



Hebo: New Year Ritual of Yem People in South West Ethiopia

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Abstract

Hebo, which is the New Year ritual of Yem, plays a crucial role in resolving conflicts and/or crimes of any kind among the community. The ritual incorporates multistage peacemaking processes. This study describes Hebo ritual performances and reveals peacemaking mechanisms through its stages. To collect data, participant observation, in-depth interview and document analysis were employed in ethnographic fieldwork. Data were described and interpreted based on the sequences of ritual performances. The findings of the study show that the New Year ritual has multi stage peace maintaining mechanisms that strengthens social cohesion, redirects identity and restores solidarity among the clans. Hence, considering the traditional system of uncovering hidden crimes and peacemaking mechanisms plays significant roles to reinforce peace, social stability and development in the study area in particular and in the country in general.

Keywords: Hebo; Chalo; Ritual; Mäskäl

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The *Yem* people are living in *Yem* special woreda which is located within the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP) Regional State according to the federal administrative structure of the present Ethiopian government. Based on the 2007 Census conducted by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA), this woreda has a total population of 80,687.

The neighbors of the *Yem* are the *Gurage*, *Hadiya*, and *Kambata* to the east across the Gibe River and Jimma zone to the south, north, and west. The area is situated at an altitude ranging between 500 and

3,500 meters and between 7°30' N and 8°35' N latitude and 41°25' E and 41°55' E longitude (Getachew, 2001). The region covers only about 34,000 hectares of land, mainly comprising mountain ranges, gorges, and deep valleys (Tiffin, 1965 cited in Getachew, 2001).

The *Yem* are one of the indigenous people of south-west Ethiopia who used to have their own kingdom, with an elaborate system of political and administrative structure (Aklilu, 2002). The *Yem* were first mentioned in the year 1420 under the name “*Janjero* in the victory songs of king Yeshaq (1412-1427) of Christian kingdom of Ethiopia, paying horses as tribute to the King (Getachew, 2001 and Alka Taye, 1960). But, the chronicler of King Yeshaq mentioned nothing about them except stating that they were paying horses as tribute (Nigusu, 2015). The *Yem* (the then *Janjero*) people were one of the strongest and organized kingdom of South west Ethiopia among *Kefa* and *Wolayeta* (Bahiru Zewude, 2000).

Even though the *Yem* people were strong and organized as aforementioned in the 14th century; they lost their power after they began a war with the neighboring Oromo people of Jimma, who were under the leadership of *Abba Jiffar* in the 1880s (Aklilu, 2002). Since then until recently (1977) most of the people had left their land due to manmade and natural reasons. Though they lost their power through time and forced to confine to *Fofa*, they have shown a strong sense of enthusiasm of keeping their ancestors' traditions. Collecting traditional medicine in groups irrespective of age and sex, performing funeral ceremonies, celebrating New Year (*Hebo*) and *Mäskäl* festivals accompanied with sacred objects such as shrines to ancestors, shields, wild skins and skulls, spears, swords and animal horns are some of their unique ritualistic traditions transferred from generation to generation (Aklilu, 2002).

According to some sources, the *Yem* people attracted European travelers since 1613. For instance, Fernandez (1613) Cecchi (1886) and Cerulli (1938) cited in Aklilu (2002) briefly described the culture and language. According to Getachew (2001) descriptions were made by Huntingford and Straub and special aspects of the language were discussed by Wedekind (1986) and Bender (1976). However, most accounts were based on information obtained from one or two informants who were not members of the people understudy and they did not stress on ‘unique’ and ‘strange’ customs.

In contrast to foreign scholars, Ethiopians, for instance, Hirut (1993), Dereb (2004), Teshome (2006) and Fisseha (1984), Girma (1986) cited in Aklilu (1993) conducted in-depth field based researches on the language recently. Unlike these Ethiopians, Getachew (2001) and Lemma (2006) have conducted ethnographic researches on the culture of the people. These studies were also limited to social periphery and gender aspects of oral literature respectively. Despite the fact that, the *Yem* people have their own unique traditions in connection with *Hebo*, little is known about their peacemaking values. Therefore, the researchers believed to conduct a research on *Hebo* and its values.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Conflict in Africa originates from problems basic to all societies such as competition between different identities, the unreliable allocation of resources and right of entry to power and differences on what is right, fair and just (Stedman, 1991 cited in Esayas, 2015). In this line, Ikyase & Olisah (2014) also mentioned the following factors that breed conflict in Africa. These are: corruption, bad governance, ethno-religious conflict, economic crisis and poverty, leadership dilemma, lack of democratic tents and boundary disputes.

To regulate such conflicts caused by different factors, Africans have built multitude of indigenous mechanisms. Before the establishment of colonies, there were various traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution, which could resolve any kind of conflict in Africa (Esayas, 2015). These traditional

mechanisms are used according to the specific culture of a particular community (Tsega, 2005). However, during the colonial era most institutions were destabilized and replaced by western modern legal system. This holds true for the *Yem* community in relation to traditional conflict resolution mechanisms because some ritual practices have been hampered by Western centered leaders of the community not to continue as they had been practiced before.

Since 2004, *Chalo* traditional court, which is part of *Hebo* ritual, is banned considering it as bad traditional practice though the people are practicing it yet. According to Esayas (2015) the 1994 constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia confines the mandate of the customary dispute resolution institutions only to private and family disputes by specifically excluding their application to criminal matters despite the fact that they are functioning for many types of crimes on the ground. The ban on this indigenous knowledge in the studied community might be emanated from western centered elites or disenabled by politicization, bribery and mistreatment of traditional organizations, above all traditional status of governors.

What so ever the motivating factors are, ignoring, despising or substituting of indigenous knowledge of a given society by western legal system constricts development and provokes violence and irresponsibility in the community because “the traditional mechanism of conflict resolution has its root in the people’s culture. The mechanism is guided by the people’s traditions, customs, norms and values. Accordingly, a policy on conflict resolution that recognizes the people’s culture has always been found to be effective” (Olaoye, 2005). Similarly, in her term paper written for the course: “Culture of Peace and Education” taught at the European Peace University, Bob-Manuel from Nigeria, suggests the proposition that “it is only when potential and cultural conflicts in Africa are understood in their social contexts that they can be solved. Values and beliefs, fears and suspicion, interests and needs, attitudes and actions, relationships and networks have to be taken duly into consideration” (Brock-Utne,2001).

Though the fact on the ground revealed the above tangible evidences, unfortunately during the colonial era most of the institutions were destabilized and replaced by western modern legal system. When the colonial regime replaced the power base of local political structures, the use of traditional methods of conflict management dwindled (Wilson, 1954 cited in Abebe, Samson and Tessema, 2015).

In addition to other factors, colonialism, most importantly, portrayed everything that is African to be incapable of serving any useful purpose. The result of all these is that African indigenous peace institutions were destroyed, or where they could not be destroyed, became weakened to a state of ineffectiveness (Osaghae, 2000). Diminishing or making ineffective of the institutions seems to lag Africa, aggravates violence in alarming rate and causes instability across the continent. Moreover, modern development (economic, social and political) has generally failed in Africa because the western model was applied based on foreign values, traditions, and cultural realities (Claxon, 2007). As research findings show, in all African societies, the resolution of conflicts or disputes through peaceful method in line with the values of any given community is preferred rather than violence (Best, 2006). Hence, the main purpose of this paper is revealing the multilayer peace maintaining processes and functions of *Hebo* ritual which has not been studied yet to the knowledge of the researchers.

Thus, the study is expected to address the following research questions.

- Who are the actors of *Hebo* ritual?
- What are the processes and procedures applied in each stage of conflict resolution?
- How does the community view the role and power of the traditional judges and the sacred places of the ritual?

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. The Concept of Ritual

It is worthwhile to sketch the concept of ritual and to locate the focus of the study in relation to it. Ritual is “A repeated socio-religious behavior; a chain of actions, rites, or ritual movements following a standard protocol (Green, 1997). The important symbols and values of the people are used, provoked, communicated, or expressed in ritual. Moreover, “ritual is limited to the symbolic enactment of relationships between man and what is conceived of as transcendental reality” (Blasi, 1985). This definition comprises five basic principles that help not only to describe ritual in its fullest sense but also to designate the ritualistic events with non-ritualistic phenomenon.

First, it excludes non-religious ceremonies, though it may have much in common with such ceremonies. Second, ... it excludes acts which are directed at superhuman entities not thought to be transcendent, or activities performed within the auspices of a super naturalist symbol system for instrumental, magical or mundane purpose. Third, ritual is symbolic; its significance lies not in the personal and unshared experiences associated with it but in the public and typified significance negotiated for it in social history. Fourth, ritual takes the form of enactment; it is not a physical cognate of a word. Such a cognate would be posture, not ritual. Ritual is more of a physical cognate of verbal processes such as narrative, political address, appeal, or argument. And fifth, ritual embodies a relationship between the human and what is taken to be the divine; a relationship which entails a span, a tension, something having an intentionality about it (p.60).

Ritual is also defined as collective sentiments as follows:

The key part of the ritual process is the assembling of the individual portions of the collective sentiments, for it is in their assembled and concentrated state that their distinctly common or collective nature comes into its full existence. The process of ritual assembly is the moment of symbolic reproduction, as the emergent reality of such assembled sentiments now acts back upon each individual, strengthening and reaffirming their portion of this concentrated and assembled collective sentiment (Bergesen, 1999, p.158).

Based on ritual's structures and functions ritual is defined as “performances that are repeated, patterned, and frequently includes ceremonial actions that incorporate symbols, action, repetition; and perhaps most significant to our being able to recognize rituals, they have a frame that indicates when the ritual begins and ends.” (Blasi, 1985).

From these definitions, one can easily understand that ritual is a collective performance of structured events, which have mutual benefits both to the individuals and to the groups performing it. Ritual is defined based on its structure, functions and performers sentiments. Therefore, to understand a given ritual meaningfully all these components have to get due considerations. In this regard Rapport in Kaeppler (Nov.2010) suggested that “a ritual is 'a form or structure [having] a number of features or characteristics in a more or less fixed relationship to one another' that can exist only in performance. The medium (i.e., the performance of structured movement) is part of the message; more precisely, it is a metamessage about whatever is encoded in the ritual”.

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Many cultures use their religious beliefs ...to organize the rites in a religious way (Holm, 1994). Rites commonly are divided into three categories: crisis rites¹, rites of passage² and calendrical rites. Calendric rites, which are the focus of this paper, are periodic, so they recur in regular time, and form a clearly distinguishable group of their own. They include various ceremonies performed according to the time of the year or in conjunction with the shifts in seasonal employment, such as rites for sowing and harvesting grain and ceremonies for opening a new year (Green, 1997).

Hebo in Yem (which is encapsulated under calendric rites) is a New Year ritual which helps the practitioners to resolve yearlong conflicts among the community. Conflict is a natural phenomenon in the life of human beings which occurs in relation to interaction for socio-cultural, economic and political purposes (Tasew, 2016). Conflict is a common facet of our everyday lives, an inevitable aspect of human interaction, an unavoidable concomitant of choices and decisions (Kaushal & Kwantes, 2006).

From these ideas, one can easily understand that it is hardly possible to live without conflict. Due to this general or natural fact, people almost all around the world put to practical conflict resolution mechanisms to a broad sort of modes to prosecute their disagreements caused by different factors. But the nature and causes of conflicts and the mechanisms for resolving them are deeply rooted in the culture and history of every society; they are in many important ways unique to them (Wardak, 2003). For instance, the Yem people use curse as a control of wrong doings and discover the guilty one(s).

2.2. Curse as a Means of Controlling Wrong Doings and Discovering the Guilty One(s)

Curse has been defined as "a prayer or invocation of evil fortune to befall certain persons or things." In the frames of traditional community, the curse is a mechanism for realization of the revenge. The curse is not only evaluated in a negative way, but it is also approved as a response to evil. This response is expected to happen with the assistance of the supernatural forces that are able to resolve crisis situation for the individual and the community. The communication with them is established through ritual and magical formulae and actions, whose interaction results with the realization of the curse. Their application is the key for punishing the perpetrator. In the past the punishment that the perpetrator faced was very real (sickness, madness, death) due to the powerful faith in the dangerous strength of the curse (Cvetanovska, 2003).

In many African communities, the fear of curses and cursing is real. A curse is a disturbing anguish in life and living. It does not matter whether one is a leader; educated or uneducated; restless youth or an elder; medicine man or a soothsayer; sorcerer or witch; polygamist or monogamist; celibate churchmen and women, or laity; man endowed with virility and fecundity; or woman blessed with femininity cum fruitfulness; pauper or billionaire; a peace maker or a peace breaker. The underlying factor is that of curse and cursing phobia. ... It is such an incredible phenomenon whose anxiety and wonder remains. But still, curses conservatively guide, guard and influence the Africans in their socio-cultural and religious

¹ Crisis rites are understood to be occasional ritual acts, performed in order to remove some crisis phenomena. ... These rites occur under unique circumstances and are attempts to organize the behavior of the community in such a manner that the crisis situation can be safely passed over and the normal order of life is restored. Crisis rites include healing dramas.

² Rites of passage, rituals that are associated with different phases of human life such as birth, childhood, puberty, initiation or entry into adult status, engagement, marriage, maternal confinement, fatherhood, transfer into another social status, and death.

life and this points to something positive which seems to add value not only to one's life as an individual but also to the community (Wachege, ND).

The phobia of curse extends to the development of self-exposing belief in front of the people. In a case when the person who has done the evil deed is not known, the curse is used not only as a mechanism for punishment, but also as an instrument for discovering the guilty one. This is possible since the cursing is done in public, in front of a big number of people. The reaction of the present ones is a decisive indicator of identification of the evil doer. The justification for the curse is a proof of innocence, while the one who opposed the cursing is considered the guilty one (Cvetanovska, 2003).

Moreover, there were cases where the cursed one, fearing the consequences of the curse, would himself admit the sin. There were other cases when a candle was lit in a church for the guilty person (a non-verbal curse), with the intention that this person brings back to the spot the things that he stole: "If he does not return the stuff something could happen to him, either to his child, or to his wife". The thief would have to choose between two alternatives, if he is familiar with the fact that a candle was lit for him in the church. It is an obligation of the victim itself, to inform at least one person from the village about it, which is enough for the news to arrive to the one for whom it is intended (Cvetanovska, Ibid).

2.3. A Model of Ritual

Although there is general agreement about the basic outcomes of ritual, there is little consensus about just how these outcomes are produced (Marshall, 2002). Most thinking about rituals in recent years has focused on their symbolic content, maintaining that ritual is merely one more medium in which ideas are symbolically expressed, transmitted, and reinforced. But such an approach cannot explain why these particular messages are expressed in this particular way; or why, if ritual is primarily a means of communicating messages, participants are so often uncertain, conflicted, and ignorant of what those meanings are (Marshall, Ibid). In keeping with Durkheim's contention that symbolism and ideas are secondary to behavior and sentiments in the origins and understanding of religion (Durkheim [1887] 1972, [1912] 1995). Marshall assumes that the best way to understand ritual's epistemic and integrative functioning is to begin with its most universal and salient aspect of its practices.

For this study, the co-presence model is chosen because it has direct effect on belief and on belonging. In a world that chronically provides only incomplete or ambiguous information, individuals regularly look to others to provide definition of validation of, and reassurance regarding their understanding of the situation. Among group members who already share the relevant beliefs, co-presence produces both intensification and extermination of those beliefs via the process of "group polarization" (Marshall, 2002).

Simple contact between individuals is a powerful source of linking and cohesion (Marshall, Ibid). This individuals' contact plays multiple mechanisms of attachment, including mere exposure, propinquity, similarity, and mere categorization. Moreover, both the developmental and ethological evidence indicate that such proximity- attachment linkages have strong biological underpinnings (Marshall, Ibid)

Therefore, by employing this model, the analysis revealed the effects of co-presence both on ritual performers' beliefs and peaceful coexistence.

3. Research Methodology

Ethnographic fieldwork was employed to generate first hand data for this study in Yem special woreda. In addition, relevant documents like related books, journals, articles were reviewed. Since the participants of this study were Yem people living in Yem special woreda, primary data were collected from five purposively selected *kebeles*: *Shemo Metelo*, *Yelayegnaw Keshelu*, *Semu Awasho*, *Bosher Alamma* and *Fofa*. The first four *kebeles* were selected because *Bore* Mountain, which is the symbolic and the center of many rituals, is at the center of them. *Fofa*, which was the administrative center of the *wereda* from 1985-2005 EC., was selected to include key informants who live in the town. The key informants were selected with purposive and snowball sampling techniques with a great emphasis on age and experience. Since elders play significant roles in the peace making processes, attention was given to them in the interview. Moreover, traditional judges, representatives of the twelve clans (*qoros*) and culture and tourism workers were purposely included.

Data about the sequential structure of the New Year festival performances and the peacemaking processes were collected by using participant and non-participant observation by two field visits in (2017 and 2018). The participant observation enabled the researchers to generate first hand data how the three judges play their roles as an individual and as group, how the representatives secure the peacemaking processes, how the disputants present their cases and values both to the custom and the place, and how the *bongagnas* perform the house to house festivity dances. In non-participant observation data about how the mass traditional dancing put its significant role in the peacemaking process was collected. In short this method helped the researchers to capture regular or routine elements as well as information about the performance of the New Year festival and the peacemaking process in it.

Regarding secondary sources, the researchers included both published and unpublished materials such as books, magazines, journals and unpublished reports from government and non-governmental organizations. From these documents, pertinent secondary data were collected and analyzed.

Besides, cultural (symbolic) data about peacemaking performances were collected both through semi-structured and close ended interview questions in Amharic. The semi-structured interview questions helped the researchers to guide the interviewees to generate valuable information about the subject under study and the close indeed interview questions enabled the researchers to establish basic information quickly.

In the data analysis great emphasis was given to Wilson's (1971) five principles (features of ritual) because in the preliminary notion of ritual, according to Willson, (1954) a ritual should fulfill five principles. Therefore, this study analyses ritual in line with the five principles.

Moreover, the fundamentals of any performance analysis requires an adequate ethnographic description of speech acts in a given society; accounting for the reasons, purposes of speaking, the participants, performers in the occasion and the speech genres they employ. All these aspects of performance are interdependent, and there is a degree of correlation between them that a description must be made explicit. Therefore, the description of performance focuses on the relations within the occasion as much as possible on the nature and meaning of each of its components (Green, 1997).

Having these in mind, descriptive and interpretive data analysis methods were employed. Data gathered from the field with different instruments were transcribed and classified based on sequences of events and content similarities. From these data, the most significant to the topic and representative of the group were selected for the analysis. The study sometimes used word for word quoting to present the respondents' actual words.

Since the goal of this paper is describing the performance of the *Hebo* ritual and revealing the functions of it, the role of the participants, their attitudes to the ritual and the traditional beliefs they acquire are taken into account. Because to find out a satisfactory definition of the term ritual, the participants' attitudes concerning the ceremony, social custom, and religious doctrine should be taken into consideration (Green, Ibid).

4. Results

4.1. Actors and Procedures of Conflict Resolution

In *Yem*, there are four responsible bodies who are engaged in managing local conflicts: elders, clan representatives, religious leaders, and traditional judges. Of these, the traditional judges have an absolute power and respect in the community as they resolve serious and secretly committed crimes. While elders of the village negotiate common daily conflicts, conflicts among clans are treated by clans' representatives, *jiggas*. On the other hand, immoral and shameful wrong doings are also treated by religious persons to keep the secrets of the disputants from the people.

The traditional judges are members of one clan, and they have different roles and responsibilities in the conflict resolution. In *Yem*, both the traditional judges and the representative of the twelve clans are all males. Besides, it is mandatory to be a member of *gazewa* clan. As a key informant stated:

In *Yem*, it is believed that each clan's fate of work and responsibility has [been] set by god. For instance, since *gama* and *mua* are considered the most respected clans, their social roles in the people [is] are engaging in administration. Unlike these, *fuga* and *gezi* clans' fate is engaging in lower ranked works like tannery and metal works. Engaging in any activities out of these traditionally set jobs and responsibilities are banned by the norm of the people (key informant interview 1).

According to data from the field, all *gazewa* clan members do not have the right to be a traditional judge. From this clan, the one who inherits the power is the elder son (might be the first child in the family or male child next to a daughter/s). He hands down his position in the same way when he gets older.

The main traditional judges who investigate the secret doings are three individuals with unique names and responsibilities. For instance, the head of the traditional court is called *mengagna* (war leader); next to him is *alwangagna* (security chief) and the *kongagna* (thanks giver to their god).

Regarding responsibility, the *mengagna* is accountable to the cursing part of the ritual. When a suspected individual refuses to appear after the traditional court or becomes unwilling to uncover his/her crime, and denies the case after the court, the *alwangagna* demarks a line by erecting small sticks (*chikale*) between the mass and the traditional court. He also prohibits people not to cross the line and punishes those who violate the rule. The *alwangagna* is accountable for the *Chalo* judicial process. Slaughtering a goat at the holy place of the ritual near the *demera* on the first *fin³* of September 27 is the responsibility of the *kongagna*. He also colors the *fin³* with goat's blood used for that day only. When somebody's blood drops in whatever case on *kanga*, the *alwangagna* is responsible to slaughter a goat and spray the blood upon it for the honor of the place and to get pardon from the ritual lord *semagor*.

³A slender tube made from bamboo tree closed at one end and opened on the opposite end to which the breath is blown.

Besides, the traditional judges, representatives from the twelve clans who are called *koros* (*local representatives*) take part in the traditional court. Their roles are: evaluating whether the three traditional judges' decisions are in line with the ancestors' custom or not. They interfere directly when any violation on the custom is made. Beyond these traditional coaching, any of them do not interfere with the decision of the judges and the activities of others.

According to their ancestors' custom, the traditional judges have equal responsibility for both disputants. Taking bribe from anybody and unequal treatment are considered serious sins. On this sentiment, the judges take care not to violate the tradition so that the community has a strong belief and respect to the traditional judges. They believe that if the judges incline or bias to one party, punishment from the gods will be inevitable upon them. The community members have great respect for both the traditional judges and the place where the ritual is performed permanently.

4.2 The Ritual of *Hebo* and Conflict Resolution in *Yem*

The data indicate that *Hebo*⁴ is the most respected holiday⁵ in *Yem*. From time immemorial, the people have celebrated the rituals of the New Year to give thanks to their god *Gor/Semagor*. The preparations for the festivity need almost the whole year. In addition to *Hebo*, the people celebrate *Mäsqäl* which is one of the most important holidays in Ethiopia.

Even though the people celebrate *Mäsqäl* for faith reason, the overlapping occurrence with *Hebo* in *Yem* gives it the highest status. To celebrate both *Hebo* and *Mäsqäl* rituals, the family members gather from every corner because as Bergesen (1999) mentioned, it is in their assembled and whole state that their distinct common or collective nature comes into its full existence.

Although the celebrations of these rituals have many functions, the peace making function is more valuable than others. As the data showed, the peace making process has two phases under which different actors have to pass through. These phases are *kama kesa* and *chalo*. Their concepts and procedures are explained below based on the sequence of their performances.

4.2.1. *Kama kesa*

The data indicated that *Hebo* ritual is performed in the community from the time immemorial to give thanks to the deity *Semagor*. After Christianity was introduced in the area, *Mäsqäl* ritual is celebrated with *Hebo* ritual starting from 25th, September for seven consecutive days every year. In the community, there is a strong belief that entering obscenity to these holy rituals causes different social crisis. In this understanding, the first phase of conflict resolution (act of purification) starts on September 25. This day is known as a day of mediation in the community. As Schellenberg (1996) mentioned, mediation is a voluntary dispute/conflict settlement process in which a mediator (third party) promotes reconciliation between the disputing parties. The mediator manages the process and facilitates the issues between the parties. The mediator, however, neither decides nor forces the disputants to reach an

⁴ *Hebo* means the first month of the year. It is derived from the Hebrew word *Hebub*. The festival was started to be celebrated to praise Israel's God who made them free from the ruling of Feron. The phrase chant "*yaho yahoya*" which means God has arrived is an evidence of the historical manifestation (Key informant interview 2009 E.C).

⁵ Householders establish the traditional money saving system *eqube* for beef and their wives save money in the same way for butter and spices. Boys collect firewood for *demera* and girls help their mothers in the preparations of food.

agreement. On this day, even the disputants make conciliation between them and reach an agreement for a win-win purpose because the main purpose of the negotiation is not to identify the wrong and right doer but to resolve the case through agreement for mutual benefits.

Kama kesa is delivered at the end of the reconciliation. *Kama* means honey and *kesa* means get rid of. After the negotiation has come to an end, the oldest negotiator put the honey on the false banana leaf and let the agreed parties give the honey to each other. This peacemaking custom (*kama kasa*) is practiced in the same way throughout the community on the same day.

After the community purify themselves in the ritual on the first day (September 25), they clean their houses and the outer surface of the ground to the corners of their fences the next day. As data from interview confirmed, cleaning the house and its surroundings is a long experience in *Yem's* New Year tradition. They also give great emphasis to maintain their personal hygiene. They wear new clothes or they clean the old ones. In general, everybody purifies him/herself from sins, his environment from dirt to enter into the New Year with purity. The community makes everything new for the *Hebo* and *Mäsqäl* festivals. On the next day, each household performs a ritual to welcome their lord of the holiday (*Samagor*). The husband and his wife spray special traditional food of the day (boiled *amecho*)⁶ in front of the front and back doors respectively. They pray to the lord of the ritual to come and go in peace.

Data from the key informant interview indicated that on the eve three *Demeras* (bonfires) one in front of each household and two (one small and one big) are prepared on the special place of (*kagna*)⁷ topped by a cross. Around 5:30-6:00 pm each member of the family led by the husband lit their *chibo* (a bunch of sticks) saying "*dasin maka kessa, maka kesfan gawa girum*" which means "Turn out hunger from the inner room of traditional house (*majet*) and bring in wealth" moving around the *majet*, *medeb* (sleeping area), and pet of cows lighting their *demera*. After the ritual, participants sing the song of the day "yahoya-yahoya", the elders bless, and the eve ceremonies becomes to end.

4.2.2. *Chalo*

Chalo is a traditional institute in *Yem* community. It is set for resolving conflicts which are related to hidden crimes. In *Yemsa*, (the language of *Yem* community) the value of *Chalo* is greater than everything else (Mitiku, 2013). In short, *Chalo* is a traditional judicial institution for crime detection and dispute solution, especially in case of anonymous theft, denial of money and wrong doings. It is a seven days judicial service to uncover unknown criminals and has great relationship with *Semagor* and *Maskal* rituals. It starts when small bonfire at *kagna* is lighted at the middle of the night. According to the tradition, an early awaken individual goes to *kagna* with a lit bunch of sticks. Early awaken individuals call villagers by pumping impala horns, which is called *turturu* to make them participate in the lightning of the big bonfire at *kagna* which symbolizes the beginning of a New Year.

People from the surrounding villages gather around the lit bonfire and perform their traditional dance until 4:00 a.m. by saying "our god the honored".

Around 4:00 a.m. elders come to *kagna* and lit the big bonfire immediately after blessing the ritual participants. At this time, one of the traditional judges' *alwangagna* slaughters a goat and paints the *fina* (traditional music instrument) with its blood. The ritual participants sing and dance until around 8:00

⁶ Special food of the day prepared from the roots of false banana

⁷ A place where folk dances of *Hebo* ritual are performed from 2nd to 7th *finas* and bad deeds or conflicts during the ritual period get resolution by the *kagna* leader.

a.m. before they prepare themselves for *boga* traditional play. (*Boga* is a traditional play which is only performed in the New Year and *Mäsqäl* rituals irrespective of ages). Elders and youngsters wear tiger and colobus monkey raw hides, hold large bamboo sticks, pump impala horns and *finas* in their village and gather around 3:00 pm at *kagna*.

Entering to the New Year without engaging in *kama kesa* peace making performance is the sign of impurity. However, even if some individuals who are committing wrong doings like stealing, denying someone's property and physical attacking skip the *kama kesa* conflict resolution ritual, they cannot escape the *chalo* traditional court investigation. At *chalo*, victims appeal their cases to the traditional judges starting from *isonsi* to *nafunsi* (the first to the seventh *finas* respectively).

4.3 The Judicial Procedures of *Chalo*

It is possible to divide the *Chalo* judicial procedure into two phases according to the stages of the process: unknown criminal investigation and cursing.

4.3.1 Unknown criminal investigation

As it was observed in the natural setting, victims appear to the *kanga* irrespective of sex, age and social status and make a line in front of the traditional judges based on their arrival at the place. The victims in the front line kneel down and narrate their cases one by one to the traditional judges. The judges ask individuals whether the narrated cases have evidences, taken to government court, or have been given decisions by anybody. If the cases have evidences, they advise them to go to government courts. If any case is under investigation by government court, they advise victims to wait for the final decision or take the case to elders. At the same time, if other bodies had investigated the case and a decision was made they advise applicants to accept the decision or appeal to the higher judicial body. In short, the traditional judges investigate cases that are committed secretly and have no evidences.



Figure 1: Victims appealing their cases to traditional judges

As it is observed from the field, traditional judges ask the applicants whether the accused individual is around or not. If he/she is around, he/she is told to appear in front of the judges by one of the clan representatives. S/he kneels down and gives her/his response about the case. If s/he confirms, the judges order her/ him to return the material or money or to give a compensation to the victim at spot. If s/he hasn't the money or any other material, they ask her/him to decide when to pay the compensation. If s/he doesn't accept the case or deny, the judges warn her/him not to try cheating them. If s/he assures that s/he is free of the crime s/he is accused of, they inform her/him that a curse ritual is going to be performed. If s/he agrees to be cursed they let her/him to go and tell the victim to appear on the curse ritual date to pronounce his words to the god.

On the other hand, when the accused person is not around or remain anonymous, the judges give order to the clan representatives and elders to announce the case through the community that such a case is raised at *kanga*. A person who is responsible for that case appears soon at *kanga* and clears his guilty deeds before the curse ritual is set. The judges order her/him to return the material/money or give compensations to the victim before the cursing ritual. Then, s/he promises and does what s/he has told by the judges. However, denying facts, disobeying the traditional judges' decision or disrespecting the holy place (*kanga*) are considered deceiving the great god of *Hebo* ritual, *Semagor*.

While hidden crime uncovering and giving justice for victims are practiced by traditional judges, flowering rituals of *Hebo* and *Mäsqäl* are performed in each village before noon and after 4:00 p.m. at *kanga*. At around midnight, each village's ritual participants gather at the central place irrespective of age and sex. The group is called *bogegna*. Each group has a leader who is chosen by his good manner and leading ability. He leads the group from house to house performing their singing and dancing. A key informant interview and the observation indicated while the group reaches from a house of an individual, they shouted *wuwu...wuwu* together and pump impala horns. The house owner who was waiting for the *bogegnas* crouched somewhere appears suddenly by echoing the *bogegnas*, *wuwu...wuwu*. At this moment, the *bogegnas* hit their shield with their sticks and say *wuwu wuwu* by showing a special

traditional movement. Then the group starts dancing at the gate of the house about half an hour. After a certain play the husband invites them *kobana* (the traditional food of the holyday) and drink *bordie, arche* (alcoholic drink). In addition, they take fresh butter for their hair and shield. After they are served the food and drink, they start singing and dancing by uttering (*gorwotato wonets yinetesta katawuto, miyafufana futu kontefawu*) which means be blessed the lord of *Hebo- Gor*, wish you (the inviter) to reach the coming year in peace, your cattle breed and be a lot as many as sands). After blessing their gods and inviters this way, they move to the next house.



Figure 2: Traditional dances performed by a member of *bongaagna*

While the *bogignas* sing and dance in the village and express their good wishes of the New Year, at *kanga* the uncovering process of the anonymous wrongdoers cases are investigated. The *nafunsi fina* (the seventh day *fina*) ritual is celebrated in a unique way as follows.

What makes this day unique from the other six days is the mass ritual of the community, which is performed at *kanga*. Since this day is the last day of the conflict resolution and the performance of *bogigna* dancing at *Chalo*, the community members gather from all parts of the special woreda and the surrounding places at *Chalo* and sing and dance together to encourage the traditional jury institution and bless their lord. On this day, people gather starting from early in the morning and make a circle of six to nine individuals from the great circle of the performance. They sing “*yahe! wohe! xbani kanga ekitu worfewe!*” meaning silence is not good for fathers’ *kagna* (Mitiku, 2013).

As observed from the field, everybody is absorbed by the traditional singing and dancing and seems very much impressed. When the mass performance is going on around them, the traditional judges perform their duties seriously about three meters from the mass performance. At about 3:00 p.m. the *bogegnas* from different directions arrive at *kanga* singing in a bravery manner like heroes who have returned from the battlefield with a great victory. They have pass through the great circle of the performers with louder shout once and return before they perform their formal traditional songs and dances. At this time, mass performers scatter to let the *bogegnas* pass through the great circle. Otherwise, they are thrown away and suddenly kicked by the performers. This happens at every *bogena* group’s

arrival to *kanga*. At around 5:00 p.m., the traditional judges finish the investigation and discuss about the cursing ritual, which is practiced upon the denials.



Figure 3: The performance of traditional justice and mass dance side by side at *kanga*.

The *bogegnas* of different villages play the traditional songs and dances of the day in a sentiment of contest among each other. It is a very dramatic performance. Some individuals kneel down, stretch to the backside, and move the shield as if they are ready to protect the enemy's spear on the air. They also move their bamboo sticks back and forth like a person who is aiming a spear to an aggressive animal.



Figure 4: Traditional dancing styles of *bongagn* at *kanga*

At the end of this dramatic play, every *bogegna* group member runs to the big *demera* ash, which was burned down at the beginning of New Year. They run to it with a loud shout and take the ash from the ground and put a cross line on their forehead. This is a promise to the lord of the ritual to transfer

them to the next year in peace, and to declare the closing ceremony of the *bogegnas'* play and a transition to a cursing ritual.

4.3.2. Cursing Ritual⁸

In the seventh day investigation of anonymous theft, denial of money and wrong doings, sinful individuals expose themselves for two reasons. First, lying or denying at the honored sacred place of *Chalo kanga* is considered cheating the almighty *gor* of the *Hebo* ritual. Second, to be cursed at *Chalo kanga* means inviting death, serious diseases and distraction of wealth not only to evil individuals but also to their families and close relatives. Therefore, anyone who commits crime secretly and hears that the case has been raised at *Chalo kanga* never exposes himself/herself for cursing because s/he knows that the consequence of being cursed is serious.

Therefore, cursing is practiced upon criminals who either do not hear the announcement which was made around or live out of the area and cannot reach before the performance of the cursing. Whatsoever the case is, the cursing ritual is practiced as follows.

As data from the key informant interview showed, when the accused anonymous refuses to take the responsibility, the *mengagna* (one of the three traditional judges) leads the mass and goes to the highest point of *Chalo kanga*. Victims follow the mass. At about 7:30 p.m. the *mengagna* stands facing to the west holding his spear with his right hand as if he is aiming at a specific target and ready to throw it. Then, he echoes the words of the victim who is uttering his case kneeling down behind him. The victim faces down to the ground when he finishes reporting his cases. The *mengagna* says “*shosho kamo, kone kamo*” (the places name at the edge of *Ghibe* river where sacrifice was delivered to crocodiles) to the god to mean “if the victim’s words are real, investigate the truth”. After he transfers the case to the god, he hits the ground with his stick and says, “Wrong doers and their relatives should be bitten like this.” The mass repeat his words and do the same after him. The victim stands after s/he exposes the wrong doer for the god. After each victim exposes the wrong doer in the same way, the ritual is officially closed.

4.4. Discussion

The result of this research revealed that the New Year rituals (*Hebo and Mäsqäl*) have multistage peace maintaining mechanisms that strengthen social cohesion, redirect identity, and restore solidarity among the clans. As it was indicated from the description of data, to participate in performing *Hebo* and *Mäsqäl* rituals, the *Yem* community has deep rooted customs of purifying themselves from sin and cleaning their environment from dirt. In the community there is a strong belief that entering obscenity to these holy rituals causes different social crisis. In this understanding, the first act of purification at *Kama kesa* ritual is made on the day of reconciliation in the community on September 25. As data from the field indicated, on this day, the disputants either reconcile one another or reach an agreement for a win-win purpose or elder mediators settle their conflicts throughout the community. The main reason is that this day is a peace-making day among family members and/or relatives and neighbors not to get to the New Year with quarrel that results different social crises. This finding has conformity with the work of Lenin and Dejene (2016) who discusses the indigenous Oromo peacemaking ritual especially *Tajoo*. They mentioned that in Arsi Oromo, participating in *Tajoo* with dispute even in heart would cause harm from *Waaqaa* (god). Like *Yem* communities who purify themselves in *kama kesa* before *Hebo* and *Mäsqäl* rituals, Arsi people who have conflicts between or within members of the society should inform and

⁸ Nowadays, cursing ritual is fade-away.

resolve their conflicts ahead of the ritual since restoring and perpetuating peace in the community is one of the essential preconditions for performing *Tajoo* ritual's.

As Schellenberg (1996) mentioned, mediation is a voluntary dispute/conflict managing process in which a mediator (third party) promotes reconciliation between the disputing parties. The mediator manages the process and facilitates the issues between the parties. The mediator, however, neither makes a decision nor forces an agreement because the main purpose of the negotiation is not to identify the wrong and right doer but to resolve the case through agreement or to perform the reconciliation via forgiveness for mutual benefits. According to Claxton (2007), reconciliation is ... an intrinsic part of conflict resolution in the African socio-cultural universe ... This traditional conflict resolution process through dialogue, sanction, purification rituals, and celebration is a model that is almost ideal for dealing with conflict at the community level.

The result also revealed that some of the pre-colonial traditional approaches to conflict prevention, management and resolution in Africa are practiced in the studied community. As Ademowo and Ahmad (2017) stated, socialization, institution and celebration of festivals are among some of the ways through which conflicts were prevented before the coming of colonialists. In socialization, the indigenous Africans see human existence as unified, interlinked and integrated in a web. Likewise, the overall philosophy of *kama kesa* conflict resolution mechanism is governed with this intent. As Ademowo and Ahmad (Ibid) mentioned, "from childhood, people were taught to live in harmony with others and avoid a situation of trying to win at all cost in the case of conflict and dispute settlement". The celebrations of *Hebo* and *Mäsqäl* festivals are not just for the celebration of ritual but for the virtues of peace, harmonious living, honesty etc. These were extolled in songs. Rituals and scarifies were performed to the village deities and ancestors for peace, protection, good works, fertility and the like.

Moreover, the community's traditions like cleaning themselves from hate (sin), followed by cleaning of their houses and environment and maintaining their personal hygiene have symbolic expressions. As data from the field indicated, "everybody purifies himself from sins, his environment, his body and his clothes from dirt to enter into the New Year with purity".

This research also showed that in the traditional judicial institution of *Chalo*, cases of anonymous theft, denial of money and wrongdoing crime detection has multifunction for the community. First, it serves as an alternative way of getting justice for the community. As it is already known, non-evidence based crimes, thefts, etc. are not treated in the government court. In *Chalo*, the traditional judges investigate cases, which are committed secretly and have no evidences and safeguard victims from loss. The very interesting characteristic of *Chalo* traditional court is, it does not interfere with the investigation and decision processes of others (government court and elders' negotiations).

The second benefit of *Chalo* is that the judges' concern is not only for the victims but also to the wrong doers. That is why curse ritual is performed upon the criminals after many steps of discussion with suspected wrong doers because the main objective of the traditional judges is restoration of peace and maintaining harmony. As it is indicated in Endalew (2005), a research finding on Traditional Mechanisms of Conflict Resolution in Metekel, the procedure and aim of *Hebo* conflict resolution mechanism had common features with customary dispute resolution mechanisms of Ethiopia. Procedurally they involve mediation, restitution and reconciliation between the conflicting parties and their respective families and aims not at only settling the conflict between the parties but also at restoring the previous peaceful relationship within the community as well as maintaining their future peaceful relationships by circumventing the culture of the revenge.

The third benefit of *Chalo* has psychological aspect. As data from the field showed, the victims have great confidence on the place and judges. Lying in *Chalo* is considered cheating the powerful gods of their ancestors. At the same time, the traditional judges are respected because they treat individuals of

the community equally. Within this mind set up, the victims and expected wrong doers accept the decision of the traditional judges with respect because both of them believe that they are treated in the same manner.

Finally, as mentioned by Bergesen (1999), the key part of the ritual process is the assembling of the individual portions of the collective sentiments, for it is in their assembled and concentrated state that their distinctly common or collective nature comes into its full existence. The process of ritual assembly is the moment of symbolic reproduction, as the emergent penalty of such assembled sentiments now acts back upon each individual, strengthening and reaffirming their portion of this concentrated and assembled collective sentiment. This collective sentiment helps the community to hand down the inherited culture and identity of their ancestors from generation to generation.

In addition to this, the *bongagna* group play, good wish expression in each household, accompanying the traditional court at *Chalo* especially in the cursing ritual. It strengthens the bond of the community and gives a chance to inherit the skills of defense mechanisms, which were practiced by their ancestors.

The finding of this research showed that the curse ritual was performed upon those who hide themselves in the investigation process. As data showed to uncover hidden cases or to revenge the wrong doers cursing is common in other communities too. As it was reported by Megersa and Dejene (2015) in Arsi Oromo, if the case remained hidden, a gathering is organized and the participants of the gathering curse the unknown person who committed the act. The gathering curses the doer of the act to suffer from health problem, infertility, social instability and poverty. The use of curse to penalize the anonymous guilt in traditional conflict resolution is reported by other researchers like Shai (1978), Faraone (1999), Cvetanovska (2003), Faraone (2011) and Willson (1954).

What makes *Yem* community's curse ritual unique is its multistage ritual performance to identify the doer of the crime. The other aspect of the curse is that it is done in a well-organized manner once every year while denial is occurred at *Chalo*. In general, the repetitive *Hebo* ritual helps the studied community to control conflicts, maintain group cohesion and identity.

4.5 Conclusions

This research work clearly reveals how *Hebo* ritual resolves conflicts among *Yem* community and creates collective sentiments to strengthen their identity. The *kama kesa* reconciliation custom is the key to resolve conflicts and maintain peace in the community. In addition, the *Chalo* judicial tradition which is part of the *Hebo* ritual uncovers the anonymously committed thefts, crimes and wrong doings which are beyond the scope of legal codes. The findings also indicated that cursing ritual is done not only to punish the cursed but also to discover the secretly done acts and testify the power of their god. Moreover, the findings of the research showed that the *Hebo* ritual is an indigenous knowledge that encapsulates peace-making mechanisms, which is unique to *Yem* community. To sum up the findings of the research in other words, the repetitive *Hebo* ritual helps the studied community to control conflicts and to maintain group cohesion. Thus, *Hebo* and *Chalo* are valuable rituals that have tremendous contributions to bring sustainable peace and development in the community in particular and in the country in general.

4.6 Recommendations

The *Hebo* ritual is fundamental to *Yem* community to maintain peace, resolve conflicts and uncover secretly done crimes which is beyond the limit of government codes. From time immemorial, the community practice and hand it down from generation to generation. In turn, the ritual practice strengthens the cohesion of the community to safeguard its culture and identity. As it is obviously known, since culture is dynamic then change is inevitable (as the cursing ritual faded away). Therefore, it is recommended that legal protection is needed to apply it to investigation secretly committed crimes side by side with the legal system at least in the studied community in particular and promote the traditional conflict mechanism in general since conflicts are culturally contextual (Tasew, 2016). As Shai (1978) mentioned a true and lasting peace requires a culture for peace that is a comprehensive society wide system of values, beliefs, and attitudes. Finally, it is recommended that the oral tradition of *Hebo* ritual would be better to be recorded and written for future evidence.

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