regarded as a serious problem and thus, does not call for peace initiatives on a grand scale. Conflicts at this level are not public, and it is women who play a bigger role in conflict resolution for example, by mediating between their husband and son. As it is the case with their domestic roles, women's role of resolving conflict at a household level is not recognized as such.

The reality in most parts of the world today is that societies are mainly of a patriarchal type, that is, male dominance persists in all aspects of life. The prevailing socialization process is the one that raises men to the level of main decision-makers, both in the private and public spheres, including questions of whether or not to enter into conflict. (The PANOS Institute, 2001).

The gender division of labor overburdens women with multiple productive and reproductive responsibilities. Rural women work 13-17 hours a day in productive, reproductive and community management activities. On the average, their workdays may be 50 percent longer than men and their work closely integrates with the household production system (NCTPE, 2003, Cited in Lenesil Asfaw, 2005:18)

It is only in few societies like Awara Amba in Amhara regional state of Ethiopia that gender justice prevails and the traditional role of women is changed. For example, there are women engaged in farming and producing commercial goods by weaving and men participate in fetching water and caring for children.

According to Nhema, 2004 'Conflict in African societies has brought starvation and extreme poverty.' This reality manifests in African countries more than in any other continent. The

consequence of these conflicts has critically undermined African's efforts to ensure long-term stability, prosperity, human rights and gender equality for its peoples. It is understood that wars of all sorts bring destruction to human and material wealth. Of course, the degree of devastation varies depending on the nature of the wars, areas of fighting, arms used, duration of fighting, etc. The internal wars and defensive wars against successive foreign aggressors have left their multi-dimensional impact on the social, cultural, economic and political life of the Ethiopian society. Even though they did not take a vanguard position in major combats, the Ethiopian women had their share of the burden of wars.

At any rate, the human loss because of wars has a direct effect on the life of women, including those who did not even take part in military engagement. They had to suffer from loss of husbands, brothers, fathers and relatives. Women camp followers often had to witness the fall of their own husbands and brothers, and were obliged to carry away corpses from the battlefields for burial. This was particularly common during the Fascist invasion that caused an immense human loss that Ethiopia had never seen before. (Adugna, 2001:33)

Women are not only suffering during the war but also after war. They are the ones who take the responsibility of maintaining the family and society. Moreover, female-headed households will also increase after the war:

According to Angela E.V. King who was special adviser on gender issues and advancement of women for the United Nations Assistant Secretary General, conflicts no longer aim at defeating the opponent's armies, but at inflicting pain and humiliation on civilians by destroying their identity and sense of community. They erode institutions that provide a basis for the sustainability of any societies and undermine societal values, replacing them with institutionalized violence. Women become specific targets. Rape, sexual slavery and assault have also become deliberate instruments of war. Such instruments destroy the bonds that hold communities together. (Daily Monitor, Saturday-Sunday, February 10-11, 2007.)

These realities make the issues of gender equality and human rights particularly, most important features of conflict management. It is therefore vital to work on managing and preventing violent ethnic conflicts by bringing women into the process at an early stage as contributors and active participants.

This study will attempt to show the undermined role of women in conflict resolution. It also aims to single out important factors for the incidence of peace in *Sinke* institution of Arsi society. The relation between this cultural institution and that of the modern ones is of competition than of complimentary. The major objective of this investigation is to reveal to the public the importance of *Sinke* culture, which will help to protect and promote this institution.

To sum up, the existence of this institution and the overall women's participation in conflict resolution instigated me to study the stated topic.

1.3 Objective

1.3.1 General Objective

The main objective of the study is to investigate the role of women in conflict resolution in Arsi Negale woreda and to identify awareness creation strategies that could be contributed to the peace building efforts of modern society in the area.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- o To show ways through which the cultural institutions are translated into action and how measures are taken to stop conflict.
- o To show the influence the institution has regarding how women are perceived in the community and their role in resolution of conflicts in Arsi society.
- o To identify awareness creation strategies that could be contributed to peace building in Ethiopia.

1.4 Significance of the Research

1. It gives information about unique women's participation in conflict resolution and the place of women in cultural-traditional Arsi zone in general.
2. The research can serve as an input for maintaining such a cultural stick of justice, which is very much important for solving any arising conflict easily.

3. It serves as a springboard for other researchers who want to investigate and promote the positive part of the culture.

1.5 Feasibility of the Study

In order to make the study more manageable, its scope is delimited to one selected district in the Arsi zone namely, Arsi Negle woreda. This is because of the researcher's causal observation of the case in the area. Moreover, the researcher is familiar with the language and culture of the society and hence it is convenient to make a proposed study in the stated area.

1.6 Limitation of the Study

The study is limited due to lack of accessibility and knowledge of local language. Since it is far away from the main road and the local language is *affan* Oromo for those who cannot speak and know the culture of the area, it is very difficult to conduct such kind of research.

CHAPTER TWO

Overview of Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Review of related literature

2.1.1 Situation of Conflict

Conflict has been defined as a violent and armed confrontation and struggle between groups, between the state and one or more groups, and between two or more states. In such a confrontation and struggle, some of those involved are injured and others killed. (Bujra, 2000 cited in Nhema, 2004: 12)

Conflict is an inevitable and necessary feature of domestic and international relations. The challenges facing governments is not merely the elimination of conflict, but rather, how effectively to address conflict when it arises.

In any society, conflict occurs at different levels, starting with individuals within a family or household, peer groups, communities and neighborhoods. It manifests itself at the tribal, ethnic or racial level, amongst different civil or interest groups, and finally, at cross-border, regional and international levels for the purpose of competition for power and control over, or access to resources. Wherever it takes place, the impact is generally the same: the destabilization of the structures of development.

> "Civil War is Africa's self-inflicted wound. More than one African in five lives in a country that is fighting a war, and nearly 20 countries have experienced civil war since 1960. The continuing conflicts that ravages the African continent represent a heavy social and economic burden. During a war, most of the country's resources tend to be diverted away from development and towards supporting the conflict- War is estimated to cost \$1 bn per year in central Africa, without counting the cost of aiding refugees, which is estimated to be about \$ 500m in the region" (Bolle, 2000 cited in Dr. Maria Nzomo, 2001: 13)

According to Nhema, 2004 in Africa, unrepresentative governance systems place very little regard on the rights and civil liberties of their citizenry. Therefore, in the global political economy African countries are among the weaker competitor and are losing in all aspects of global interaction.

 As Nhema mentioned it, some strategies identified to manage and resolve conflicts in African countries are-
- Negotiation and reconciliation efforts within the framework of existing local socio-economic, political and cultural structures;
- Legal approaches like the use of truth commissions;
- Interventions by international actors and regional organizations like the African Union (AU), Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) and Southern African Development Community (SADC); and

- The role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) especially in rehabilitating and improving the status of women, children and other minority groups through civic education, training and material aid. (Nhema, 2004:13)

One of the most interesting initiatives that have been receiving attention regionally and internationally is the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) endorsed by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) heads of state and governments at the ninth Summit in Khartoum…. The issue they have identified is not lack of early warning information, but lack of political will. (Nhema, 2004: 15)

Especially armed conflicts in Africa are mainly due to exclusionary political arrangements that do not guarantee basic freedoms, accountability of leaders and institutional arrangements that encourage participatory democracy. The popular aspirations of the masses come into sharp conflict with the interest of the ruling class, thereby widening the gap between the governors and the governed.

Africa's conflicts will have to have homegrown solutions and seek to evolve indigenous economic and development agendas that espouse aspirations of the people. All the root causes of conflicts must be identified and addressed coherently and holistically. In most cases, various causes of conflicts are related and, therefore, solving one and ignoring the other could be an effort in futility. It is necessary to ensure that salient tensions do not develop into full-scale conflicts. This process is not an easy one since the initial laboratories for peace building are in the hearts of men and women.

The extended and complex nature of conflict in Africa makes the conflict prevention and resolution map of the continent very complex. The approaches adopted to prevent and resolve such differences of interests determine the resolutions of the conflicts. The means and processes of peace resolutions are the critical issues in conflict management. The coercive methods of conflict management are those in which the conflicting parties have little or no autonomy in terms of choosing the forum, and in which the parties must abide by the decision of the forum. These include judicial settlement and arbitration. Non-coercive mechanisms, on the other hand, confer a lot of autonomy on the parties especially in terms of

choosing the forum and of defining the context of the outcome. These include methods such as negotiation, mediation and problem solving workshops.

During the pre-colonial period, there were various traditional principles of handling conflicts in Africa that worked well as they were performed within a particular culture and traditional environment. The traditional principles pay attention to group unity, to reconciling the conflicted individuals or groups and to their peaceful re-incorporation into the community.

In each community, the traditional principles are followed, and considered as indigenous initiatives. Elders play a central role in these mechanisms, reconciling the conflicting groups according to the norms and forms prevalent in their respective areas.

What is interesting in the traditional African principles of conflict resolution is that the conflicting parties are given equal rights to present their cases. In Ethiopia, there is a similar practice of conflict resolution through payment of blood money to resolve crimes particularly when some body is killed by someone, the term used is known as *guma*. Most of the Ethiopian peoples solve their conflicts at local levels. The Oromo, for instance, have various traditional bases for resolutions of conflicts among themselves and with other communities. More importantly, they developed different mechanisms of adoption for cultural integration and tolerance, which speeded up their expansion process.

The Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA) has always been concerned with developmental issues in the region, especially the situations such as conflicts that are counter to development.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in his statement in the United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International Peace on 8 March, 2001 said, the Security Council had declared that maintaining and promoting peace and security required women's equal participation in decision-making. "I am here today to ask you to do everything in your power to translate that statement into action. Women had proved instrumental in building bridges rather than walls. They had also been crucial in preserving social order when communities collapsed. Conflict resolution and prevention called for creative and flexible approaches. "In all these areas, we have seen examples of women playing an important role", yet their potential contribution to

peace and security was still under-valued and they were still under-represented at the decision-making level.

> Women's contributions to war and peace have long been underestimated. In fact, women often contribute to the outbreak of violence and hostilities in many cases; they are instrumental in inciting men to defend group interests, honor, and collective livelihoods. Women also play a key role in preserving order and normalcy in times of chaos and destruction. In times of conflict, when men engage in war and are killed, disappear or endanger family livelihood, women struggle to protect their family's health and safety--a task that rests on their ability to cope pragmatically with change and adversity. It is therefore not surprising that women are also a driving force for peace (Sorensen, 1998 cited in Development Policy Management Forum, 2001:13).

The types of conflict common in traditional societies need to be identified. This can be done at the level of the family, the clan, or the tribe.

Within the family, most conflicts relate to property, marriage, and divorce. In cattle-owning societies, disputes also arise over grazing land and watering points. The head of the family, the husband, takes the major role in resolving conflicts. If the conflict is not between husband and wife, the wife plays a role in mediation, especially if the conflict is among sons and daughters, between husband and children, or between the husband and his brothers and cousins. The wife would normally get the support of the relatives on the husband's side to intervene in the resolution of a conflict that has cropped up between, say, the husband and the children. The same procedures as within the family may be applied in clan and tribal conflicts. (Badri, 1998:10)

In order to prevent conflict from spreading, women get involved in at least three levels. First, a wife may express her view on the issues under consideration through the husband or other close male relatives involved in the conflict resolution. Secondly, she and other women may be involved through their fathers, brothers, and other relatives in their clans of origin. This is particularly the case if their clans of origin are involved in a conflict with the clan into which they have married--the clan of their husbands. Thirdly, women are normally involved in conflict prevention and conflict resolution sessions by preparing meals at the mediation.

In the process of continuing instability and armed conflict, women and children are certainly the most vulnerable. Women and their dependents comprise the majority of refugees and displaced populations. In the war zones, they represent the majority. Most are not educated and cannot get jobs. As a result, they cannot cope with the life. They usually bring the word 'peace' into their prayers every day.

> Women's under-representation or lack of involvement in official efforts at resolving internal state conflicts is taken as a given in most situations. While they often bear the brunt of the war brutalities, and are increasingly involved in combatant activities, they are seldom part of the inner circles of peace negotiations, peace accords, or policies at the formal level to resolve conflict (Boyd, 1994:3).

Most of Africa's conflicts and related disasters are arising from undemocratic governance, partially manifested in gender inequities in the structures and processes of public governance, which in turn are reflected in the near absence of women's voices in key decision-making on strategic issues, including those regarding war and peace. Despite women's marginality in decision-making process in war, they are not only victims of war and other forms of violence; they are also active participants before, during and after civil war, serving as combatant and service providers.

2.1.2 Culture and violence

According to Lindsey (2005), patriarchal culture supports men's control of women in economic, political and all forms of social aspects. In the culture of patriarchy, violence is used as a means of maintaining power that ensures the privilege of male domination over women. Control of women's sexuality is a part of a culture and means of social domination

that perpetuate male dominance. Feminist analysis identify that sexual violence against women is an extension of normative male behavior that defines the traditional male sex role.

It will be difficult to implement any international conventions, rules and regulations unless the problems of violence against women are addressed in their totality. Violence against women is not unique to a particular situation or locality. Impacts of conflicts on women are both physical and psychological, resulting from rape and torture committed by aggressors. There are changes in factors of existence; when men go to fight women and children are left behind to fend for themselves. This changes not only lives of women but also their gender roles.

2.1.3 Women's cultural role in resolving conflict

In the process of modernization, Ethiopian jurists were engaged to draft uniform codes mostly based on the western legal systems (Ethiopian country report 2008: 20). Despite this, traditional systems have persisted. The diversity of these systems varies. Some are localized informal norms and structures serving specific purposes like the *idir* and *jemiya.* Others are complex and powerful systems with formal power structures governing all aspects of community life. Just to mention one, the *Gada* system of the Oromo comes to mind. These traditional systems implement comprehensive rules of behavior through indigenous institutions led by Abba Gada. However, the modernization process has disrupted some of the customary law systems as obstacles to its authority and national unity. Thus, consolidation of the unitary state has further weakened these systems.

It is now the time to look inward and re-examine the role and potentials of our indigenous systems in addressing critical concerns of peace.

Women and men have different roles in conflict. These roles are influential in determining how women behave during conflict, during the peace process, and in the reconstruction and rehabilitation process necessary to restore the peace. They can be actively involved in conflict by being forced to assist in war preparation. Men desire militarism, which reinforces the patriarchal structure of the society. Women can also be forced directly or

indirectly to join the armed forces. Women may also encourage men to fight. However, women are chiefly concerned in ensuring that they and their families survive.

Power is accorded to whichever sex is thought to embody or to be in touch with the forces upon which people depend for their perceived needs. Conceiving power in this way, different researchers mentioned that in some societies women have more powers, or men have more, or both sexes have approximately an equal amount of power. As people transmit their culture from one generation to the next, they transmit sex-role principles. Human beings do not invent new paths for males and females to follow from one generation to the next.

Male dominance is not universal, as some people have suggested. Then in addition, there is a connection between religious thought and male and female power, which feminists have been arguing ever since the nineteenth century. The relative power between the sexes will change as our culture changes. For example, giving women access to blessed roles and much else will change our concept of the sacred, the standard interpretation of the Bible, our concept of "human rights," and so on. Moreover, we may ask, will the traditional fabric of our culture be involved if the current move toward sexual equality succeeds?The wife plays a significant role in proposing ways to resolve the conflict. In the community, some conflicts may be referred to women to resolve because women are considered better suited to do so. Women may sit as chiefs and judges to resolve such conflicts. For instance, according to Badri, (1998) a women, Chief Sekina of the muda tribe in the Maridi Rural Council, in Sudan, was empowered to settle disputes not only between individuals but also between various groups in the community. A strategy that the chief and her assistants (both women and men) commonly adopted was to keep the community to argue on issues that were likely to generate conflict. Their strategy was to shoot the conflict before it was aggravated.

> Another strategy women used widely is to compose songs that emphasize the power of solving problems peacefully through debate and discussion. Women are known to have suggested binding two antagonistic communities through intercommunity marriage. The new bonds and relationships that come with the marriage serve as a bridge for peaceful living between the two communities. (Badri, 1998: 15)

Traditional communication refers to indigenous communication systems such as music, dancing, story telling, poetry, proverbs, and rituals. Sudanese people are a mix of various ethnic and tribal groups; the cultural heritage of each group determines the form and method of its traditional communication.

> There are examples of women who have encouraged intercommunity marriages to lessen or even eliminate conflict. There are examples of girls and mothers, like Chief Sekina or the Queen of the Latuka, who have encouraged peace among members of the tribe by composing songs about peace and about the evil of tribal fights. There are examples of women and girls who compose and sing songs in praise of warriors in the community. (Badri, 1998: 24)

According to Badri, 1998 in the Sudanese government, there are women who are involved in conflict resolution. At the community level, we hear songs composed by some women calling for the war to be resolved. These women call upon God and upon leaders of the government and the opposition to concentrate on the realization of just peace, to save their children from the evils of war.

Women have recently increased their call for a peaceful resolution of the civil war. They went to the streets in the three towns of Khartoum, calling upon the government to bring their young sons back from compulsory military service.

Nevertheless, women seriously lack the political power to resolve current conflict. Moreover, the initiatives they have taken are not well organized. As corrective measures forums have been established in the past--Beijing 1995 the UNIFEM-Carter Peace Dialogue in Nairobi 1995, and a workshop organized by Ahfad University for Women in Khartoum, in 1995. The women's desk of the Sudan Council of Churches also organized a conference on women and peace. These are steps in the right direction, yet more steps that are practical are required. For instance, women who are committed to resolve the conflict peacefully should approach leaders on both sides that are managing the conflict.

According to Debra (2004), the techniques employed by Somali women are at their core original, creative and cultural, and exportable. Despite the devastating impact of thirteen years of civil war, the women of Somalia have created an energetic national network of women's social and humanitarian organizations. As a result, women's issues and

perspectives are well articulated and represented from the grassroots to the highest levels of political discourse. Somali women have also employed culturally specific techniques to act for change in the community and advocate for it on the national level.

Peace is very crucial for women because of their roles in the maintenance of life. Women not only take care of the survival of families, communities and societies; they also carry the burdens of reconstruction and healing after conflicts.

Women not only become victims targeted for political ends, or are used as weapons by warring parties. They also take care of the needs not only of those remaining behind, but also of those at the front, even if this means that they have to perform double or triple arduous shifts of work to maintain life at all levels.

Sex- roles are yet another factor in generating conflict situations in a given societies. The construction of masculinity often requires that manhood be equated with the ability to exert power over others, especially that requiring women to be passive and submissive. This results in conditioning the behavior of men and ends up justifying violence against women's rights.

According to Cockburn (2000), gender power is seen to shape the dynamics of every site of human interactions, from the household to the international arena. It has expression in physique--how women and men's bodies are nourished and trained and deployed; how vulnerable they are to attack: what mobility they have. It has expression in economics--how money, property and other resources are distributed between the sexes. It structures the social sphere, deciding who has initiative in the community and authority in the family, and who is dependent. Of course, gender shapes political power, executives and command centers.

Because of the place given to men in the predominantly patriarchal importance of societies, they remain the principal decision-makers. Conflict is usually the outcome of men's failure to resolve disagreement peacefully.

The way conflict affects women is always different from the way it affects men. It has been noted that the impact of armed conflict on women is the same all over the world.

They suffer from problems of rape, torture, sexual slavery, disappearances, deprivations, and other problems, such as being refugees or displaced persons in camps, etc. Although women, men and children suffer immeasurably in times of war, women suffer additional forms of gender-related violence that leave them unresponsive to serve physical and mental health complications.

Since women are the ones who are most affected by conflict, they should be at the forefront at all levels in the task of preventing conflicts. They should be involved not only in the equal socialization of their daughters and sons, but also in conflict resolution.

2.1.4 Gender Socialization and Power

The patriarchal ideology and its value system considers man as superior to woman and gives him authority and control over the woman's life, and women on the other hand, are considered to belong to the domestic sphere, to be patient, kind, loving and totally committed to the well being of the family. A woman is thus a symbol of unity and sacrifice in the family. Nevertheless, because of her socialization a woman also has insights into the individual and collective needs of the family members and is therefore in a position to influence the family positively (Lindsey, 2005). As a result of socialization the meaning of men and women that is reflected in the knowledge, value and attitude systems of most men and women defines men as aggressive (assertive), action oriented dictators and women as those who do not impose their will on others (Lindsey, 2005).

The social distinction between men and women, not only provides a framework for the construction of power relations between men and women, but also defines leadership and activity profiles in peace initiatives along gender lines. While some people consider this power relation and activity profile as natural and ineviatable, others see it as a theory intended to perpetuate the subordination of women. (The PANOS Institute, 2001).

In traditional societies, men and women were socialized with a clear set of rules and regulations and an accepted code of behavior along gender lines. This socialization ensured that women knew they were the initiators of peace and that they had the capacity or obligation to say 'no' to violent methods of conflict resolution and to the belief in the myth of the value of violence. It also made them realize that to achieve peace, their participation

was essential. Men believe that women, as carriers and nurtures of life, had the authority to say 'no' to violence. The researcher upholds this view as well.

2.1.5 Gender Responsive International and National Instruments

To address the varying socio cultural and economic challenges facing women in Ethiopia, measures have been taken in the form of social policy development, declaration and ratification of various international conventions. This is aimed at providing a framework within which government and development partners can promote the advancement of women in the country.

Beijing+5 held in June 2000 reviewed commitments made by governments with regard to protection of women in armed conflict, support for women's capacity building and political empowerment and proposed concrete action for diverse actors: In this way, it ensured the way toward full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, including its critical areas on armed conflict.

> *31st October 2000 was a landmark in the process of building a global legal framework to promote peace and security. On the date the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325, calling for a gender perspective to be built into the policy and practice of reconstruction and peace building. The resolution asserted that the key to peaceful and harmonious societies is democratic decision making that is, decision–making in social institutions. Peace depends on the full and equal participation of women, and all other marginalized groups, in decision making at global, national, and local levels. (Caroline, 2001:3.)*

The government of Ethiopia has committed itself to women's advancement through different policies and constitutional proclamations, policies to promote participation in economic, social and political affairs. This is reflected in Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) constitution, which provides for full equality between men and women in terms of rights and protections. National policy on Women announced in 1993 aims to institutionalize the political, economic and social rights of women. New Economic Policy and Development strategies, National population policy, Heath and education policies, Civil service law and other sector policies and strategies in Ethiopia gives support to gender equality. However, due to the implementation problems, women do not enjoy equal

rights or opportunities, and they are subject to many forms of discrimination and suppression.

> It is believed that women's political empowerment is indispensable for many reasons, some of which are protection of other women's rights, the utilization of women's abilities, experiences and talents for national development and for conflict prevention, management and resolution. (The PANOS Institute, 1999:55)

2.1.6 Traditional Customary Laws

The formal, government run system of police and the courts is not the only legal system in Ethiopia. Traditional customary laws, specific to each ethnic group, hold control in many areas. While some of these laws are biased against women, other laws ensure that they are treated fairly. Among these the prominent ones are, as it was summarized from International Institute of Rural Reconstruction's (IIRR) *Culture and Change* publication, the property ownership of women among the Dawro, a farming community in southern Ethiopia, where women and men control different types of crops and livestock animals which gives them an independent source of income. Gurage customary laws govern abduction, rapes, and family reconciliation if divorce is unavoidable. The man and women share the property equally, however, though the woman is entitled to the house, the man has to leave.

Yakka is a Sidama women's protest tool which allows women to go together to defend their sister against a man who insulted or attacked her. The power of *Lend Mecho* in southern Ethiopia where Hadiya women help to settle disputes gives women a big role in resolving conflicts and solving crimes by encouraging people to confess, is another example of women's empowering roles in customary laws. In addition, we have the Oromo *sinke* sticks of justice in which women play a key role in preventing and settling disputes among men, as well as protecting women. Women in this community normally intervene in extended disputes that the male elders have failed to resolve.

2.1.6.1 *Sinke* Cultural Institution

2.1.6.1.1 Meaning and significance

Sinke is the Oromo stick of justice. When an Arsi Oromo girl gets married, she is given a long, thin stick, the same height as herself. This stick is called a *Sinke*. Like the wedding ring worn by western women, it remains a life long sign of marriage. It is also a powerful symbol of authority and justice within Oromo society. The woman takes her S*inke* with her whenever a special ceremony takes place, or whenever she needs it.

> *Sinke* is an embodiment of the unity of Oromo women. It is a promise taken by a daughter, administered by the mother wherein the daughter makes an allegiance to help, support every woman in her community, and united promotes a woman's view in a society. If a woman holds her *sinke* up and calls out Eyiii Siqqeee (Women cry), it is the responsibility of every woman with a *sinke* in the area who heard the cry to come out running to the woman making the *sinke* cry, leaving whatever they were doing behind and respond by saying '*Degegnee Dufnne'e* (we heard and we came). No woman is to return home until the problem is solved for the woman who made the *sinke* cry. (Ethiopia country report, UNCC, 27th Feb,-1st March 2008:28)

Because of the subjugation of oppressive past beliefs, noble traditions of the Oromo people that protected the rights of women eroded. *Sinke* is the best example of such traditions that is on the border of disappearance.

2.1.6.1.2 Basis in customary law

The basis for the *Sinke* institution has been traced to the customary laws of the Oromo (Gada System) and its religious roots. In this customary law system, Oromo women have been granted protection by the divine gift of a *sinke* (ritual stick) and a *qanafa* (sacred piece of wood) for the Gada Ruler (Abba Gada) to take home for his wife.

The ritual stick is meant to symbolize a woman's rights and the respect due to her. On the other hand, the piece of wood, while also a symbol of honor, specifically symbolizes the highest state of dignity during and after childbirth. The *qanafa* is tied to the forehead of a

woman in confinement (Ulmaa) for a period of four to five months. During this period, family members, including the husband, are expected to please the mother and avoid annoying her. Violation of this obligation, especially on the part of the husband, is believed to result in serious damage on his health and wealth.

2.1.6.1.3 Purposes

The *Sinke* institution is used as a traditional and religious mechanism to solve marital disputes and clan/tribal conflicts as well as a blessing ritual in the case of war, disease, draught or other calamity affecting the community. Some reports indicate that in order to prevent a clan/tribal dispute from deteriorating into a full-fledged conflict, women also use *Sinke*. In marital disputes, *Sinke* functions as a response to the potential or actual occurrence of verbal, physical or sexual abuse. Due to the strong customary and religious symbolism, a man about to hit his wife would immediately restrain himself once she has picked her S*inke* stick. Where the act has already been committed, the wife will take out her *sinke* and cry out for help. This is by itself considered a signal for the occurrence of abuse or violence and leads to a process of resolution of the conflict according to the customary laws of the Gada system.

In conflict situations where two clans/tribes engage in violence, the women lay down their *sinke* on the ground in the middle of the fighting. The significance attached to the women's action is so powerful that the men would prefer to resolve the dispute peacefully rather than walk to the ritual sticks laid down in front of them. Alternatively, the *sinke* may be used to bless the clan/tribe's young warriors to achieve victory in a justified or unavoidable conflict. In this case, while the men prepare for war, the women form two columns and hold up their *sinkes* for the men to pass under.

2.1.6.1.4 *Sinke* as an Institution of Gender Justice

As noted above, the use of the *sinke* in marital disputes is mainly for the protection of the rights and interests of women. This is especially so during the confinement of a married woman after childbirth which is referred to as *Qanafa* in the customary law. During this period, family members, especially the husband, are expected to be caring to the mother. The

husband, in particular, should observe many customary rules including refraining from any form of mistreatment or abuse. Failure to observe these rules results in appeal of the *Sinke* ritual.

Women can use their *Sinkes* to enforce female rights and resolve conflicts according to *murti amba*, the traditional law of the Oromo. If they see a group of people fighting, for example, some women carrying their *Sinkes* will intervene. They will place their S*inkes* between the fighters to separate them while the villagers ululate to stop the fight and attract other villager's attention and elders come to resolve the dispute. The men will not dare to continue fighting in the presence of the S*inke,* and they are bound traditionally and culturally to respect the decisions that are made.

Sinke as a response to violence against women is usually initiated by the victim who takes up her ritual stick in public as a response to the potential or actual occurrence of verbal, physical or sexual abuse. Whenever this happens, the senior mothers then mobilize all women in the village who would abandon whatever they were doing and join the protest. Then, the men approach the women to investigate why they have protested and bring the council of elders to the site.

The sinke is a formal ceremony governed by intricate rituals. The imitation of sinke by married women is considered evidence of wrongdoing on the part of her husband. The punishment is usually in the form of an explicit admission of guilt and proprietary compensation.

Based on this fact the study examines the role of women in conflict resolution and the nature and extent of barriers women confront in the process. The project also focuses on proposing future-oriented strategies for the involvement of women in decision making by taking as an example the cultural role of Arsi women in Oromo region. Instead of focusing on the many difficulties that women face in this largely traditional society, it highlights the positives. It describes how customs in various cultures in Ethiopia supports and protect women, rather than oppress and harm them.

As it is well known, gender violation as a deliberate and systematic strategy of war has mainly been built on pre-war structural violations (distribution of power and resources)

which are deeply rooted in the culture and perception of the community; so the earlier could not be changed unless the latter does. (The PANOS Institute, 2001)

2.1.7 Traditional Religion

African traditional religion is not just one of the subjects for studies in educational institutions, but it is primarily a way of life of Africans and it forms the religious background of most African Christians, Muslims and followers of other religious traditions. Although today we use a descriptive term, "African traditional Religion" as agreed by African scholars, those who follow the religions does not give such names. For them, African Traditonal Religion is a way of life that encompasses every aspect of human endeavour from cradle to grave. It is a way of living: way of eating, way of working, way of dancing, way of praying, way of offering sacrifices, etc. There is hardly any activity in life that is separated from its religious implications (Denis, 2008 :1)

African Traditional Religion is not a religion that could be simply understood by analyzing its system of beliefs. In theological jargon, it is not a religion that is "thought out in the agora of theology", but it is "lived out in the market place of Africa. It is action-oriented religion, involving some activity: consulting diviner, pouring libation, offering prayers and sacrifices, enthroning a chief, falling into trance, etc. These activities have definite goals to be achieved: solving a problem, curing sick people, bringing favorable weather, placating angry spirits and invoking blessing of ancestors, etc (Denis, 2008 :1)

African traditional religion became object of study when people from the northern hemisphere entered Africa many centuries ago. It began as an attempt to satisfy the curiosity and personal interests of sailors and explorers. It became an important subject for colonial administrators in order to understand the people they were to govern. Most reports show that the influence of African traditional religion is felt both overtly and covertly in many countries of Africa. There are still many people who practice African Traditional Religion. There are those who have converted to other religions but are living in a culture that is defined by traditional Religion and who are, therefore, still guided by some aspects of the religion. Those who leave African Traditional Religion, very often join Christianity or Islam. And the converts to the new religion bring with them their worldview and their culture, both of which are heavily influenced by the traditional religion (Denis, 2008).

Many reports of inter religious dialogue identifies in many villages of Africa followers of African traditional religion that co-exist side by side with Christians and Muslims. The believers do not often talk about their religion. But they live out what their religions have taught them about good neighborliness, about honesty, dedication to duty, justice, service to one another, love, duties in the family, community development, etc.

In many parts of Africa, Christianity is no longer just determining the ways in which gender relations are perceived from the outside. Christianity is also influencing the ways people see themselves, their past and present. With Christianity and colonization, Christian lines of thinking and Christian norms for social conduct grew increasingly dominant in those vast parts of Africa that were under the influence of colonization and missionary teachings. Rules regarding sexuality and fertility joined into a single moral code, and norms for male and female sexual behavior developed along different lines (Denis, 2008: 6)

2.1.8 Women and peace building

The study made by Chinwenwoye (2008), on women and peace in traditional Africa is constituted of a number of case studies which were carried out between the mid 1990s and the year 2001. These studies were aimed at evaluating the role of women and peace in six African countries: Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Namibia, Somalia, and Tanzania. The six studies were undertaken within the framework of the United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Women and Culture of Peace Program. The results of the studies clearly demonstrate an interesting mix of traditional conflict resolution and peace building practices in Africa south of the Sahara. Consequently, a careful review of the six studies will be vital, as so doing would draw attention to important insights into the relevance of traditional African women's agency in peace-building and conflict resolution practices that are worthy of our attention in our current search for solutions for the peace problems affecting the life and opportunities of people in contemporary Africa.

2.1.8.1 The meaning of peace in traditional Africa

An important study by a Cameroonian scholar, Chinwenwoye, on the African traditional notion of peace sees peace not as an absence of war. The investigator in the Cameroonian study rather observes that:

> In almost all the cultures of Cameroon, peace was equated with 'freshness,' health, well being, harmony, calm and tranquility. The absence of such qualities was seen as the sign of conflicts, which could be either dormant or obvious. It was that harmony and freshness which provided farmers with good crops, fishermen with abundant catches and hunters with game. When there was enough food for everyone, peace would reign in homes and families, clans and tribes. As nobody had any reason to be envious of anybody else, neighboring communities could live in peace, visit one another during the off-seasons and attend weddings and funerals. (Chinwenwoye, 2008:4)

This view of peace might apply to many African societies.

2.1.8.2 Women and peace building through positive childcare

An important finding from all the six studies reviewed is that African traditional societies assigned to women the role of educator. Such education is the type that prevailed from the cradle onwards and was affected by means of a variety of activities in which the children participated. Thus, the most general implication in all the six studies is the understanding that peace is not born but made and that mothers implanted the culture of peace in traditional African societies. Indeed the central message in these studies is that peace building was taken seriously in traditional African societies and that it is established, little by little, in young minds and molded in the behavior and personality of the young through the agency of the mother. (Chinwenwoye, 2008:4)

In particular, these studies reported that girls were specifically trained in their duties and responsibilities as women and that the elderly women were responsible for this training.

> It was suggested that from early childhood, each child was exposed to a variety of songs, stories, proverbs and sayings directed by the mother or the aunt and conveyed at the fireplace or after the evening meals, which aimed at reducing conflict. The songs, stories, proverbs and sayings contain simple but clear messages and moral teachings. Indeed some of the studies went ahead to suggest that African mothers in such stories and

songs tried to project to the children what they expect of them as sons and daughters in family and community relationships (Chinwenwoye, 2008:5).

They showed that in sum, the themes of such stories and songs expect the children to demonstrate responsibility through reciprocity, honesty and loyalty through mutuality and deference and faith and compassion through inner strength and self-control. They also focus on the importance in human living and mutuality, of consideration for others (Chinwenwoye, 2008 : 4).

2.1.9 Women's contribution to conflict mediation

The study revealed that a fundamental fact of traditional Central African societies was the sacred character of the respect given to the elderly in general, and the elderly women in particular. Women played a key role in crisis management and conflict resolution. Thus, when a conflict degenerated into armed violence, an appeal would usually be made to a party of mature years to calm the tension and reconcile the combatants. Such an appeal for mediation was usually made to a woman who enjoyed the consideration and respect of all who knew her. The same study revealed that if war broke out,

> The oldest women of the clan would go to meet the opposing clan, and to interpose themselves between the fighters in order to make them see reason. When words proved fruitless, the women would threaten to expose their nakedness or to go down on their knees. In either case, the gesture signified a curse for those who bore the responsibility for such grave acts. Because of the respect that the enemy soldiers had for the women, they would usually put down their weapons before the fateful acts were accomplished (Chinwenwoye. 2008:8)

The same report suggests that if there was no lying down of arms, the old women, naked and on their knees, would crawl towards the foolhardy combatants and say to them:

> We are your mothers who do not want war,
>
> We do not want bloodshed.
>
> Do not fight with your brothers.
>
> They have sent us to sue for peace.

2.1.10 War and Ethiopian Women

Getting involved in the efforts that are made to prevent and resolve conflicts that are likely to arise, or have arisen between and among different groups is also contributing to the war process. It is in the light of this perspective that the role of Ethiopian women in conflict is looked at.

Women have played central roles in generating conflict by inspiring their men folk to go to war. Sometimes there is record of women themselves going to war. Since Aksumite times, there have been references about the role of women as war leaders. One of the most intriguing of these female warriors, who has received some attention from most of them seem to agree that she was queen of the "pagan" state of Damot, called Yodit Gudit or Esato, who, was forced into rebellion because of pressures from the southward expanding Christian Aksumiste state. (Belete, 2001 Cited in Adugna, 2001: 3-7)

Medieval historical sources indicate that women accompanied the army in its campaigns, usually as providers of various services; however, their activities have not been discussed in detail. There were times when women of elite backgrounds, took an active role in leading armies. Two women who have received some attention are Empress Sabla Wangel and Bati Del Wambara. The former was Emperor Lebna Dingil's wife, while the latter was the consort of Imam Ahmed; after the Imam's death, Bati Del married his nephew. After Lebna Dingil's death, as an escapee from the attacks of Imam Ahmed, Empress Sabla Wangel continued the struggle. She later received the Portuguese soldiers who came to give support to the Christian army in 1541. (TekleTsadiq, 1983 Cited in Adugna, 2001:7)

Several writers have focused on the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935-36. Tsehay's work tries to situate historically the mechanism through which women in highland Ethiopia participated in warfare. She focuses on four women leaders: Likelesh Beyan, Shewareged Gedle, Shewanesh Abreha, and Kelemworq Tiruneh.

According to Tekle Tsadiq 1983, Kuwee Kumsa focuses on the involvement of Oromo women in the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). Kuwee points out both the important role women have played as combatants in OLF and the significance of the material assistance they provided. She argues, however, that despite these contributions and the rhetoric from the leadership regarding their importance, OLF leaders have not allowed women to participate in decision-making.

During wartime a band of women served their menfolk in misleading enemy soldiers by displaying themselves from the hill top and shouting but disappearing suddenly from the site so that the site would be falsely targeted by the enemy (TekleTsadiq, 1983 Cited in Asugna, 2001:10)

The majority of women camp followers joined the battlefields to raise the fighting moral of the soldiers with their war songs, ululations, and prayers. Even the coward is therefore most often obliged to become a patriot for fear of the insult and mockery of women.

Apart from these, it was common to find women fighting in wars. As early as the 17th century, some women, though mostly members of the aristocracy reported to have "mounted mule or horse, spears in their hands with their belts tightened and their *shemas* or togas draped over their heads." Such manly appearance of women had reportedly displeased Emperor Iyasu, who in 1691, passed a decree against the practice. Nevertheless, chroniclers invariably reported women fighters to have gallantly fought in most battles, particularly taking the rifles of their deceased husbands or relatives who had fallen on the field. Such women often dressed themselves like men (Pankhurst, 1957 : 116)

Conversely, prominent women of the royalty and aristocracy have been reported to have played decisive roles in military affairs both in provoking and ending wars and leading their army into battle. Such women actively involved themselves in power struggle, promotions and demotions of officials, securing power and wealth for themselves and their relatives, using their position in relation to emperors or during their guardian roles. For example, in the battle of Adawa, Empress Taitu, the wife of Emperor Menilik, had herself gone to the war front, leading her own army. Some women had actually participated in the actual fighting. It was documented that the empress and her women followers were engaged in gathering intelligence information from local people and enemy camps (Pankhurest, 1990 cited in Adugna, 2001: 5).

Empress Taitu was regarded as an intelligent, astute and self-assured woman by many writers. Harold Marcus, cited in Adugna, 2001, has supported this judgement by writing, "she was highly intelligent and politically astute and she often acted as one of Menelik's

advisors" Emperor Menelik is invariably said to have endorsed her views and proposals in administrative, political, military as well as foreign affairs.

The post war training of women in different occupations must have been enhanced partly by the Italian occupation that awakened the women to demand further economic and political roles. The Ethiopain women's Welfare Work Association was reinstated at the dawn of the Liberation. It opened a school for the orphans of war. The Princess Tsehyay Memorial infant, Matenity Clinic, and women's Vocational School were also established by it. (Adugna, 2001:36)

The war enhanced the political participation of women. Woizero Senedu Gebru, for example was from the royal family at the time of Ethio-Italiian war and got encouragement from her family to participate in politics and became the first woman MP in Ethiopia in the 1957 parliamentary election. Woizero Ayelechy Mehasha and Woizero Rabia Abdul Kadir from the royal family as well, followed her example. Yodit Imiru, from the royal family as well in support of the war became Ethiopia's first woman minister (Pankhurst, 1957 Cited in Adugna, 2001:36)

In general, even though there is not enough documents written about the involvement of women in war, we can understand from the above points that women have been involved in all phases of war making. However, in this study, I will try to show the role of women in conflict resolution through the case of *sinke* cultural institution, which shows the participation of women both in encouraging war and in solving conflict.

2.2 Feminist Theoretical Frameworks

Feminist theories used in this study vary according to the issue treated in this document. There is no one feminist approach or single feminist theory. The term "feminist" covers a wide variety of perspectives and practices. There is a common characteristic among feminists to uncover the nature and functions of gender, but some feminists agree in that it is difficult in practice to separate gender from other facets of identity, such as ethnicity, or to understand practices of gender subordination separately from social inequalities rooted in class or justified by racial inequality (Bryson, 2003).

For example, according to socialist feminism, women's division of labour contributed to their placement in lower status of the hierarchy at different levels. They farther elaborated on evasive of sexism and economic oppression and the decisive role of economic empowerment for women's emancipation. When they discuss conflict, they relate it with class struggle. However, modern conflict theory asserts that the bases of conflict are not only class struggle. It can arise between different groups that are differentiated as minority or majority according to the level of resources they possess (Lindsey, 2005).

Conflict theory is based on the assumption that society is a stage on which struggles for power and dominance are acted out. The struggles are largely between social classes competing for scarce resources, such as control over the means of production (land, factories, natural resources), and for a better distribution of all resources (money, food, material goods). For example in capitalist societies, the interest of the dominant class is to maintain its position of power over the subordinate class by extracting as much profit as possible from their work. According to Marx's collaborator, Friedrich Engle's (1820-1895), the master slave relationship transfers into relations within the household. Modern conflict theory asserts that conflict is not only based on class struggle and the tension between owner and worker or employer and employee but it occurs on a much wider level and among almost all other groups. These include parents and children, husbands and wives, young and the old, sick and healthy, people of color and whites, heterosexual and gay, females and males, and any other groups that can be differentiated as minority or majority according to the level of resources they possess or power they have (Bryson, 2003).

Radical feminist's theory also helps analyzing violence and patriarchal system as the main hindrance of female decision-making power. They reflect that sexism is at the core of patriarchal society and places emphases upon patriarchal family as the key site of domination and oppression of women. According to Millett, the radical feminist, a process of conditioning starts with childhood socialization within the family and its values are internalized by men and women. For some women this socialization leads to self-hatred, self-rejection and an acceptance of inferiority. (Bryson, 20003: 166)

Due to socialization processes, men are regarded as superior to women. Whereas women wage uphill battles for economic, political, and social equality, men wield the power that will greatly determine the outcome of the fight. All roles are made up of both rithts and

responsibilities, but both men and women perceive the rights and privileges of the male role as eviable, desirable, and well worth the responsibilities associated with the role. Men are sexual leaders; women are sexual followers (Lindsey 2005:235).

In contrast to the above socialization process in *sinke* cultural institution sex role of masculinity and femininity was balanced in determining the conflict situations in the society and the empowerment lies in feminine roles. But, these days with the slow disappearance of *sinke* feminine roles have become disempowered and there is an increase of violence against women and between two ethnic groups supported with guns instead of peaceful reconciliation of conflict as it was practiced in *sinke* culture.

Having these feminist theory as a background to understand the different theories with the plan to set more relevant conceptual framework for this study, the researcher chose eco-feminist theory, along with the general essence of feminist criticisms as an important tool to look into *sinke* cultural institution.

2.2.1 Eco- Feminist Theory

Eco-feminist theory emerged in the 1980's emphasizing on motherhood and the care of the young as a positive exercise to be celebrated and as giving rise to 'womanly values' such as to do with nurturing, cooperation and peace, in contrast to male attributes of self-interest and aggression. Such thinking has contributed to the development of 'eco-feminist' theory. They have equated men's treatment of women with their treatment of nature. Claming that both have been raped, exploited, abused and hated, they assert that it is only women's values that can save the planet from ecological disaster. (Bryson, 2003:185)

However, out of the stated perspective of eco-feminism, this study focuses only on the following points of the theory. These were mainly the role of women in resolving conflict

within the community in relation to the role as mother, elder in relation to nature, the issue of respecting women's right and their values, and respect for women's economic and social right in the community.

Eco-feminists also looks at women in relation to nature. Eco-feminism connects the degradation and oppression of women with the degradation of the eco-system. Drawing on earth-based spiritual imagery, Eco-feminism suggests that the earth's original balance was upset through patriarchal domination of the planet (Warren, 1997; Low and Tremanyne, 2001 cited in Bryson 2003: 185). The planet can be healed and ecological harmony restored through political action, emphasizing thus the principle of equality of all species (Bowerbank, 2001). With its holistic viewpoint and emphasis on interdependence in all its forms, eco-feminism is particularly compatible with global feminism.

In particular, the Indian writer Vandana Shiva has lined environmental destruction with a male process of thinking, which she sees as a product of both patriarchal and western values systems and patterns of thought. (Bryson, 2003: 185) Rich has argued that women see the world differently from men because they experience it in relation to their own physicality (cited in Bryson, 2003). Griffin similarly sees women as closer to nature than men, and therefore able to express and identify with its needs, (Lindsey, 2005) while Collard 1998 states, "Nothing links the human animal nature as profoundly as women's reproductive system, which enables her to share the experience of bringing forth and nourishing life with the rest of the living world. Whether or not she personally experiences biological mothering, it is in this that woman is most truly a child of nature and in this natural integrity lies the wellspring of her strength." (Collard, 1988, Cited in Bryson, 2003:196). This view directly relates with the idea of supporters of *sinke* cultural institution, for they consider *sinke* as the mouthpiece of God.

Therefore, this study engages with Eco-feminist theory as a theoretical framework to analyze the role of women in conflict resolution in *sinke* cultural institution in Arsi society. According to the eco-feminist Judith Plant, the world is rapidly being penetrated, consumed and destroyed by the self-centered "man's world." The stand of eco-feminism serves as a key in the planetary shift away from the simple-minded selfishness of patriarchy, (Plant, 1989:2) to all embracing, participatory and empowering prosperous society just as the main principle of the *Sinke* institution upholds.

The message of eco-feminist is that we all must cultivate the human characteristics of gentleness and caring, giving up patriarchy with all its deadly privileges. (Plant, 1989:3) This means valuing diversity above all else. It means we have to take our own authority, be responsible for our communities and ourselves. Organization at the local level and stand against the invention that threatens the well-being of its citizenry is necessary for diversity management. (Plant, 1989:4)

Enloe argues that women's peace movement in general deliberately avoids forms of organization that are top-down and valorizes qualities of equality, spontaneity and connection. For many feminists the proper question to ask is how both women and men might strengthen institutions and processes that will help to build peace-orientated communities that recognize the common majority worth of all human beings.

As it is well described in this study, *Sinke* the Oromo women stick of justice stands for peace, wealth and health of the whole society. Particularly, it is a tool for protection for those suffering from violence. Therefore, in order to deal with *sinke* cultural practice eco-

feminist theory is more appropriate for analyzing the importance of this traditional culture, which serves the wellbeing of nature and human beings in general.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methodology

3.1Study Design

The study focuses on identifying the cultural practice of '*sinke'* that shows the role of women in conflict resolution. I have used qualitative research methods such as interview, focused group discussion and observation. Such methods are helpful in closer study with advantages to listening to what people have to say about their real lives. In fact, the potential for listening is a major advantage of the qualitative method over the quantitative one. I have used tape recorder and photo camera while discussing with the participants.

The study is qualitative, exploratory and analytical in nature. It is qualitative because the data collection tools are qualitative in nature. With regard to being exploratory and analytical, it gives the picture of the power relationship between women and men through analyzing traditional practice and their consequences in the light of women's rights. I chose qualitative research methods over quantitative research methods to understand the overall situation in a better way and I wanted to realize the practice from the participants' point of view in-depth.As Patton (1909) has said, qualitative analysis "permits the evaluator to study selected issues in-depth and detail" to understand the social phenomena in-depth through the participants' own interpretation, qualitative research method was taken as a relevant method. Lather (1988) stresses the role of the process that one uses in conducting the research as very crucial not only to recognize women's participation and to arrive at reliable result, but also to raise consciousness of the women who have participated in the research.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Arsi Negele Woreda, one of the twelve Woredas in East Shoa Zone. The capital city of the district, Arsi Negele town is located at the distance of about 230 Km from Addis Ababa and 170 Km from Adama, the Zone capital of the Oromiya region. According to 1994 housing and population census of Ethiopia, Arsi Negele district has projected a total population of 148,998 (50.1% F and 49.9%M).

The urban *kebeles* are located in Arsi-Negele town, which is the seat of the *wereda*. The peoples of these *kebeles* are engaged in diverse livelihood and are composed of different ethnic groups. Basic social services like portable water, electricity, health and education are more available compared to the other rural areas where these kinds of services are considered as luxury.

The study was conducted on four *kebeles* out of 13 *kebeles* of the Arsi-Negele *wereda, Kebeles* selected for the study are *Godee-Qaraaruu, Qarsaa-Ialallaa, Daakaa-Laangannoo*, and Arsi-Negella town *(01) Kebele*. Among these *kebeles*, three are rural and the remaining one is urban area. I chose these *kebeles* for they have better accessibility and the *sinke* culture was widely used in the area. Based on the stated objectives, the study focuses on the society in the area to realize the role of women in conflict resolution.

3.3 Fieldwork

The fieldwork was conducted for two months. The travel from Addis Ababa to the study area was very difficult. In order to reduce the risk during the study, the researcher contacted an NGO**,** working on this specific area at the head quarter in Addis Ababa. The manager was very much interested in the study, promised to collaborate, and introduced the researcher to the staff of the project in Addis Ababa and outside Addis Ababa.

The study was an enlightening experience, which provided me with wider knowledge about '*Sinke' c*ulture even though it is very difficult to get written documents except one small booklet, which was prepared by the Rift Valley Women and Development project. In all *kebeles*, almost all women and men were collaborative in responding to interview questions and focused group discussion. I was impressed with participants' assertiveness while expressing their views and defending their institution '*Sinke'*. They were worried about the

gradual extinction of their culture in general, and '*Sinke*' culture in particular, because of wrong interpretation of Muslim and Christian religions. They still strongly support '*Sinke*' for the belief that it brings prosperity, peace and empowerment for them.

I also went to a place where all of the women sat in groups chatting over coffee and exchanging information on mutual concerns. All of them were carrying '*Sinke*' while I was conducting discussion by using unstructured interview. At this time, I observed their feeling on the *sinke* institution. They are sad for the current generation who are going to miss the benefit of '*Sinke*' culture and allow the disappearance of the institution.

In the course of the research, I had interviewed staff members of Rift-Valley project representative, Women's Affair head office and cultural office representatives of the Arsi-Negale wereda by using structured interview. During the interview sessions, they were very much eager to consolidate the institution of '*Sinke*' culture.

3.4 Sampling

The target population in this study consists of women and men elders, Non-governmental organizations staff around the study area and government officials. From each of the four *kebeles* eight women and four men participants of the interview, totally 48 participants, were selected. The focus group discussions consisted of 5 men and 10 women from four *kebeles*, (Totally 60 people participated, and all of whom were elders.) More number of women respondents has been included since the women respondents are the focus of the study.

As mentioned above, four out of 13 *kebeles* have been chosen from the study areas from one *woreda*. The rural *kebeles* were selected from areas where Rift Valley Children and Women Development Association are operating and the remaining one was selected outside of the project area.

Purposive sampling technique was employed in selecting the *kebele* and the respondents included in the study. They were picked based on the de facto principles, in which the responses came from people permanently using '*sinke*' and believing in '*sinke*' cultural institute and also legally registered in the *kebele* at the time of the study.

By using a purposive sampling, the researcher together with the Arsi-Negele development area staff of RCWDA conducted focus group discussion with eight groups of 48 people in total.

3.5 Data Sources

3.5.1 Primary source

The primary sources of information include focus group discussion, interview (women and men farmer elders, government officials, and associations) and observation. Among the government official women Affairs head, three cultural office representative and Rift Valley representative were included.

3.5.2 Secondary source

Various published and unpublished documents were thoroughly reviewed to obtain information on the issues of conflict resolution in general and regarding '*sinke*' traditional practice in particular. The revived documents include relevant national policies and international conventions.

3.6 Data Collection Tools

3.6.1 Observation checklist

Participant observation was conducted to get an insight on the situation and the status of women in the study area. The researcher stayed at the study site for about two months. This helped me to participate in and observe the routine life and different practices of the people. There were times when the researcher attended coffee ceremonies, markets, and cultural ceremonies. Participating in social activities is very important in order to create closeness and acquaintance. The researcher as a participant observed and collected field notes on the actual activities of the people. This approach helped the researcher to engage in open informal discussions and obtain information about the attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts of the society in many aspects of women's life.

3.6.2 Interview guide

An interview guide was prepared to gather qualitative data from government officials. A purposeful approach was used to identify knowledge of women and men on '*Sinke*' culture for qualitative interviews regarding their experience and perspectives. All of the Arsi-Negale *wereda* respondents were those who have knowledge on '*Sinke*'. Five key informants from Arsi-Negale *wereda* were identified for their expertise in human rights, '*Sinke*' cultural institute, gender and other fields relevant to the subject of the study.

3.6.2.1 Interview Instrument

According to Merriam (1988) interviews give ample opportunity to explore for clarification and ask questions appropriate to the respondent's knowledge, involvement and status and it has the advantage of having the chance for continuous assessment and evaluation of information by the inquirer, allowing him or her to redirect, investigate and summarize the semi-structured interviews.

Interviews lasted approximately 45-90 minutes and took place in the workplace or another private setting chosen by the participant. In the results, where possible, the exact words of participants have been used in quotations.

3.6.3 Focus groups discussions guided questions

This is one of the instruments of the study, which was used to obtain qualitative data on various components from the sampled Kebeles. According to Flick et al (2004) FGD is very useful in understanding issues of consensus and variation among members of the discussion, to obtain group attitudes and perceptions by initiating the participants for active discussion. Women and men elders' representatives of notable people of the Kebeles were the participants of the focus group discussions. A checklist of questions was used to guide the discussions accordingly. The time and place of discussion was fixed in consultation with the Kebele officials. The necessary preparation was made to facilitate the discussion, and motivate the members to share their knowledge about the subject in question by the help of two moderators -- one woman and one man -- from Rift Valley Children and Women Development Association. Audio tape recorder and photo camera have been used where felt relevant to record speeches of the participants and take photos of the important events, to facilitate the discussion.

The discussion was conducted in locally spoken language that is Oromiffa. Translation was not necessary as the researcher speaks the language very well. In each FGD, information was collected on the overall perceptions, attitudes, problems, in promoting *Sinke* cultural institution and the role of women in conflict resolution. The discussion was quite frank, informative and resourceful in most of the FGDs.

3.7 Data analysis Methods

Merriam (1988) considers the timing of analysis as a major point that distinguishes qualitative research design from that of quantitative design. She considers qualitative analysis as ongoing activities that takes place during data collection, devising of categories and building of theory.

The researcher conducted the interviews and focus group discussions in Oromiffa. After data collection, transcribed in Amharic and then translated them to English, to read the transcripts thoroughly and identified emergent themes, and then arranged the data in themes.

Interpretational analysis approach, along with descriptive case study analysis was used for this study to identify and understand major areas for the role of women in conflict resolution and their cultural status in Arsi zone. In addition, it was used along with the feminist research analysis conception that exerts maximum effort for in-depth understanding of women's experience and putting women's account at the center of the analysis.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

According to Punch (1994), most ethical concerns in qualitative research revolve around issues of harm, consent, deception, privacy and confidentiality of the data. Therefore, immense attention was given to the ethical issues as much as possible. In this case I investigated the willingness of all respondents to give their idea freely and then made them know that they had the choice not to answer any question they considered inappropriate.

Regarding the confidentiality, even though the participants of the study were so happy to reveal all information about the *sinke* institution, the identity of individuals has not been included here along with the information they have provided.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings and Analysis

This chapter is devoted to the presentation of the findings and analysis of the data collected from the observation, focus group discussions, unstructured and structured interviews with the participants in the study area, based on a case in the four *kebeles* ('Godee-Qaraaruu', 'Qarsaa-Ialallaa', 'Daakaa-Laangannoo' and Arsi-Negella town 01 *kebele*. In addition, it tries to relate the fact on ground with the literature and theoretical framework in chapter 2 so that the analysis is backed by theories. The interpretation focuses on the role of women in conflict resolution. Almost all elders have *sinke* in their home, particularly in the three rural *kebeles* mentioned above. These days they use *sinke* mostly for wedding ceremonies and sometimes when the need arises, for other different issues. For example, very recently there was a revolt by women carrying *sinke i*n urban areas to ask the government to revise its decision to dislocate them from their place for using the land for other development purposes. Immediately the representative of the government in the area stopped their action and left the land for them. This shows that a woman with *sinke* is still respected highly within the society in the area.

4.1 Gender Relations

Women in the study area, just like in other parts of Ethiopia, suffer from work stereotype and gender-based distribution of labor. Most are engaged in the domestic work. Although women are engaged both in laborious domestic and external work, they are not considered as breadwinners.

A gender critical look at the activities in the communities exhibits a remarkable division of engagement across the customary demarcation line of well-pronounced patriarchy.

Lenesil Asfaw carried out a gender analysis in the study area to search around the kind of gender relations that existed both at the household and within the community levels in 2005. According to this study, though all members of a household participate in agricultural activities, women and children are engaged mainly in tedious and backbreaking activities. This worsens the situation of women as they are overburdened

with domestic chores. As a result, they have no time to look after themselves and improve themselves or socialize with outsiders and take part in village meetings.

According to my observation in the study area, the above condition of women shows that in the community their work is something considered as natural that the families take for granted without giving any value. Therefore, to change the system of women's work in the area is very difficult and takes a long period since the country's production system is predominantly agricultural. Due to the above conditions, integrating the cultural systems with the other progressive women's international and national rights based policies and devising strategies is very much necessary to solve relationship conflicts which often provides fuel for disputes and can promote destructive conflict even when the conditions to resolve the other sources of conflict can be met.

4.2 Gender- Based violence in the study area

According to my observation of the study area, Oromiya is one of the regions where many types of traditional harmful practices (female genital mutilation, abduction, rape, early and forced marriage, as well as wife-inheritance) takes place. In the rural area the awareness of communities is very low, and women seem to lag behind their male counterparts, particularly in their attitude towards the practices of FGM. Studies have shown that rural and illiterate women are twice likely to support the practice of *sinke* than urban and educated NCTPE (2003) cited in Lenesil, (2005)

According to the observation done in the study area, violence against women takes place in the family and within the general community. Physical, sexual and psychological violence including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, female genital mutilation, male child preference in accessing social services and the like occur in the family.

Violence occurs under the pretext of tradition and culture accepted as normal day-to day aspect of life. Sexual abuse, rape, marriage by abduction, early marriage, widow inheritance and bride price, sexual harassment and intimidation at school are common forms of violence faced by women of the study area.

Religion is no longer just determining the ways in which gender relations are perceived from the outside. It is also influencing the ways people see themselves, their past and present. With Christianity and colonization, Christian lines of thinking and Christian norms for social conduct grew increasingly dominant in vast parts of Africa. Rules regarding sexuality and fertility joined into a single moral code, and norms for male and female sexual behavior developed along different lines that paved the way for masculine and feminine behavior.

Most people characterize Arsi zone as only a haven for harmful traditional practice that endangers the rights of women. Therefore, it is also quite important to make known to the public as well as to the government that this area also possesses rich and useful cultural practice that protect the rights of women that are now becoming outdated, and all who support the rights of women should save this culture from its complete disappearance.

This study shows that in order to change the existing situation the best means will be to promote the good cultures that the society uses, like the '*sinke*' that protects women from violence.

4.3 Information of the respondents for focus group discussion And interview

Distribution of Respondents by Age, Marital status, Education, Religion and Occupation

Background of the Informants	Respondents	
	Female	Male
Age group		
30-49	10	8
50-79	50	24
80+	6	10
Total	66	42
Marital Status		
Married	45	39
Single	1	3
Divorced	8	-
Widowed	12	-
Total	66	42
Education Level		
Educated	1	11
Uneducated	65	31
Total	66	42
Religion		
Muslim	30	23
Orthodox/Christian	20	9
Wagefannaa	15	8
Protestant	1	3
Total	66	42
Occupational Status		
Framers	65	38
Women's Aff. Off.	1	-
Tourism and culture	-	3
RECWDA	0	1
Total	66	42

Information of the respondents describes sex, age, marital status, educational status, religion, occupational status and urban rural setting. As shown in the above tables, the majority (60%) of the respondents were women while 40% were male. This marked gender disparity because the study mainly targeted women. Considering age composition, in table

1, the majority of women and men are between 50-70 years of age. This is because women and men elders have enough knowledge on 'sinke' cultural institution than the youth. As seen from table two, most of them are married. Some were widows but had inheritance after the death of a husband. A widow is supposed to be taken care of either by the husband's brother or a near kinship of male line. Some others are single. Regarding educational status, almost all of them are illiterates.

Concerning their religious set up, the great proportion of the participants are Muslims followed by Christians. According to the respondents' view, this shows that most of them converted from their original belief called 'Waaqqaffennaa'.

Occupationally, majority of them are farmers, except for few office workers serving as key informants. The great proportion of the interview and focus group discussion participants were from rural areas. This was intentionally done to target group selection for the culture of 'Sinke', which is still used by farmers in the rural areas.

Like most Ethiopian communities, women in this area have their own patterns of division of labor. The heavy workload of preparation of food, firewood collection, fetching the water, washing clothes, cleaning the house, grinding grain, caring for babies and younger siblings is women's work. This clearly shows that women are largely responsible for almost all the productive activities.

4.4 Results of Study

4.4.1 General

Focusing on the objectives of the study the data is organized into three major sections because all responses from the participants in focus group discussion and interview were almost similar. The first is about the roles of women in 'Sinke' cultural institution of Arsi society. The second one is about the factors contributing to the slow diminishing of 'Sinke' culture and the third one is the way to maintain this unique culture.

The first discussion posed for the participants of interview as well as focus groups was about their view on Sinke. According to most respondents, Sinke is a stick of justice and symbol of peace. It is made up of a special plant called "haroressa" and put in the roof of a hut for a long time so that it turns brown from smoke. Not all brown sticks can serve as

Sinke. To serve as *Sink*e the stick must be straight. As it is mentioned in the literature review, the plant is chosen for two reasons; first, it does not easily split or break and second, it grows straight having equal thickness throughout its length. The length of *Sinke* is cut in such a way that it matches with the height of its bearer.

The participants of the study affirmed that it represents various regulations that protect the rights of women. The society is more afraid of *sinke* than it is of gun. As it is well known, the use of Gun came with the thinking of militarism, war, violence, and users are those who want to impose their power over powerless. For example in Ethiopia, guns were mostly used when there were internal wars fought mainly for territorial expansion, political supremacy and because of tribal conflict of one sort or another, and also when Ethiopians waged wars to defend their countries independence against successive foreign aggressions. And it is true in this study area that the use of gun among pastoralists in these days have became popular, particularly after the slow dimension of *sinke* cultural institution.

On the other hand, the woman uses *Sinke* to decide on various issues without bloodshed. Women's affairs department head of Arsi-Negale *wereda* summarized her view as follows: She defined *Sinke* culture as women's empowerment, which was given to her starting from her wedding day as only married women carry *Sinke*. It is held neither by men nor by unmarried girls. A woman begins carrying *sinke* right after the day of her wedding. The mother prepares *Sinke* for her daughter and presents it to her together with other cultural gifts given on such occasions. It has its own message of "let Sinke follow you as your mother and father wherever you go". This signifies the transition from adolescence to adulthood or from childhood to motherhood. This also implies that every woman has the responsibility to support other women whenever faced with an unfavorable condition.

Each generation transmits essential cultural elements to the next generation through socialization. Socialization is a life long process, with various requirements at certain age levels. During primary socialization and continuing socialization, gender socialization is the process by which individuals learn the cultural behavior of femininity or masculinity that is associated with their biological sex. As a society's total way of life, culture endows us with social heritage and provides guidelines for appropriate behavior. Cultures are organized through social institutions that ensure that basic needs of society be met in established,

predictable ways, although it is the social institution of the family that is shaped by overall cultural values of the society. This is practically manifested in *sinke* culture where the mother transfers her culture through socialization to her daughter and her daughter has the responsibility to handle conflict cases within the society as well as within the family.

Society believes *sinke* to be the mouthpiece of God. It is called *sinke 'Affuraa Waqqa'*. According to the discussion of the participants of the study, *Sinke* commands deep respect and admiration among the Arsi Oromos. Unlike any other stick, it is not used to beat cows, horses or dogs, nor is it used as a support. It is held during special occasions, or to signify holiness. Hence, a woman holding *Sinke* is respected and valued. For instance, if someone encounters a woman carrying it, he cannot cross her road unless he is given permission to do so; or one cannot cross a river ahead of a woman holding '*Sinke'*. Apart from this, when a woman carrying *Sinke* begs for assistance, everyone is obliged to give whatever assistance she is requested. From the above sayings one can understand how powerful *sinke* is and the society's readiness to respect and to be governed by this stick of justice.

They further confirmed their idea as follows: *Sinke* stands to bring peace between two conflicting individuals or parties. Whenever a conflicting or unstable situation arose and a woman took her *sinke* and asked for help, no one refused to help. The one who refused was alienated from the society.

When women face problems, sinke is their symbol to expose their case to the society. Whenever there is conflict, which might be social, individual or a national problem, it is an instrument to stop conflict. For example, in case of a dispute between husband and wife. In general, whenever there is violence acted against somebody, it is an instrument to stop the situation from aggravating. This shows that culture also provides for measures of social control to ensure that people more or less conform to a vast array of social norms. Social control mechanisms such as ridicule, exclusion from peers, and loss of support from family or colleagues are informal but very powerful. There is strong correlation between social class and parental values that affect society's norms. In this sense *sinke* stops violence which cannot be stopped even with legal systems.

According to a farmer, "In the absence of *sinke* there is a big problem. After we left *Sinke,* as it is now, we are in problem without rain, peace, health, and satisfaction. *Sinke generally*

symbolizes the motherly heart of women. God is with them. What they beg from God is easily gained" (Wakko Kurro, February 15, 2000, Arsi- Negale farmer). From this expression, we can deduce that even though this concept is based on women's nurturing role as mothers, women were also seen as a major asset for peace building and conflict resolution. Eco-feminists also regard women as guardians of nature's balance. According to Wakko, Sinke is a binding system for peace. Even enemies will come to agreement with this system. If mother and father work mutually and have the common idea, everything will get better. Even children learn and follow their family's character. Therefore, to build a country with ethical citizens we have to work on the peaceful administration of the family. These days, except for some places, there is no *sinke* culture. We are endangered if we replace it with other systems. Our respect, peace, health and wealth will go with it. Therefore, we have to think frequently about it. For example, I am the follower of Muslim religion but I will promote this issue. If we look neutrally, the objectives of any religion, Christianity or Muslim, are peace, equality and justice. So if we teach our society and make them believe in peace I am sure no one will refuse to accept *sinke* culture. (Woyessa , February 20, 2000, culture and tourism bureau).

Most women farmers in the focus group discussion believe that, Oromo people should accept what God and earth accepts. As it has been said, *sinke* serves all good things like:

- bringing rain by praying with *sinke* in time of draught
- protecting and respecting women at all times, especially at maternity
- stopping raging war between two different groups by mediating with sinke.
- blessing those who will go to war and pray for those who are sick.
- formalizing wedding ceremony and ensuring the property of women afterwards

Most of the focus group participants unanimously underlined their views as follows: leaving aside *sinke* means living without justice and in mal-administration. For example, under this system, when men committed violence women carried their *Sinke and* sang "have you heard what happened?" Then they came together to express their solidarity for bringing an end to the violence. Later on, the one who committed violence would ask for excuse and finally be punished by elders' resolution, thus letting peace prevail. When women carry *sinke* those who have guns also put aside their weapons and accompany women at the time of prayer. Those who quarrel negotiate to make up. They do not go for

farther conflict. Those who refuse to make up are automatically punished without any precondition.

One can deduce from their discussion, *sinke* culture is a very strong traditional peace making institution and essential for real solution of conflict. All the participants have discussed this indigenous empowerment as it is. Conflict transformation must actively envision the positive elements of a culture that include respect and promote cultural resources from within. Women's uses of the customary ways have proven their value in implementing official and modern conflict resolution methods. This is not only in Ethiopia, but also in many other parts of the world. Take for example, in both Bougainville and in Solomon Islands, where there are matrilineal communities; women are valued in the role of peacemakers and judges, which males cannot do. Moreover, as it is mentioned in the literature review, women have greater role in Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Namibia, Somalia and Tanzania. Particularly, despite the devastating impact of civil war, the women of Somalia have created a vibrant national net work of women's social and humanitarian organizations. They have employed culturally specific techniques to act for change in the community and advocate for it on the national level.

Research and understanding of the traditional and modern peace resolution institutional processes is necessary groundwork for appropriating conflict resolution strategies. Central to this process is the understanding of the way the different levels of governance operate and the interaction points between these levels. Women's actual and potential place in these processes lies in local preventions of what is peace as well as whether there are families that are still teaching, practicing and reinforcing these values.

Moreover, many studies show us that, traditionally women were at the forefront in the various stages of the peace process like preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping and post-conflict peace building. They did this either through direct intervention or indirectly through elders and women's networks that existed within the warring parties.

4.4.2 'Gada' system as the origin of *Sinke* culture

According to the interviewee from Rift Valley Women and Children Association employee, 'Gada' is an Oromo administrative system, which shifts within eight years rotation of different clan rule. The authority shifts within the clan with a ceremony of women-holding *Sinke*. Under the 'gada' system, every sect of the society has its own right to be judged with different rules.

According to the respondents of the focus group discussion, *Sinke* is one of the 'Gada' system through which women's rights are respected. For example, if a person insults a woman it is taken as if he insulted all women. Subsequently it has it own justice that was clearly given to *sinke* authority. There is a sanction in 'Gada' system against those who violate the rights of women. This system allowed men's sticks to decide over any dispute and for women's *sinke* to protect their right.

A male participant from Rift Valley Children and Women Development Association farther elaborated that different clans administered the Gada system at different times within the interval of eight years. Within this institution, true democracy was practiced. In this administration, no police and judge appeared for arbitration. Any conflict has solved through negotiation. *Sinke* is the symbol of peace within 'Gada' system. In 'Gada' system, however, even if women are able to participate in the appeal process, using *sinke* cultural institution, it is men who finally decide. These days though, the above-mentioned system does not exist in its previous form. This shows the slow disappearance of traditional and indigenous cultures that also face ethnic discriminations.

Notably, men participants in the focus group discussion reported the increase of violence against women both at household and community levels due to the deterioration of the *sinke* institution. Women, much more than men, are deprived of their empowering institutions when caught up in conflict.

The participants of both the FGD and interview group elaborated more about the institutiom as follows, *Sinke* is held only under special conditions, such as when women face mal-treatment or when acts of violence are committed against them, or when women are in desperate situations, needing help. Under normal situations, *sinke* is maintained

with due care and respect. Situations that necessitate bearing of *Sinke* are fighting, war, disease outbreak, severe drought, etc. The role of *Sinke* under such situations is to bring peace between fighting or warring parties, to punish those who cause damage to women, to pray to "God to bring the rains during drought" and to heal people in times of illness. Apart from this, women use *sinke* to pray to God to ease the pains of women in labor.

A woman, who is traveling a long distance on her own, also carries *Sinke* so that no one commits any act of violence on her, defying the rules and norms of *Sinke.* It is also carried to beg or help in times of deprivation. In short, *Sinke* is carried to draw the attention of the public to the fact that, some problems have arisen which need immediate intervention. We can understand from this that in the absence of this institution immediate solution may not be found for women of these areas who are in need of help at the time of violence. As it is well known, women are victims of human rights violations more often than men are. They face gender-based violence, such as rape, forced pregnancy. In particular, sexual or verbal humiliation has a harmful effect on the dignity and self-esteem of those affected. *Sinke* can serve as a foundation to combat all kinds of violence if it would be properly promoted and up-graded to express women's solidarity against gender based violence.

This is because currently, there is not much knowledge about all these functions of the *sinke*. Even though, the political framework to promote the protection of women in times of violence is clearly indicated in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform of Action and the Pacific Platform for Action, there is insufficient knowledge about gender equality in peace and security. Data has not been properly collected on the impact of violence and conflict situations on women and families, nor has there been serious advocacy and lobbying done to implement the international and national instruments of peace and security in Ethiopia.

4.4.3 Issues Addressed by *Sinke*

4.4.3.1 Familial Conflict Settlement

4.4.3.1.1 Spousal Conflict

Findings of the focus group discussion also shows the role of *Sinke* in settling dispute between husband and wife who are separated. A custom existed widely before to settle dispute easily between the family but which is rarely used now. Some Arsi Oromo women sometimes may have a hidden affair with a man. This sort of relationship is obviously established without the knowledge of the husband. Eventually, when a husband discovers that his wife had an affair with a man, he immediately expels her. Then she takes her *Sinke* and goes to her friend. In this situation, the friend approaches elders to resolve the dispute upon which he is made to give an endowment as compensation.

According to the culture, "if the friend really loves the woman in addition to the heifer, he presents a gun, tiger skin, a mule, etc. to the husband. In this case also *Sinke* plays an important role in reconciling the wife with her husband, thus saving the marriage from disintegration, and also avoiding violence between two men over a woman, a common cause of conflict in Ethiopia. In Arsi when such incidences occur, women take up their *Sinke* and intervene to avoid the conflicts from being further aggravated.

Key informants of the study have expressed their idea about '*Sinke'* cultural practice as follows:- During the maternity period of women which ranges from one month up to six month depending on the well being of the family, "Kenefa" is tied round the head of the woman. Only women who gave birth deserve to wear *kenefa*, since the prime objective of *kenefa* is to protect the interests and safeguard the right of women. During maternity, a woman's husband cannot mistreat his wife. If so, a woman carrying '*Sinke'* rescues a wife being mal-treated by her husband. The relevance of *sinke* is an embodiment of women's empowerment. The *sinke* ritual is an expression of solidarity among women and it is a potential tool for advocacy.

According to the tradition, no one has the right to beat a woman who wears *Kenefa*. *Kenefa* on a woman's forehead signifies that women have given birth; that she is weak and helpless and hence no assault whatsoever is allowed against her. It is an indication of soliciting respect and honor that is due for mothers. This holds until the woman removes Kenefa from her forehead and puts it around her neck.

Most respondents of the study summarized their idea as follows: - there are some exceptional men, who sometimes defy this tradition and commit acts of violence on women wearing *kenefa*. "Entalla ayaa dhagessee oddun si gassee" which means women have you heard what happened to me. As soon as they hear her cry, under the circumstances or after having heard about the incidence, women call one another and carrying their *Sinke* sing a special song, '*Degegnee Dufnnee'* (we heard and we came) in which they express their concern and dismay as the result of the violation of the *Kenefa* tradition. Singing in groups, they surround the house of the perpetrator and condemn the act of violence in their song. This song sounds like this: -"why do you offend your wife before her body has become strong. She is on maternity leave, breast-feeding. Beating her is not fair" He accepts their message without any hesitation, asks for excuse, and prepares gifts for her.

According to the tradition, the husband, who has violated the rules, is forced to butcher a cow or an ox and buy clothes for his wife in the form of punishment. He does all this out of the respect he has for *Sinke*. If the husband fails to comply with this, the women will take the case to the elders who would pass more severe penalties on the perpetrator.

As mentioned in the literature, due to the strong, customary and religious symbolism, a man about to hit his wife would immediately restrain himself once she has picked her *Sinke*. This by itself is considered a signal for the occurrence of abuse or violence and leads to a process of resolution of the conflict according to the customary laws of the Gada system.

The idea is that male members of the community, including elders, will be forced to take part in the process of finding solution to the problem. The solidarity of the women thus makes this institution a powerful instrument, giving women a chance to influence the male dominated traditional structures of their communities.

In such occasions, when the women immediately succeed in impeding the beating and the man accepts to fulfill his obligation according to the tradition, they sing a song whereby they recall their success and eventually disperse to their homes.

Such cultural institutions paved the way to highly legitimize women's upper hand in stopping violence enacted against them and ensuring their right by creating unity among them.

4.4.3.1.2 Dispute between a mother and son

The other area that was highly discussed by the informants of the study was violence committed by son against his mother. If, by chance, an ill-mannered son beats his mother, women gather holding their *Sinke* to rescue the victim. The first woman who heard or noticed the incidence ran from house to house singing a song in which awakening the women folks and telling them about the bad things that has befallen their friend. According to the respondents of the study, they sing the song in a group as follows: "*Muccan rabi ratessee necaramessee*" which means 'A god-damned boy dishonored me'. Having heard this, all women march to the house of the perpetrator, condemning his terrible act of violence through their song as "Bontulee *hatti ke anuuma*" which means even though you dishonor me, I am your mother. If the perpetrator happens to be in his house at this time, he abandons the house. He appeals to elders to resolve the situation through mediation. If he is unmarried, he will face rigorous punishment in the form of beating, if married, he is left to the judgment of elders. A married man, who commits such an offence, is usually penalized by having to slaughter the dearest cow or ox, as well as by being forced to buy new clothes like '*Bulukko'* for his mother.

Thus, all these assertions show that *Sinke* traditional institution has its own simple way of solving problems for every dispute arising in the family. Culture gives guidelines for appropriate behavior. Social institutions of the family have set the standard for the emergence of gender roles in children. Moreover, the family itself is shaped by the overall cultural values of the society. "Parent-child interactions occur in a cultural context in which women have lower power than males. Starting from infancy, parents socialize sons to express emotions differently than daughters in ways that support gender differences in power" (Lindsey, 2005:51). This is also continuous when the child starts school, at religions places and in other social, political and economic activities. Socialization goes on from one generation to the other through the mediation of parents, siblings, peers, teachers,

media, and all other social institutions. Thus, as discussed above, the *sinke* institution is a tool to intervene in the behavior of children, particularly boys in terms of respecting women's rights.

Though the role of such traditional institutions in resolving conflict efficiently and effectively is immense, currently these institutions are forced to leave their place to the 'modern' institutions such as police, court and other concerned adminstrative structures, which are costly and precarious.

4.4.3.2 *Sinke* in cleansing men and women involved in incestuous Relationship

According to the view of the participants of the study, a woman carrying *Sinke* cleanses a man/woman who is involved in sexual relationship with his relative. The purification process takes place by forcing the best man and his wife, inviting in-laws, to enter the house through the opened roof hole and exit through the door while undressing both partners who are involved in incest, and covering both with fresh animal skin from behind.

In such a way, they use *Sinke* to cleanse the individuals from their misconduct so that they become full members of the community in the future. There are cases where women themselves were punished by the culture when they misbehaved. The above account justifies that there is also a rule for every unlawful situation. This shows that they do not leave the individual to suffer and carry blame. Rather they solve the problem on time and let the individual live in the society freely without remorse. Thus, *sinke* serves in the process of being educated as acceptable men and women in the morals and ethics of the community.

4.4.3.3 *Sinke* culture challenging masculine character and patriarchal Culture

Another interesting event mentioned in the focus group discussion was the girl who enters the house of her likely-husband as a wife: According to the Oromo tradition, an over-aged girl enters into marriage by going to the house of the man, the one she chooses for husband on her own, with *Sinke*. This form of marriage is called '*Asenna*'. According to cultural norms, a woman walking without *Sinke* is considered as ill mannered or jobless. She may also be susceptible to immoral acts. Therefore, she carries *Sinke* to protect herself from all possible dangers".

In accordance to the respondents of the focus group discussion, the girl who decides to go into Asenna carry *Sinke*, which she throws into the house, enters and takes a seat. No one attempts to push her out of the house. The owner of the house searches for a reliable man among his clan and proposes for him to marry the girl. The man who is chosen to marry the girl will not refuse to take the girl as his wife, because if he rejects her, he would be considered impotent.

Sometimes the girl chooses her would-be husband herself. In this case, she throws *Sinke* into the compound and singing a song where she expresses her resolution not to go back and pray to the man to take her as his wife, enters the house and takes a seat. No one dares to move her from her seat. Hereafter she is considered as the wife of that man, who cannot refuse to take her as his wife due to the respect he has for '*Sinke'*. This shows that just like a man has a right to choose his own wife, in '*Sinke'* culture a woman exercises her right also to have her own partner. This implies that at some levels '*Sinke'* traditional practice absolutely breaks the thinking of patriarchal system and shows another dimension of relation between husband and wife which rarely happens elsewhere in Ethiopia.

4.4.3.4 The role of *sinke* in averting dangers of war

The majority of the participants interviewed and focus group discussion emphasize the importance of '*Sinke'* in preventing dangers of war created in the society. As they put it, women carry their '*Sinke'* and express the benefit of peace against the ugly face of war and forward peace and negotiation. In accordance to information collected, the *sinke* institution had effectively mediated as clan conflict that arose between Dewwe and Gambo clan over grazing land and also an ethnic conflict between Sidama and Arsi Oromos that shared

grazing land. At this time, the two parties immediately stopped the war for the respect of the culture.

As it looks paradoxical, *sinke* accompanies war of aggression launched by a foreign power that is alien to the culture of the locality and this is tantamount to participating by blessing the combatants that were ready to defend their culture, identity and territorial integrity. Of course, at times, conflict is to be resolved through a war in case peaceful means fails. A man who is sent to the war front in such manner will not hesitate to pay any sacrifice. According to one of the interviewee "When my son went to the war all elder women around us came to my home with their '*Sinke'* and touched my son with their '*Sinke'* and blessed him. Then he went confidently and returned back peacefully. *Sinke* is not a simple stick; it has its own power of God in it".

4.4.3.5 *Sinke* in rectifying bad luck due to sterility

The participants of the focus group discussion also discussed the role of '*Sinke'* in helping a woman to adopt a child. A family may not have a baby due to various reasons. Particularly not having a son is considered to be a great misfortune among Arsi Oromos. When such bad luck befalls a family, they rectify the situation by adopting a baby boy from either a close relative or a friend. This is an important means of protecting the family from disintegration. Accordingly, holding *Sinke* and a local bottle of milk in her hand, the woman whose heart is broken due to lack of child approaches the family from which she is going to adopt the child. The family, thus requested, is obliged to give away its child for adoption. This is an important means of protecting the family from disintegration. It also creates peace stability in the community.

4.4.3.6 *Sinke* in formalizing a girl for wedding and guaranteeing her Property rights

According to Arsi Oromo culture ten activities are performed during a girl's wedding. The *sinke* is one of them. The *Sinke* ceremony called "*Adda Bana*" *sinke* is the most important one during wedding times. Women's property, particularly cattle, which was the major item in the list of property for the then pastoralist community of the study area, is also assured in these occasions. After this ceremony is performed, the husband cannot sell or

give as a gift any property to anyone without her consent. According to most of the respondents of men and women in the focus group discussions, even after the mother's death only her children can have the right to use her property guaranteed for women on her wedding day and which she touched with *sinke* stick.

The following events take place next to *Sinke* during a wedding:

- Spraying melted butter on the face of the bride
- Putting a bridal veil
- Harnessing the horse of the bride
- Assigning a person who helps the bride climb the horse
- Putting fresh butter mixed with barley grain on the head of the bride
- Presenting a heifer as a dowry
- Handing over of a wooden pillow by the mother of the bride as a token of good wishes for the bride
- Presenting a bowl of milk by the bride's mother to the bridegroom holding marriage stick 'watessa' upon his arrival.
- Singing of wedding songs by young girls.
- Singing by the bridegroom's followers.

In this ceremony, '*Sinke'* holds a pivotal position, indicating that the wedding has been conducted in conformity with the requirements of the tradition.

4.4.3.7 *Sinke* as a means to pray to God

Almost all respondents knew the '*Sinke'* prayer which they perform along with another song when there is a shortage of rain. Arsi Oromo women use '*Sinke* to pray to God for mercy when calamities such as drought strikes the society. They go to the river around the tree and while begging God they use the word "everything is possible for you and in your hand. Please give us rain and make us cool." At this time they sing in their language *Attetta serba fexaanssa ayoo koo roobban addemma*. This means, God the capable help walk in the rain! Then those who pass by, including men, will accompany them in prayers.

Respondents further confirm, because of the benefit from 'Sinke' cultural institution, no one refused a woman holding 'Sinke' who seeks assistance.

As it is mentioned in the literature review, the significance attached to the women's action is so powerful that the men would prefer to resolve every dispute peacefully rather than walk to the ritual sticks laid down in front of them because of high cultural respect they have for *sinke.*

Respondents of the study further affirm that anyone who the woman asks for assistance is obliged to contribute as much as his capacity allows. It is believed that a person who refuses to help, faces the same fate himself. He is cursed, not accepted, and sometimes the community confiscates his belongings. All these show the respect given to *Sinke* by the community as a whole and by individual members as well. He will be alienated from   the community if he does not abide by *Sinke* or if he refuses to comply with the provisions of *Sinke* tradition, he will be doomed to fail in his life.

All these ideas help us to understand how our traditional culture is so strong, particularly to stop situations of conflict by mediating two parties. Such mediation also stops the destruction of human resources, particularly the damage of lives of women and children. Indigenous women are not just hapless victims of war, but often keep societies going. They maintain the social fabric. As a result, women are the prime advocates of peace. Although indigenous women often play a role in the informal process of negotiations, they are not involved in formal peace talks. It ought to be recognized that such cultural institution have a role to play in sustainable peace. And the inclusion of sustainable peace will enhance sustainable development.

As it was mentioned in the literature part, women have also been the agents through whom the society at war has been able to preserve itself and rehabilitate and re-establish in times of peace. Therefore, the collection of qualitative and quantitative data, including women's stories, reveal women's perceptions of war, their knowledge and use of reconciliation procedures and processes as well as aspirations for the future. This data is vital in understanding the factors they play in conflict situations in different countries today, as well as the baseline for planning strategies for conflict prevention and rehabilitation strategies.

From the above discussions and findings, one can realize there was a peaceful way of life in the absence of written law, police and judge with the customary law of 'Sinke cult rural institution. Therefore, to make life easy and safe indigenous cultures should be reexamined to upgrade and apply them in the modern administrative systems in order to enjoy sustainable peace in our country and in Africa at large.

Any effect of reinstituting the *sinke* culture requires accepting and integrating all aspects of gender issues such as allowing women to participate in all processes of conflict resolution. Therefore, the *sinke* institution has to create a space for women where they take part in the decision-making process in their own right, but not as only an applicant. Moreover, this will put an end to patriarchy, and see a beginning to the cultivation of a democratic culture when the contribution and benefit thereof is equally ensured and respected for both men and women.

4.4.3.8 *Sinke* in protecting a woman on her journey

According to *Sinke* tradition, no one commits an offence on a woman who travels carrying S*i*nke. It is assumed that the woman is peaceful and she has no intention to do harm to anybody. On the contrary, if a woman travels without *Sinke*, she is considered as ill mannered or practitioner of socially unacceptable values. Nobody is allowed to cross the way of a woman carrying *Sinke*, unless she gives permission. If, in spite of all this, someone violates the rules and crosses her way, then she chants a special song in which she condemns such acts and draws the attention of women in the vicinity. Hence, whatever the objective of her journey maybe, a woman is culturally protected by carrying a *sinke* stick

4.4.4 Cause for the extinction of *Sinke* culture

Starting from the sixteenth century, western adventures made a conscious effort to undermine the cultural heritage of various peoples around the world; this has been accomplished by imposing western religion and cultural practices on those with a different

way of life. Justified initially as a civilizing mission and subsequently dubbed modernization, in practice it was wholesale westernization with very little room for any viable middle ground. For instance, until the late twentieth century, it was assumed that development for the colonized peoples must involve a denial of their history, a rejection of their cultural heritage and the adoption of western cultural practices.

As Professor Andah cited in Akande (2004) once noted, "the effect of this policy in the case of Africa has caused untold damage to the African psyche, so much so that most Africans have come to believe as truth, the myths and lies about them as being primitive, historyless, mindless, cursed, lazy, inherently evil and corrupt, third world, underdeveloped ."

Regarding this point, different respondents have given different opinions. According to men and women farmers, at focus group discussion: Because of different religious beliefs *Sinke* cultural institution is considered as backward and archaic. Most people, particularly the young generation do not accept it. Most of us are afraid of the agitation of different groups in the name of religion. From this expression, the followers of traditional religion are considered as "pagans" and "idol worshippers" and they want to wipe out "this paganism" which was also considered barbaric by westerners.

W/ro Medehant, head of women's affairs office in Arsi- Negale Wereda forwarded the following idea: after the slow decline of *sinke* culture different kinds of harmful traditional practices have come to exist in Arsi zone. Because of this and other conditions like religious beliefs, women were considered as inferiors. For example, in marriage process now women do not have their own property. Even she cannot decide on the sale of any animals. She is considered to have been sold to her husband just like any goods. At the time of wedding the husband payed a lot of money to her parents in the form of dowry. Even to go to the market she has to get permission from him. When she is not able to live with him and go back to her parents, they tell her to return quickly for they are not able to pay what they have taken from the groom or from his parent.

Most of the participants have also mentioned harmful traditional practices. For example, a women whose husband died is in a situation of *adda gufuffa*. This means she will not clean her body, cloth, hair, etc,.. she is out to harm herself with different sanctions. These

and other violences against women like physical assault, rape, abduction, female genital mutilation, wife inheritance etc… are dangerous for our progress in contrast to our *Sinke* cultural institution.

Women suffer from various forms of physical and sexual violence at home and outside. As it is mentioned in the literature part on patriarchal culture, women are socialized to accept any form of violence committed on them as natural consequences of their own mistake, and in most cases, violence against women, particularly domestic violence, remains unnoticed. Women, rather want to solve their problems through elders. The elders make reconciliation, usually by asking the husband to present a chicken or a goat, depending on the assets of the family.

Some reports in study on women in marital disputes indicate that, *Sinke* functions as a response to the potential or actual occurrence of verbal, physical or sexual abuse. Due to the strong customary and religious symbolism, a man about to hit his wife would immediately restrain himself once she had picked her *Sinke* stick and cried out for help. This by itself is considered a signal for the occurrence of abuse or violence and leads to a process of resolution of the conflict according to the customary laws of the Gada system

 By the time Muslim and Christian religion spread in the Arsi zone, there was an attempt to abolish traditional systems like *Sinke*. Most respondents were convinced that *Sinke* system is not harmful religion but share most principles of good life.

Majority of the focus group discussions reflected the following points. The propaganda against *Sinke* by Muslims and Christians does not examine the inner part of the culture. According to these religious views, simply those who carry *Sinke* are considered as impious, backward and traditional. The followers of the above religions preach as if *Sinke* is simple wood, and belief in it is like a belief in unknown god. Still others have not accepted to throw their *Sinke* and they want to promote it. "Why should we leave our culture, we have to consolidate it, particularly *Sinke* that empowers women." Without women, nothing will be ok and justice will prevail when women have power. To use women's peace making potential we have to respect their rights.

Moreover, the respondents further elaborate that all of us came from women and our success depends on the success of our mothers. Therefore, it is necessary to avoid harmful traditional cultures and maintain the good ones. "Followers of sharia and missions tried to abolish *Sinke* culture but we do not want to leave *Sinke* culture. Bible and Koran accepts equality. The problem lies with those who promote and interpret them differently. This shows us that the *Sinke* custom began to disappear just like other African native cultures when rapid modernization and centralization characterized the development of the nation state in Ethiopia, supported by religious ideology and a western-modeled state and legal system.

This transplanting process reached its peak in the mid-1950 and 1960s with the revised constitution and modification of major laws, which did not involve the consent of diverse Ethiopian communities. As it was mentioned in the literature review, the justice system drafted was based on the western legal system and by overlooking traditional systems, which continued to address social, economic, and political needs. Particularly powerful systems with formal power structures governing all aspects of community life like Gada system of the Oromo and clan structures of the Somali and Afar are some of the banished cultural institutions.

Stopping conflicts arising within the society is the main objective of *Sinke*. Therefore, I hope it will not contradict with good religious view. One of the respondents said, "The leaders of these religions preach only the good part of their own religion but we have to support as a citizen the mutual respect of people to each other, so we do not want to throw our '*Sinke'*. The main thing is to maintain the good part of the culture".

There are so many things to do, particularly when we see it with regard to women's rights in the Arsi zone. In many places, there is physical assault, abduction, rape, female genital mutilation and widow inheritance. There are women who face so many problems, for example a wife will be forced to leave her house and when she goes to her parents they say "go back to your home." This is because at the time of marriage the girls side took a lot of money from the husband's family in the form of dowry and it is difficult for them to return the money, consequently the only alternative they have is to force their daughter to go back to her home and let her suffer there. According to one of the respondents of the interview,

many women have died because of the different suffering in rural areas, particularly after the thinning power of '*Sinke'.*

As it was emphasized in the female farmer's focus group discussion: "Another big problem coming to us these days is our children's fate. After they complete their education, they are not employed to earn their living. At this time, they quarrel with their parents saying, you have to give me money; why have you brought me to this world? You have the responsibility to take care of me till I get a job. Disputes particularly get aggravated between sons and fathers. Nevertheless, mostly mothers suffer from the consequences for they mediate between male children and their fathers. These days in most places there is no *Sinke* culture, which once had great power to solve conflicts that arose at every stage. The participants of the group discussion underlined that even though the solution is to create employment opportunity, in the absence of binding traditional culture between us like '*Sinke'*, which helps to protect conflict before it arises and after it arises, it is very difficult to manage such problems in our society.

An interviewee from cultural and tourism bureau forwarded his idea as follows: Previously Oromo religion was '*Waqqeffetta'*. Now some are convert Muslims, the others baptized Christians which is why *Sinke* has diminished these days. They condemn praying under the tree and around rivers but it is God who created all. Now thanks to government and other people who want to protect our culture, everybody has the right to promote his own belief. One day our culture will revive. Since the government supports these traditional cultures, we will promote our language which has been buried for a century and we will promote our culture according to the principles of peaceful coexistence. For example, harmful traditional practice like female genital mutilation does not exist in the Gada system. It came to be practiced later on with the coming of Islam and Christianity.

Therefore, if religion stands for peace, there is no reason to contradict with good traditional cultures unless the interpreters have made them quarrel. To bring up our previous point we need to have our *Sinke* 'Kenefa' cultural institute and abolish harmful traditional practices like abduction and wife inheritance.

One can deduce from this idea that religious beliefs like Christianity and Islam along with modernization have abolished customary laws protecting women. This has been done

without any preliminary research on their benefit and their harmfulness or adequate planning on cultures or considering aspects of them to be upgraded or abolished.

As it is stated in the literature review, for example 'Sinke' is an embodiment of the unity of Oromo women. It is an oath taken by a daughter and administered by the mother, wherein the daughter makes an allegiance to help and support every woman in her community and unite to promote a woman's view in a society.

4.4.5 The fate of *Sinke* institution and the way forward as suggested by respondents.

Most women participants summarized their view as follows: "If God helps us and this generation picks up again this culture will keep us away from all problems like disease, drought, war, and instead we will have peace, health, wealth and less conflicts among different ethnic groups and societies. Generally, for our society, particularly in order to save women from violence, it is the best instrument."

Therefore, in order to promote and get acceptance for further consideration we need to be organized. We want to establish our organization in the name of *Sinke*. Previously when *Sinke* was functioning God was with us. Now we are deprived of our respect. We are concerned about our situation day and night. Where are we going? What will be our children's fate if it continues like this? Mal-administration will be widespread. *Sinke* symbolizes our good culture and at the same time our actual right. We have deprived our culture and our song by which we express our power. We need to have it again.

According to Gemechu, an interviewee from Rift Valley Children and Women's Association:

> Each society has its own excellent culture. We have to look into every culture and take the good ones with us to make it perfect. We have to teach our society its benefits. Even the surrounding society can benefit from it. If we do so, it is a big achievement. That is why we are doing our best these days to promote this culture with Women's Affairs office in our area since our association's objective also lies in the development of women and children. As individual effort and the association's responsibility, we were establishing *Sinke* association recently. Its aim is merely for peace.

No one dislikes peace and we wish others to accept and collaborate with us. Please announce to the public what you have taken from us and teach them.

According to the view of representatives of culture and tourism bureau interviewee:

Sinke represents respect for women, which has its own positive impact on the children and over all, the family. For all it is a system of respect and peace. Even our children became immoral after we ignored *Sinke*. They do not respect their family. Previously, those ill mannered were corrected through this culture. It is not as simple as we see it. Our society has already been shaped by *sinke* culture. Therefore, through media and in the school, if we teach this culture I hope the public will accept it. If we respect women we will be respected because they are near to God. Working with women is a development. Without them everything is dark. Unless wife and husband work in agreement and work together by helping each other there will be a gap. If there is no health, wealth, and ethics among their children, who will replace the old generation? If family is spoiled, then the society is spoiled and then the country is spoiled. Progress will come when equality and right is respected and proper division of labor at home exists.

A woman interviewee, a farmer, responds to the general aspect of *Sinke as*:

For me, everything was good in Oromiya when we were praying to God, as we did previously. At that time, we had everything. Wealth is far from us now. We need to establish our associations in order to solve our problems. We have to learn from each other the benefits of our culture. We heard that there is an association established called *sinke 'welda bitta midhani'*. We need to accompany the association, as it is our foundation. Whenever training is provided to us, it has to be done together with our husband in order to bring them on board at the same time. Otherwise, when only one of them is trained the other may not take it positively.

The respondents further underlined in cultural institution, even if there is no rule in written form, we have our own norm in our mind and we practice good things willingly with the help of *sinke*. Therefore, we need to establish our association in the name of '*Sinke'* in which we discuss our problem and get rid of it. It has its own implication, as it is not an easy issue. Helping each other and learning is important for all of us. If we overcome our ignorance about our good culture there will be no problem between us.

For women, *Sinke* is her symbol of power. Even those who were late to marry can have the right to marry a person they want, just as a man chooses his own partner. Generally, to promote the culture we have to teach, we must announce through poster, and different clubs, using different media.

According to the cultural office representative of the study "we already have passed resolution to bring back Gada system. Next year our campaign is focused on this. We have planned to announce widely and consolidate this system." We can draw from the above discussion that respondents believe the intervention prospects of *Sinke* has more or less similar attention from the community. Some say *Sinke* can solve the problem of individual women concerning the family dispute and the others say it solves the problem of the society and the country in general in times of different war situations. The current cultural revival struggle from different corners also supports the existence and replication of *Sinke* culture and the support of the government is another big input, which may improve the revival of *Sinke* in the society.

If we look deeply into this institution, when bad things occur it is by far better for women to get justice through this institution rather than going to court and to the enforcing bodies. Thus, justice can be served at the doorsteps as it was used to be during the full operation of the *sinke* institution. Because as we know of the status of women, most of them are deprived of property, have no time to follow their case and there is no information for them regarding where to go in time of violence. The process is also not affordable for them. Therefore, it is better for them to get nearby traditional justice. This was realized through *sinke i*nstitution. As it was mentioned by different participants of the study, one needs to establish associations, which empowers women through a sharing of their ideas, and help each other by upgrading the previous *sinke* institution.

According to the representative of tourism and culture office,

> following this path now, we begin to establish women's organization called Welda *sinke* (*Sinke* Association). The aim of this organization is to help each other. Particularly the women who face problems in different aspects will get priority to be helped. These days we preach day and night to all women that, 'justice is in your hand with *Sinke* culture.' Therefore, they take their *sinke* again and stand together to establish their association. We are on the way also to convince youngsters to respect their culture and

abolish harmful traditional practice. For this purpose our tourism
bureau has helped us a lot.

Finally, when the participants were discussing the lessons learned and the way forward, most of them reflected the following idea: In Oromiya there are different types of cultures. Most of them are subjugating women while some of them like *sinke* are empowering women. However, the good cultures like *Sinke* are on the way to be abolished because of so many reasons, particularly because of religious beliefs which tries to eradicate so many traditional cultures which was considered opposed to the religion. Now thanks to the concerned body's promotion, there is an attempt to save this institution. Peace is more assured by this kind of cultural institution which was respected by the society. For people governed by their culture and religion than formal law, *Sinke* by itself is a belief. There was a boy who does not believe in *sinke*, and when his mother kept *sinke* in a roof, he took and broke it into two. The day after he did this, he was psychologically tortured and committed suicide. Every body knows this around this study village. It only proves once again the power of *sinke* in Oromo society.

In general, not only in Oromiya, but also in other places, all good cultures must be saved before they vanish. Therefore, we have to work towards the consolidation and upgrading of best traditional cultures in order to assure peace in the society. For this purpose, we have to form organizations.

> The participation of women and girls and the inclusion of gender perspectives in both formal and informal peace processes are crucial in the establishment of sustainable peace. Women cannot voice their concerns. In fact missions do not consult them or they are not involved in peace negotiations. Political structures, economic institutions and security sectors negotiated in peace talks will not facilitate greater equality between women and men if gender dimensions do not facilitate greater equality between women and men, and gender dimensions are not considered in these discussions." (Study submitted by the secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 1325, 2000:53)

The trend of *Sinke* practice is also a continuous process irrespective of the aforementioned factors. It will serve the purpose of family system maintenance in that the neglected women will be given attention and the support of professional skill and researchers in the society.

From the findings and discussions, the following points were drawn based on its strength, weakness, opportunities and threats, which need a thorough gender analysis application. *Sinke* practice has strength because it is a culture of the society, from which they draw pride and identity and which does not need training or sensitization for introducing it as new because it is a deep-rooted practice in the society. In the community, it helps in the maintenance of the society, particularly to stand against violence in whatever be its form. It is a means of protection and respect particularly for women and there is willingness by the side of the government's representative to upgrade and reinstitute the institution. The strength and weakness, opportunities and threats of the *sinke* institution is to be dealt herein under the conclusion part.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion

Due to socialization processes women are calm, supportive advisers and influence family and community affairs positively. They usually choose more peaceful ways than confrontation. In most cases, women are more pacifist than men who are confrontational. Thus, the involvement of women in conflict resolution is a step towards peaceful resolution. Moreover, women's involvement in conflict management can provide an opportunity for regular communication among women so that women's solidarity against

violence of any sort is realized. The *Sinke* institution of the Arsi Oromo is a good example in this regard.

Though women's involvement in conflict resolution is recommendable and critical in assuring peaceful settlement, the dismantling of traditional institution such as *sinke* in the name of modernization excludes women in public affairs such as conflict resolutions.

It is important to analyze and crosscheck the cultural assumptions of the different parties first, when dealing with conflict prevention in cross-cultural settings and in situations in which the power balance between the conflicting parties exist. In this case, *sinke* cultural institution regardless of its deterioration, is a live reference of how effective and efficient conflict resolution process would be.

Women consist one half of the society. Their participation in all aspect of life, including the public sphere, is as good as understanding an issue in its totality, which is a half way to a solution that benefits both women and men accordingly. If women participate in peacemaking process with their full potential, then half the society is working toward peace. The inclusion of the interest of women and men in the process of conflict resolution is a guarantee to reach an amicable solution that satisfies both men and women, respect for human rights and a creation of peaceful and prosperous society.

Nevertheless, due to the traditional excuses, restrictions and difficulties in traveling and exclusion from access to and control over resources, women are excluded from decision-making, including conflict management. With the advent of the rule of patriarchal system, some have been deprived of their traditional right to participate in public affairs and protect themselves from any act of violence. As thoroughly discussed in this research, women of the study area are victims of such deprivation.

To break the cycle of violence and discrimination against women, it is vital to change the structure of both formal and informal governance systems and the attitude of men and women. Without having a say in decision-making women have no access to and control over resources and to strategic institutions at all levels that are instrumental to reorient and intervene in social norms and attitudes of a community.

To this effect, focusing on customary laws and building on them has great legitimacy in the eyes of community members and is considered a key entry to fair, equitable, effective and efficient conflict resolution process. In this regard, the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia under articles 34(5) and 78(5) has explicitly stated the credence to customary laws and systems and allowed the re-examination of traditional systems and customary laws and their maintenance.

Using these laws, women can mobilize effectively in support of peace, as they tend to span the political and ethnic divisions of the society and, hence, are a powerful vehicle for peace for which *Sinke* is a good start to reckon. *Sinke*, symbolizing women's empowerment, is an embodiment of solidarity and an advocacy tool of peace and justice that make part of a customary law under Gada system in the study area.

At the community level *Sinke* is used to draw the attention of community to issues like tribal conflict, disease outbreak and drought and thus be addressed appropriately and amicably while it calls upon the attention of elders and neighbors to intervene in spousal and other family conflict at a household level. Generally, *Sinke* serves as an important instrument in conflict resolution, averting bad actions and is understood by the community as an ambassador of peace, a messenger of God and an advocate of justice and fairness.

5.2 Recommendation

Peace means the absence of violence in all its forms, at all places and the unfolding of conflict in a constructive way. Peace therefore exists where people are interacting non-violently and are managing their conflict positively with respectful attention to the legitimate needs and interests of all concerned.

In order to reach a fair and equitable decision, the inclusion of voices of all concerned, men and women, should take place. Nonetheless, women are facing immense challenges to participate fully on equal ground with men and this negatively colors the process of conflict resolution. The challenge facing policy makers and community elites is developing a gender equitable conflict resolution framework. This researcher is convinced of the traditional and cultural conflict resolution institution of *sinke* of the Gada system to provide such a framework. The framework should include the knowledge, practice, need

and interests of both men and women who are directly or indirectly affected by conflict of any nature.

Thus, acknowledging the effective and efficient roles of traditional institution in addressing conflict and integrating it to the formal government institutions of the same nature would help to address conflict at its roots and in convenience, immediacy, equitably and fairly. Hence, the following are the recommendation that are identified realizing and reinforcing women's role in conflict resolution process

- *Developing an equitable conflict resolution framework*:

The present socialization process is about power relation between men and women that excludes women's participation from public affairs and makes the process of conflict process one-dimensional, dominated by men only. Rearranging, the existing justice framework in which women's knowledge and experience could count, women's plights are addressed in conflict resolution process and women's human and social rights is ensured at all levels of life. For too long, researchers and practitioners of conflict management have largely neglected the gender dimension of conflict. Therefore, the need to conduct gender analysis is critical in the process of conflict resolution at all levels. Analyzing conflict from a gender perspective helps to understand the differing roles, responsibilities, needs and sources of power of men and women. Furthermore, equitable gender relations at the household level in which boys and girls are treated equally, both in the family and community levels, is necessary.

- *Reinforcing the solidarity proponents of the sinke institution and its reinstitution:*

At the community level, proponents of the *sinke* institution should become assertive and put the issue on the table of those concerned in both formal and informal bodies with the responsibility of conflict resolution process. In addition, non-governmental organizations and civic associations such as women's and youth associations should extend their support to the effort of reinstituting the *sinke* institution. Nonetheless, women should take the lead of reinstituting the *sinke* culture, as they are the ones who bear the burden of exclusion from conflict resolution process.

- *Implementing international conventions and national laws at the local level:*

Regardless of the existence of favorable legal condition that endorse cultural traditions and institutions, the deterioration and extinction of such heritage calls for a serious attention and commitment to both regional and federal governments. It calls for the implementation of the legal provisions that uphold the reinstitution of cultural heritage such as *sinke* institution in the study area, which is on the verge of extinction.

- *Promotion, advocacy, lobbying and networking:*

In such an era where globalization has brought people together, more than ever, the use of communication is tantamount to building solidarity among the like-minded ones, providing information for others, and drawing their attention and support as well. Hence, the need of promotion, advocacy, lobbying and networking are essential for reinstitution and replication of the *sinke* institution. Establishing a network at all levels with traditional institutions that have the same objective as the *sinke* institution is an area of attention. To reinforce the networking and developing appropriate conflict resolution framework, the need for strong lobbying and influencing religious people, traditional and government leaders is critical.

- *Acknowledging conflict resolution as inclusive and home grown*

One should realize that peace is neither imposed nor attained by the effort of a certain group of a community known for their public exposure. Outsiders can help to draw up agreements and bring former adversaries to a negotiation table and public personalities could help in technical matters. However, real peace that holds communities together is guaranteed when representatives of all groups of a community are involved. Real peace is built on a true understanding and negotiations of social and cultural norms and values of the disputing parties.

The implementation of these suggestions calls for the following strategies:
- Capacity enhancement: - Government and non-governmental organizations working in conflict resolution, culture and women in the study area should enhance their capacity by performing gender analysis on the issue and mobilize resource for its implementation. Hence, identifying and supporting appropriate local institutional arrangements and improving the capacity of local partners to inform government and donor policy on conflict management is an important step.

- To sustain these efforts and to change attitudes of the society the media and other researchers should engage in promotional activities and generating knowledge on traditional norms, values and institutions of conflict resolutions

- The process of reinstituting traditional conflict resolution institutions should include a gendered component, aimed at supporting a process of reflection on gender and conflict management. Such initiative should facilitate an understanding and inclusion of the various perspectives, knowledge, experiences of men and women and allow the concerned community to determine how to integrate gender in conflict management and resolution processes.

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APPENDIXES