
CUSTOMARY LAW 'WOGA': ITS MEANING, CHANGES AND CONTINUITY IN THE GAMO CONTEXT

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Author's Note

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to explore the meaning, the changes and continuity on the customary law, 'woga' among the Gamo of southern Ethiopia. The article followed the tradition of an ethnographic approach. To explore the customary law, interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to explore the meaning, its role and the changes that 'woga' is facing. The data is analyzed and interpreted in relation to the literature. The meanings of 'woga' given by different social groups are discussed. Some cases were analyzed to show the significances of the customary law in the day-to-day lives of the study group. The data shows that the customary law is playing a significant role in resolving interpersonal, family and inter-group conflicts in a micro and macro level in parallel with the formal institution. The study also identified that the customary law has been facing various changes linked with migration and social evolutions that adversely affects its effectiveness and efficiency. Government should promote its continuity by providing the community conflict resilience through inclusive participation of all social groups and rediscovering elders wisdom.

Keywords: changes, continuity, customary law, Indigenous, woga.

Introduction

Social Scientists argue that culture is a complex and multi-faced concept embodied in performed actions of society, thought, religious rituals and social institutions. Mason (2000) defines culture as a way of life (a set of rule-governed practices which are at least loosely woven together) informed by a set of interconnected traditions of thought and inquiry. Anthropology has a long tradition of studying certain cultural-groups and social institutions. As Lincoln and Didier (2005) explain, people are embodied in sets of institutions which will help to shape how they think and act but different institutions will have different and possibly conflicting sets of influences. Social institutions are used by the public as a reference to control deviant behavior, and the patterning of agents of control is preferred in relationship to a number of different kinds of deviant behavior and maintains group solidarity. Hetcher (1987) defines group solidarity as the proportion of member resources employed to fulfill corporate obligations. Solidarity, therefore, depends on two factors: the rate of compliance with corporate obligations and the extensiveness of these obligations.

The social organization and institutions of the Gamo of southern Ethiopia is remarkable for its uniqueness. According to Freeman (2004), people live in scattered settlements throughout the highlands and are organized in different communities or *dere*. Each *dere* has its own sacrificer (*ekka*), its own initiates (*huduga* and *maga*) and its own assemblies (*dulata*) and assembly places (*dubusha*). The defining aspect of life in the Gamo *dereta* is a set of intricate and well-enforced traditional law, *woga*. Freeman (2004) explains the role of *woga* in governing the behavior of individuals as follows:

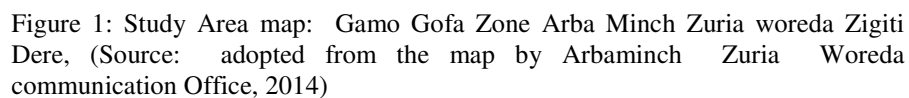
If one does not follow the rules, woga, or behave appropriately, it is as if either the gradient has been “flattened or there is a blockage in channel” (which fertility flows). The flow of fertility is “hampered” and these downstream of the obstruction would be expected to experience agricultural failures, illness or other misfortune.

Similarly Kaza (2012) argues that in addition to the economic purpose *woga* is used for different administrative purposes. According to him, it plays an undeniable role in shaping the world view, in guiding the relationships of individuals

with each other or inter-*dere* relationships, in managing resources and in resolving conflicts.

The Study Area

The Gamo people live in the highlands and lowlands of southwest Ethiopia, in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State's (SNNPRS) Gamo Gofa Zone. Arba Minch town is the capital of Gamo Gofa Zone. It is located at a distance of 454 kilo meters southwest from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital city. The Gamo highlands rise to altitudes over 3000 meters and are approximately home to 1,044,589 people (CSA, 2007). There was no overall Gamo polity that united all the people of the highland (Freeman, 2004). Before Menelik II's encroachment of the south in late 19th century, a large group of people living in the Gamo highlands were politically autonomous and divided into small autonomous political units named as *dere* (Kaba, 1992). According to Freeman (2004), there are three essential features of a typical *dere*. These are: (1) every *dere* should have *kawo* [hereditary ruler] who is a senior sacrificer of the *dere* and symbolizes the unity of the people; (2) every *dere* should also make its initiates such as *halaqa*, *huduga*, or *maga* (all are titles acquired through initiation); and (3) every *dere* should have its own assembly place *dubusha*, where *dulata* (assembly) meets to discuss communal matters.



The findings of this article relied on ethnographic data gathered from Zigiti *dere*¹ in 2015. The study follows a qualitative approach. From different qualitative research approaches, I employed ethnographic design. As ethnography allows researchers to use different methods of data gathering, I used participant observation, in-depth interview and focus group discussion. Participant observation was conducted on the special occasions during the time of my field work. Through cautious participation and observation of their routine activities and behavior from July 18, 2015 to August 25, 2015, I studied the influence of *woga* in their social life. In-depth interview were conducted about *woga* with individuals from different social categories, sex, ages, work and religious groups. A total of 21 people were

¹ I carried out an extended ethnographic field work among Zigit *dere* for my MA thesis. This article is part of my MA thesis.

interviewed. Focus group discussion is another method I employed to understand the *woga* and the changes and challenges the institution is facing.

The data collection and analysis process took place side by side. When I conducted in-depth interview, participant observation and focus group discussion, I organized the data into file folder and the files were organized into appropriate text units. During this process codes are developed to sort texts in categories. Then I classified, described and interpreted the meanings given by the people to the social situations to develop themes.

Results and Discussion

“Miza ekanape wogay shideko tas gides”.

[Better accept what is given by *woga* than receive a cow as compensation].

The above saying is quoted from an old man at Zigiti *dere*². It shows the view and trust the people have on *woga*. They used to compare it with compensation in means of *miza* (cow) and they value *woga* over it. The comparison they made is not just for the sake of comparison; they know the value of the cow. For Zigit Gamo the cow is a symbol of fertility, in addition it has a great economic value: source of *osha* (manure) which is a source of organic fertilizer for their agriculture. It also gives birth to *bora* (ox) which they use to plough their land and gives *matha* (milk) for their children.

There was no single definition that fully explains the term *woga*. But the study participants explained *woga* in light of the roles it plays in the life of the Gamo people. This shows that *woga* does not have a single grand definition among the members of the study group. For instance, the following discussion (about the role of it) was raised during the focus group discussion with elders. According to one of the elderly man:

At earlier time among us there was a tradition of siding with the truth. The dere cimata [elders] are impartial in passing decisions and everyone respects and fears the woga. Because of chaqo

² Zigit *dere* is the area which the study focuses upon among the 42 Gamo highland *dereta*.

[oath] no one can hold spear or any sharp materials to harm other individuals. If someone shows a disregard to the woga, the act is gome [taboo]³ and will result in misfortune in his or her entire life. Because of the fear of gome and hilo [ostracizing], people respect the dere woga, decisions of dulata (assembly) and dere bairata [those who are initiated to lead the community]⁴. According to woga, committing homicide, adultery, marriage or sexual intercourse with potters and tanners, and having sex before marriage harms the dere and causes misfortune to the dere. So individuals who breach these rules will be held liable and by this way woga works.

Elements of the above quotation suggest that *woga* is a customary law that guides the relationship between different social groups within a particular *dere*. It regulates the social, political, economic and spiritual life of the people. The *dere dulata* (assembly) and *dere bairata* (elders) use the customary law in resolving issues through discussion as well as the use of oath which has a spiritual feature. There is a clear differentiation between spiritual and secular ways of enforcing the customary law. For instance, the initiated or elected officials are responsible to pass spiritual decision mainly ostracizing and cursing the person who violates and refuses to be governed by *woga*. Similarly, the assembly has the power to resolve the issues through discussions and compromise. If a person fails to follow decisions passed by the assembly, then the assembly has the power to outcast him or her from socio-economic life. Disregarding and violating *woga* is believed to create misfortune in the life of the individual who deviates as well as on the whole community members. Any behavior or action that is believed as violating *woga* needs immediate resolution either by assembly or initiated persons. Still other elders in the focus group discussion explain the role of *woga* as follows:

Woga regulates all forms of relationships among members within the dere and among different dereta. It defines bale [mourning place] and duho [burial places] from the farming land. It regulates when and where the public markets can take place. It

³ The concept of *gome* carries multiple meanings, see Getaneh Mehari , The Ahfad Journal vol.33,no.1, June 2016

⁴ There are two ways of accessing these titles See Jaques Burea 1981 [2012]

guides the relationship between elders and the youth as well as the relationship of particular dere to other dereta. According to the woga, the young should listen to their elders' advice. The community as whole should listen and respect to the maga and huduga [initiated public officials] and the kawo⁵. Because of this we live in harmony with each other at earlier time. Because of this, the cow gave milk, the land gave good harvest, and the community was free from misfortune.

From the above quotation it is clear that *woga* plays a role in regulating the relationships among individuals and groups. *Woga* defines some dignitary titles for individuals when the community believes that the individual is capable to lead the community. It outlines criteria for a person to acquire the elective or dignitary titles and puts a certain obligation on both ordinary citizens and initiated individuals in their relationship with the respective individuals. It is believed that the existence of the social order has vital role for the fertility of the *dere*.

The customary law also demarcates the public/communal land and the lands possessed by private. Communal lands such as burial place, markets, communal grazing lands (*kaloo*) and the assembly places of *dereta* (*gassa*) are considered as sacred. It is not allowed for individuals to use the communal resources (like fire wood or grass for animal) without the knowledge of the public. If the individual wants to use the resources from the communal lands, he or she is expected to inform and win the consent of the *dere* assembly. Otherwise, it is reserved mainly for those who are physically handicapped, elder, and female headed households.

Regarding the other role of *woga* another individual in the focus group discussion states as follows:

It also regulates the marriage relationship within the dere. Woga has a principle which guides whom one should marry and should not. It does not allow the

⁵ *Kawo* refers an individual who holds the position based on ascribed and genealogical seniority. He is considered as a senior of the *dere* and he has a responsibility to offer a sacrifice for the good of the whole community.

marriage between mala, ayle and mana⁶. Marriage or having sexual intercourse between the mala and mana is tuna [polluting] and causes misfortune on the dere unless it is cleansed by series of rituals. Marriage is allowed between two equal social groups that of mala-mala, ayle-ayle or mana-mana marriage. This kind of marriage results in respect for each other between the bolota [in-law families] and helps to maintain the harmony of the dere.

In this context, when a person marries a woman from a particular clan, then the clan members of both a bride and groom are considered as a kin. There is a reciprocal relationship among the bride-giver and bride-receiver. The relationship includes sharing of labor for agricultural activities. Because of this, marriage is one of the way through which clan alliances are created. In this way it serves as a mechanism through which the group order was maintained. Secondly, marriage is also the mechanism through which social stratification in the society is kept. That means sexual or marriage relations between the three social groups (*mala*, *ayle* and *mana*) are prohibited. If there is sexual or marriage relation between different social strata according to study participants, it would bring misfortune on the *dere*. *Mala-mala*, *ayle-ayle* or *mana- mana* marriage is the acceptable type of marriage according to *woga*. So, it serves as a tool through which the social distance of each social group was kept. All the three social groups are expected to practice endogamy according to *woga*. If *mala-ayle* marriage occurs, it should be purified by passing certain rituals and accepted. But *mala-mana* or *ayle-mana* marriage is considered as polluting and it can cause misfortune to the whole *dere*. A *mala* or *ayle* who married *mana* has no way to access his or her previous social group.

From the study, it is possible to define *woga* as a customary law that guides the social, political, economic and spiritual life of the *Gamo* people. First, it is unwritten customary law of the *Gamo* people that was passed from generation to generation through oral instruction. Secondly, it was the elders who had the

⁶ The *Gamo* people are highly stratified group. The society is made up of three categories: *mala* a group who possess highest strata in terms of power, prestige and purity in relation with; *ayle* (slaves) and *mana* which consists of potters and tanners who occupy the lowest strata.

responsibility of transmitting the customary law to the next generation through oral tradition and lived experiences. Third, there are some established indigenous institutions responsible to execute and implement the customary law. For instance, the public officials who are initiated to lead the community or those who access some official position by the virtue of seniority are the main institutions responsible to execute *woga*. Finally, the customary institutions execute the *woga* through established mechanisms: that of discussions and ostracizing.

The customary law plays different roles among the Gamo of Ethiopia. First, it is the mechanisms through which the social relationship is organized and maintained. For instance, based on *woga* the Gamo people were organized into three hierarchical groups of *mala*, *ayle* and *mana*. The tanners and black smiths possess the bottom of the structure and the slaves are in the middle. According to the customary law cross group marriage is taboo. When it occurs, the action is considered as polluting that will result in the misfortune of the whole group. Second, it is the mechanism through which the public positions can be held. Among the Gamo group the public offices can be held through two mechanisms, by seniority and initiation. According to the customary law the positions which are held by seniority are symbolic and the senior is considered as a keeper of unity. For instance at a *dere* level the *Kawo* is the senior and he represents the unity of the entire *dere*, while the initiated public officials like *maga* and *huduga's* roles directly fall into the execution of the day-to-day matters of the community or the entire *dere*. Third, *woga* regulates the relationships between the single *dere* with other *dereta*. There are details of customary law that deal with the external relations with the others. Finally, it also guides the day-to-day relationships among the family members or neighborhoods. For instance, residents of neighborhoods cooperate in rotational task executions in farming, house building, and keeping the security of their neighborhood. Members of the neighborhood or *dere* participate voluntarily in alternative dispute resolutions.

Changes and Continuities in the Use of *Woga*

Anthropology is a discipline which focuses on a historical inquiry about societies with diachronic change. Mostly changes in the existing system will be caused by internal factors as well as external factors. Gamo group is not different from other society and it also experiences changes. According to Freeman (2004) the dynamics of cultural changes in Gamo highlands is part of some of large scale historical changes that were going on in Ethiopia in the 19th and 20th century. Due to

the change among the Gamo, *dere/dereta* lost their territorial autonomy, the indigenous institutions were banned and became dysfunctional, social stratification was officially abolished, social distancing was criminalized, and the customary law was abandoned and seen as traditional (backward) by the formal state agents.

Generally, three factors contributed to the changes in the customary law among Zigit *dere*. Changes occurred due to political, religious and social factors. The Political causes were linked with the regime change in Ethiopia. The 1974 revolution of Ethiopia dethroned the emperor Haile Sellasie I and ended his long reign. Haile Sellasie I regime had the long history of enjoying a better relationships with the local indigenous systems. But in 1974 Dergue took power and that had great impact on the cultural change of the Gamo people. The Dergue regime ruled Ethiopia from 1974-1991 and its ideology was socialism and was suspicious about indigenous institutions. The government accused the customary law and indigenous institutions for serving as a tool to create social stratifications. Because of this, the government eliminated the former territorial structure and *dere* was renamed and organized as *Kebele*⁷. Each *dere* were divided into two or more than two *kebele* and administrative effectiveness was the reason given by Dergue. For instance, Zigit *dere* was divided into three *kebeles*, namely Zigit Merche, Zigit Bakole and Zigit Feraso. Each had its own politico-administrative structure. Similarly, the government banned both the *kawo*, *huduga* and *maga* institutions which had drastic effects on the changes in the customary law.

Social factors are another reason that contributed for the changes in the customary law. According to Freeman (2004) the revolution introduced *zemecha*⁸. In the Gamo highlands *zemecha* taught that everybody was equal including the *kawo*, farmers, slaves and artisans. That created changes in the existing social structure. In addition to that, the younger generation who had exposure to the formal education failed to follow the strict rules of the *woga*. For instance, according to the study participants which are mainly from the elderly group, the young people deviate from the customary law and that results in affliction of the *dere*. One elderly man in the focus group discussion stated that:

⁷ *Kebele* is very small political administrative unit and during the Dergue regime Zigit *dere* was organized into three *Kebeles*.

⁸ *Zemecha* refers to a cooperation campaign aimed at teaching the socialist values of the Dergue regime.

The young generation is not willing to respect the woga. They do not fear gome that is why marriage and having child without the consent of their family is common among the young people. This is unacceptable according to our woga and they even intermarry with mana and that is polluting. They considered themselves as educated and government also recognizes their act as their right. You know what the results are? We pay 1400 Ethiopian Birr for fertilizer which will cover half hectare, but it was not productive because of the gome. It is not the fertilizer that can increase the productivity of our land. The only solution is to be governed by the woga, fearing God, avoiding polluting acts and siding with the truth.

From the above quotation, it is evident that some of the people believe that the formal education is one of the factors for the change in *woga* institution. It is true that the young people are movable as compared with their elder generation. The migration occurred due to pull and push factors. One is associated with the desire to follow their high school or college education. They left their home *dere* and went to nearby town or elsewhere where they meet multi-culture. Due to these exposures with other cultures, they brought some borrowed cultural elements home. Secondly, due to the shortages of arable land, they left their home to seek for jobs in urban areas. When they get back to their homeland, they come back with some new cultural practices that are considered as deviant according to *woga*. For instance, they marry without the consent of their family, practice adultery, fail to respect their elders, and prefer formal court over the customary institutions. These deeds are unacceptable according to *woga*.

Finally, religion was another factor for the changes in *woga* institution according to the study. The study participants argue that with the expansion of Christianity (both Orthodox and Protestant) *woga* faced massive changes. This is caused due to difference in the world view between the indigenous belief system and Christian belief. For instance, Christian groups do not accept any action as polluting and having potential to cause affliction. But affliction is the backbone for the indigenous belief system. Christians refuse to be initiated as *huduga* or *maga* and

they fail to owe respect for individuals who are initiated to such positions. Christians also do not hesitate to cut trees from forbidden public places and to cross the traditionally forbidden ritual places. As key informants stated, the concept of *gome* has pivotal role to maintain the group order and control deviant behaviors. But Christians are violating the elements of *gome*. This endangers and weakens the elements of *woga* that hold the Zigit *dere* together as cement.

The case of Burial of Kantes' Son in Xoyna Neighborhood

Kante is a man from Xoyna neighborhood of Zigit dere. He is a Protestant Christian. In 2012 one of his sons killed his elder son. That is a deviant behavior considered as a serious gome. According to the woga, the burial place should be at a neighborhood dere. It is believed that unless otherwise it will result in misfortune to the whole dere. But Kante claimed he is a Protestant Christian and it is unnecessary to bury his deceased son outside his dere. He argued that there is no gome on Christians. Then the burial took place in Zigit dere and participants believed it would followed by devastating consequences on the dere. The dere then faced massive land slide and unseasonal rain which caused the loss of their crops.

The above case shows that there is a conflict between the indigenous world views and the Christian ones. From the perspective of indigenous belief system, the actions of Christian followers negatively affect their lives. From the point of view of people who follow the indigenous belief system, the land slide was caused by the action of Christians. They believe that it is necessarily to behave according to *woga* to free the community from future dangers.

There is no similar view among the study groups about the impacts of changes that the customary law was facing. The elder generation is in favor of *woga* and sees the change will cause affliction to the *dere*. The majority of the participants from the elder generation argue that due to violation of *woga* the *dere* is facing failure in production and fertility. According to them different factors can be identified for the failure in production. These are related to violation of *woga* by the

young people. They reported that the young generation is violating their values. They accuse young people of not giving respect to elders and families. Second, corruption is another factor that leads to decrease in the production of households. The formal court needs only three eye witnesses to decide on any controversies. It is easy to present eye witnesses who have no first hand evidence on the issue by bribing them in the formal court system. It lacks the element of spirituality when it is compared to the customary law and that opens a door for corruption.

But all elder generations have no similar view on the changes. Some of the study participants see the changes and its impacts in a different way. For instance, one participant said:

At early time we are obliged to work for kawo. We spent our labor as well as our ox in farming the land of the kawo. The kawo treated us like slaves; we bow for him and say 'too' [a gesture of recognition that you (kawo) is my master]. Thanks to the Dergue regime and current government there is no master and slave relationships between us. Also, in the past it is common to see a frequent conflict among different dereta that was caused by silly reasons. For instance, the matter of individual is considered as the affair of the dere that drives them into a war. But now our Children are enjoying the fruits of formal education, we are free and there are no frequent inter-dere conflicts over some silly reasons.

The above two perspectives represent two opposite views of the impacts of the changes in the customary law on Zigit *dere*. Both views have their own arguments. To begin with the former, there are clear evidences that the changes in *woga* institution have negative effect in their life. In *woga*, there is no corruption and indigenous institutions can side with the truth. But the corruption is a chronic problem that the society is facing in the formal court system. From the later's side too labor exploitation due to social stratification was ended for good. The marginalized social groups are considered as equal.

Concerning the decrease of the land productivity, the young people had a similar view with their elders. But they claim that lack or having a small portion of land is the main factor for the decrease of agricultural production or it was not a

result of *woga* violation. The young generations have no enough land for farming. They inherited a small portion of land from their deceased fathers and it is shared among brothers. Lack of land made the generation under-employed. Decrease in the size of farming land leads to decrease in the production of household economy. In an interview a young Gamo in Zigit said:

To me woga violates our right to marry whom we choose. If the individual marries with the mana, the father and mother of the person as well as the members of the community excommunicates him in a systematic way. The father denies or gives a small amount of land to the son who married mana or ayle compared to his other sons who married from mala group. Also when the youth go to fulfill their social responsibilities, there is an annoying thing in the woga. All youth are not initiated to dignitary titles and mainly it is the responsibility of the youth group to dig burial places and carrying pillars to make house. The initiated adults just observe what we are doing and comment. It is really annoying.

From the above quotation, it is clear that some of the young people are not comfortable with *woga*. There are different reasons for their complaints on the customary law. For example, they were not allowed to choose their wife or husband from a group that they considered as appropriate for their future. If someone (mainly from the *mala* group) marries from other groups, it leads to systematic segregation. The family does not want to eat food from the home of *mala-mana* or *mana-ayle* marriage. Second, the customary law denies the young people to access socio-political titles and favors the older people. According to *woga*, those who are initiated to some socio-political title are freed from fulfilling some social duties and the young people are obliged to fill the gap. For instance, initiated individuals are freed from digging burial places and carrying pillars for home making. Finally, organizing big feast is one criterion to acquire the dignitary titles and it needs accumulated wealth. So, the young people are unable to be initiated because they lack accumulated wealth. They argue also that the customary *law* lacks inclusiveness. But the young people appreciate the role it has in conflict resolution. The reason for their positive view about the customary law was that it has no room for detention. Individuals are

obliged to apologize and/ pay compensation for the wrong deeds. Sometimes it will be free from compensation to control the further escalation of the conflict.

But there is also continuity of *woga* as a customary law in the life of Zigit *dere*. Freeman (2004) pointed out that when Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power and revised the Dergue's policies about customary practices, indigenous practices are actively encouraged as an expression of ethnic and cultural identity. The assembly came to work and began treating the marginalized equal with *mala* as *gome*. People began using the customary law and it has strong linkage with the formal state machineries with limited overt support or recognition of each other. The elective institutions among the Gamo society and the *kawo* institution are weakened. It has been noted that, currently the formal government institution and the *woga* institution operate simultaneously with limited support or recognition of each other. Sometimes the formal system needs the support of the indigenous institutions when there are problems like large scale conflict among the *dereta*. So, it is possible to say there is co- existence between the indigenous institutions and the formal government. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's Constitution also gives authority to indigenous institutions to entertain customary marriage, dispute resolution and peace building. There is also an element of competition and cooperation between the indigenous social organizations practiced within the elastic boundary in which the formal governmental political system allowed them. For instance, if a certain case like homicide is beyond the customary law, they look for formal court system. On the other hand, the formal government institutions use the indigenous institutions for public mobilizations. Most of the study participants reported that the local community wants to have elective institutions. They are in favor of these institutions because the institutions are strong in solving community problems. The co- existence of the neighborhood and *dere* to *dere* relation is held by this institution. But some participants are doubtful in the role of indigenous institutions in the area of spiritual practices, mainly which is associated with offering "sacrifice for bad spirits". In general, in present day Zigit, one can observe socio-political changes in the *woga*. But the changes are not much satisfactory as they are planned by the formal government. *Mala* group still do not eat food served in the house of *ayle* after the funeral which is common among the Gamo, do not intermarry with *mana* which is believed as polluting, and there is still degrading of women by using sayings like "*Enda endoko*" (women are women) to show the supremacy of men.

Conclusions

The researcher's findings have shown that *woga* (a customary law) plays a valuable role in socio-economic intra and inter-*dere* relations by maintaining group order. The researcher would like to argue that the main role of *woga* is restoring peace among the members of the study group. Group solidarity may emerge through individuals' actions to produce a collective good. This can be achieved through individuals' voluntary participation in alternative dispute resolution which was guided by *woga*. The enforcement of *woga* in dispute resolution is less costly, time consuming, and tending to corruption. Moreover, the amount of punishment (absence of detention) or compensation is proportionate to the wrong done. Similarly fulfilling the obligations related with offering sacrifice that emanates from seniority has also a role in maintaining harmonious relation between family and clan members. The *woga* is based on collective responsibility for deviant behaviors or actions that are believed as harmful to the community. In this regard, *woga* was used mainly to restore peace among the members of the group. In my view, these customary laws should be supported.

Nevertheless, *woga* has weaknesses. It marginalizes and discriminates some groups of the community. Women, *ayle* and *mana* groups are discriminated by the customary law. Women and *mana* groups are not allowed to be members of *dere cimata*. Marriage among the three social groups is not allowed to keep the social distance. The voices of marginalized groups are muted; they are denied access to common public places and the right to intermarry with other groups. Women's right to inheritance, division of resources during divorces, and their reproductive rights may also be undermined and violence against women is common. In either case, these practices contravene the fundamental human rights in the constitution. It needs working in collaboration with the formal government in the area to protect the human rights violations.

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Photo. *Dere* Assembly at Gelba Assembly Place, Partial Pictures from Inter-*Dere* Conflict Resolution Process Between Zigit and Ganta *Dereta*. Photo by: Zelalem Zewdie