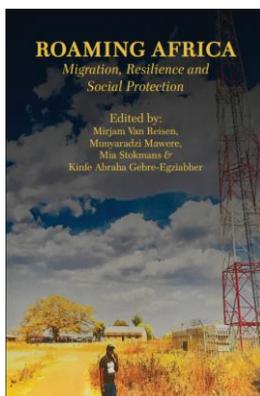# Mobility as a Social Process: Conflict Management in the Border Areas of Afar Region

Abdelah Alifnur & Mirjam Van Reisen

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Connected and Mobile: Migration and Human Trafficking in Africa

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Chapter 5

Mobility as a Social Process: Conflict Management in the Border Areas of Afar Region[1]

Abdelah Alifnur & Mirjam Van Reisen

Introduction

Since ancient times, people have travelled across boundaries in search of resources. They have also moved to conquer other societies and territories or to escape from war, natural disasters or major climatic shifts. In a broad sense, the history of the world is the history of human migration and settlement (McNeill, 1984). Hence, 'mobility' is not necessarily confined to a pastoral way of life, although pastoralists adhere heavily to a mobile lifestyle (Davies & Hartfield, 2007). Instead, this chapter identifies mobility as a social process, in which resources are shared and interests are managed through conflict management and resolution.

The Afar pastoralists use mobility to optimise livelihoods, cope with drought, maximise efficient resource use and keep their animals free of disease. For the Afar, mobility is a social process, with complex rules in a highly evolved social system. This system also manages conflict, which mainly stems from rivalry over resources, using a combination of customary law, Sharia (religious) law and formal law, all applied in supplementary and complementary ways to achieve solutions that are suited to the context and strengthened by community buy-in. This chapter offers an in-depth analysis of how mobility contributes to resilience and how social processes can help mitigate conflict to optimise solutions for local communities.

This chapter looks at pastoralist mobility in the context of conflicting interests and the existing mechanisms to manage and resolve such conflicts. The focus is on the Afar people in the border areas of the Afar Regional State in Ethiopia, who have been particularly neglected in terms of development and research (Tesfay & Tafere, 2004). The Afar people have a long history of mobility. They live in a hot, dry and sandy environment, where people survive under challenging circumstances. The resilience of the Afar and their ability to sustain their livelihoods is important. Already, due to the tensions in the region, large refugee camps in Asaita host thousands of Eritrean Afars, who have become dependent on outside support.

Pastoralist mobility is considered instructive when considering migration, for several reasons. First of all, the existing literature on pastoralism provides a number of insights into migration that are specific to the pastoralist context, and yet may reveal dynamics that relate to migration more generally. Secondly, pastoralist mobility gives insights into the dynamics of communities living across borders in different states and the challenges and opportunities that this brings, as well as the conflicts. Conflict is becoming increasingly prevalent in relation to conflicting polities across migration routes. This is also related to the pressures on pastoralism as a sustainable livelihood due to the changing economies that sustain communities (in rural, farming, urban and other communities), as well as the changing contextual realities that impact on these economies (such as population and climate change) (Gina, 2015). Finally, the study of pastoralist mobility is interesting in terms of investigating the relevance of traditional conflict resolution systems specifically designed to deal with conflict-related challenges in the context of migration.

As pastoralist lifestyles are under pressure, and the situation of the Afar is increasingly challenging due to the various developments described in this chapter, a sharp rise in conflict can be expected. While communities struggle to cope, age-old value systems are under pressure. This may lead to an increased divergence of values within

and between communities. Cultural entropy allows the divergence of value systems to be measured. When values systems within and between communities diverge, their organisation and coping strategies may be negatively affected.

The objective of this study is to investigate mobility-related conflict-management as a social process through the lens of cultural entropy. It attempts to depict the relationship between resource shortages, utilisation systems and pastoral mobility. The study also aims to describe the functioning of existing systems of conflict management in Afar communities, to promote viable customary institutions for conflict management and fill the gaps observed in those institutions through formal intervention mechanisms. The main research question is: *What are the main sources of conflict among Afar pastoralists and how are these conflicts managed and resolved?*

The study is based on interviews conducted in the *kebeles*[2] of Hidelu, Finto (both in Awra District) and Garriro (Chifra District), located on the western side of Afar Regional State, bordering Amhara Regional State, in Ethiopia. These places are home to pastoralists and agro-pastoralists, and are all rural places. They were selected for their suitability to investigate conflict management between the mobile Afar and other groups.

In the next section we introduce the concept of cultural entropy, as the lens through which we analyse mobility and conflict management among the Afar people. We then describe the Afar people and the social structure of their communities. The subsequent section looks at mobility and conflict, including mobility as a strategy, the procedures for mobility among the Afar, and the causes of conflict in the study areas. We then consider conflict management in the Afar, including the three-pronged system in place – customary law (*Ma'ada*), Sharia law and the formal law courts and administrative system – and practical examples from the study area, before providing a brief conclusion.

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[2] A *kebele* is the smallest administrative unit of Ethiopia, similar to neighborhood.

Cultural entropy

This study investigates the role of indigenous institutions in the management of conflict among the Afar and between the Afar and others. A clash of values (between cultural groups or between the state and its people) can be measured using the concept of cultural entropy (Stokmans, Van Reisen & Landa, 2018). A high level of cultural entropy (or difference in values) can lead to a decline in the efficiency of systems and organisations. In order to study cultural entropy in any given context, it is necessary to understand the social structures that are relevant to that situation as well as the values that are important to the people within the system of organisation. The level of cultural entropy informs us about the level of convergence of values within the organisation or system. This can include values underpinning mechanisms to manage conflict within or between organisations or elements of a system. High cultural entropy usually results in less effective policies and management systems, and more resources, effort and energy are needed to keep the system or organisation running. In addition, the higher the level of cultural entropy, the more likely a situation will lead to conflict.

The Afar people

This study concerns the Afar people, an ethnic community in the Horn of Africa. The Afar traditionally follow both seasonal and permanent mobility patterns, due to the nature of their pastoral way of life, which is tuned into the natural environment. Pastoral communities in Ethiopia live in the most water and pasture deprived areas, which experience low annual precipitation averaging between 400 to 700 mm. In many areas, droughts occur on a regular basis. As a result, pastoral land use depends on the scarce water supply available from rivers (Sandford & Habtu, 2000).

The Afar people live in and around the borders of three countries: Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti. The Ethiopian Afar possess a wide geographic area, stretching as far as Eritrea in the north, Djibouti in the north east and Somalia in the east. The Afar Regional State, which

is part of this geographical area, is home to an estimated 1.3 million Afar people (Minority Rights Group International, 2018). It covers an area of 108,860 square kilometres (Ilukor, Birner, Tilahun & Getu, 2014). The Afar region serves as Ethiopia's entrance to the Red Sea Port, which has great economic and political importance. It has 5 zones and 32 districts. Chifra District is part of Zone 1 and lies near the base of the eastern escarpment of the Ethiopian highlands. It is bordered by Dubti District in the east, Amhara Region in the west, Zone 4 (including Awra District) in the north and Mille District in the south. The district has two rainy seasons: *karma* (long rain), which occurs from mid-July to mid-October, and *sugum* (short rain), from March to the end of April.

Unfortunately, the Afar people have been denied their right to unrestricted mobility by the various political regimes in Ethiopia. The imperial regime of Haile Selassie (1930 to 1974 instituted the Awash Basin Authority and greatly restricted the mobility of the indigenous Afar community and their access to resources. The Dergu regime (1974 to 1987) forced the centuries-old system of rule in the region (the sultanate) into decline and ordered the communities to institute pastoralist associations and become sedentary. Under this regime, the Afar were ordered to graze their livestock in 'protected tribal areas' allotted by the regime. The Government of Ethiopia, led by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (incumbent since 1991), has pursued the large-scale land dispossession of locals through the Tandahoo Sugar Plantation Scheme. The Tandahoo Sugar Factory, the largest in East Africa, is established in Zone 1 along the Awash River Basin. It has restricted pastoralist mobility and created range land and water insufficiency problems, which are not balanced by its returns to the local community (Alifnur, 2019).

In recent times, changes in natural conditions have brought about a shift in the patterns of mobility of Afar pastoralists in a way that has triggered conflict. However, it is important to remember that conflict has existed in all periods of human history. Archaeological findings, anthropological interpretations and historical records indicate that people have been engaged in armed conflict since prehistoric times

(Mohammed, 2001). The history of pastoral societies is particularly tied to social conflict, with both positive and negative outcomes. Although the scope and frequency varies, conflicts are common in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas (Ministry of Peace, 2019). When it comes to Ethiopia, this is no different, as pastoral conflicts have struck Ethiopia in different forms for centuries and, thus, are not a new phenomenon. However, during the past two decades the country has experienced an increase in the frequency and intensity of violence in inter-ethnic conflicts (Løber & Worm, 2015).

Ethiopia's eastern peripheral lowlands are home to the majority of the country's pastoral and agro-pastoral communities, and the scene of many local conflicts. Conflicts also occur in different corners of the region; for instance, in the border areas between Afar and Amhara; Afar and Argoba; Afar and Tigray; Afar and Karrayu Oromo, as well as Afar and Issa Somalis. All of these communities have their own way of handling conflict (Ministry of Peace, 2019).

Social organisation

The Afar people have a structured system of social organisation and kin-based networks. They combine traditional and formal systems of administration in which both channels are used to regulate members' day-to-day activities, including conflict. In most cases, formal government organisations are of secondary importance in solving conflict. Afar communities are collectivist in their way of living, characterised by polygamous marriages and an extended family structure. Central to the social organisation of Afar communities is descent and familial ties. The Afar have a patrilineal descent system, based on which a person belongs to a particular clan (*mela*). Afar settlements are composed of a mixture of clans, although each locality is identified with a major clan and sub-clans (or relationships through marriage). This makes it easier to organise social, economic and political support in times of crisis (Tesfay & Tafere, 2004).

The social organisation of the study communities is hierarchical, consisting of the supreme clan, clans (*mela*), lineage groups (*afa*), extended family (*dahle*) and household units (*buraa*).[3]
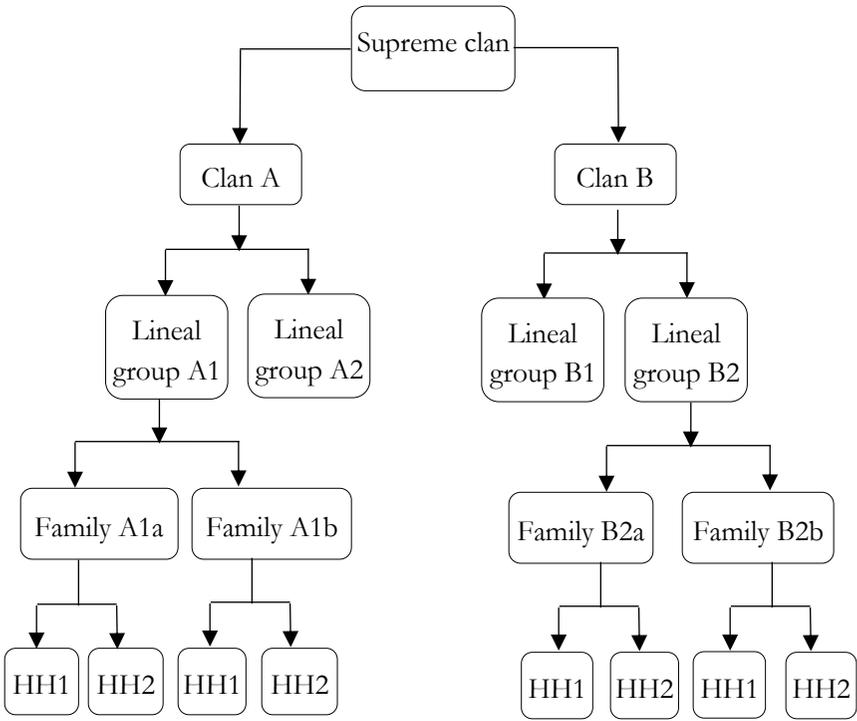
Figure 5.1. Social organisation of Afar communities
Source: Alifnur (2019)

For example, in Hiddelu (Kalkalsa), a clan called, Alla'ayto-goharto is dominant and extends far into Gulina and Teru districts. Other clans include Hunda-humedo, Kadda-humedo, Ali-gayya, Lau-ala'aytoo and Asabboora. However, in Garriro the structure is formed from the supreme clan called Arabta and eight clans with their own categories: Haddoda, Bedihitto, Adanto, Utbantto, Namelalite, Bosali, Nessar and Bulokto. In the third community, Finto, the clans consist of Hadarmu, Hayssantu, Muhto, La'ado, Gaminto, Koborto, and Andwolwalo. The clan-based structure consists of individual clan

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[3] A family refers to the extended family composed of one or more households; a household refers to individual households, which together form a family.

leaders (*kidu-abba*), collective decision makers (*makabantoo*) and an enforcer (*fie'ma aba*). The latter is an adult or youth concerned with managing the internal (domestic) affairs of a neighbourhood or *kebele*.

In Afar communities different clans or pastoralist groups meet to make arrangements for the use of resources, travel patterns and any other issues related to the group. However, these arrangements are not static and may need to be adapted as locations shift and new realities unfold. Mobility can trigger conflict, especially when situations change.

Mobility and conflict in Afar Regional State

Mobility as a strategy

Mobility is sometimes considered an adaptive strategy, as it allows pastoralists to adjust to changing weather conditions without permanently departing from a certain territory. It is fundamental to pastoralists' strategies for coping with unpredictable rainfall, livestock diseases, and scarce natural resources (Van den Akker, Berdel & Murele, 2015). Mobility also allows people to simultaneously exploit more than one fixed environment during climate change. In relation to the Afar people, the existence of well-patterned mobility enables the Afar to make a living without over utilising and destroying environmental resources and disrupting the co-existence of pastoralism, agro-pastoralism and farming, which have taken place side-by-side for centuries (Getachew, 2004).

In this way, pastoral livelihoods are the outgrowth of resource scarcity, such as water and pasture scarcity. The unpredictability and uneven distribution of rain across the area inhabited by the Afar pushes pastoralists in the study sites towards alternative zones. The short supply of water compels pastoralists to take their livestock to an area located hundreds of kilometres away from their residence. Mobility allows pastoralists to cope with the problem of finding enough water and pasture. According to Tesfay and Tafere (2004), mobility has enabled the northern Afar pastoralists to use the spatially variable rangelands for a limited period of time. Likewise, Getachew

(2004) highlighted that the seasonal migration of the Afar makes their land use, settlement and herd management highly efficient and well-organised enabling them to make a living without over-utilising or destroying environmental resources. Afar pastoralists also use mobility as a mechanism to avoid herd diseases and endangering conditions. A group of herders may leave a particular rangeland, not only due to depleted feed and water, but also due to the presence of biting flies, mosquito, ticks and predators (Tesfay & Tafere, 2004).

Mobility can, therefore, be understood as a:

- strategy to optimise the livelihoods of pastoralist communities
- strategy to cope with drought and extreme weather
- mechanism for efficient resource utilisation
- strategy to optimise herd safety

As well as having many positive benefits for the Afar, mobility also has negative consequences. Seasonal mobility and the constant search for adequate pasture and water make it difficult to access health care, education, water, electricity, and financial assistance. Alemayehu (2016) noted that mobility is a major obstacle to the delivery of education in pastoralist districts. The long journeys that pastoralists make can also claim the life of the pastoralists and their livestock. In addition, mobility can create conflict. Gakuria (2013) stated that disputes flare up between farmers and pastoralists and among pastoralist themselves, as migrating camel and livestock herds sometimes graze on farmers' lands or other livestock herders' grazing lands and use their water points. Farmer-herder conflict is an enduring feature of social life in the Sudano-Sahelian Zone, the arid belt that stretches across Africa from Guinea on the Atlantic Ocean to Somalia on the Red Sea. So, understanding farmer-herder relations is key to conflict management and resolution (Turner, Ayantude, Patterson & Patterson, 2004).

Procedures for mobility

The mobility patterns of Afar pastoralists are clear; each clan member knows the sites it can use, how long they can stay and when they should return to the main settlement. Even the distances covered are well known (Getachew, 2004). The mobility of the Afar involves certain procedures that are deeply embedded in and supported by cultural values and social systems.

Mobility is supported by the exchange of information and forming extended relationships with different groups. In the case of the Afar, exchanging information (*xaggu*) is often tied to mobility, as local people deliberately move to seek or deliver information about a distant situation. According to Tesfay and Tafere (2004), a team of people monitor the state of the rangeland before allowing herds to use it and guide the movement of people and herds in the Afar region. Information-sharing and distribution across geographies is, therefore, a vital element to decisions regarding mobility patterns. The scouting team is locally called *eddo*, which literally translates to 'range scouts'. The team has to get the consent of the host community to use enclosures (*deso*), which can be allowed only after negotiation. There are also critical pre-conditions that outsiders should respect including, for instance, access may only be allowed for lactating and young stock; all authorised animals must be free from any apparent disease; and access is only allowed for a pre-defined period of time.

Social organisation in the organisation of mobility is critical. Every clan or a specific pastoral territory has a representative responsible for managing the affairs of travellers (mostly his kin groups) and negotiating with people in the area of destination on behalf of the people who accompany him on the journey (Tesfay & Tafere, 2004). When there is a problem managing movement, conflict arises. In addition, other emerging factors may create conflict. Meier, Bond and Bond (2007) noted that the causes and dynamics of conflict in Ethiopia are changing, due to a number of factors, including environmental degradation, shrinking grazing land, climate change and political instability. Conflict can sometimes be attributed to physical mobility in search of scarce resources. However, all forms of

conflict cannot be interpreted as resulting from pastoralist mobility. According to Alemayehu (2016), at times mobility triggers conflict, at other times conflict causes mobility. When there is no traceable kinship between the migrating group and the host community, the likelihood of conflict is higher.

Causes of conflict

Conflict occurs for various reasons. But the view that pastoral communities are traditionally warlike and aggressive does not hold true. Conflict not only happens in these communities, but generally tends to happen in places where resources are scarce and not shared fairly; where there is little or no communication between the groups in the conflict; where the groups have incorrect ideas and beliefs about each other; where there are unresolved grievances from the past; and where power is unevenly distributed (Swanstrom & Weismann, 2005). However, according to Bekele (2010), resource-centred orthodoxies about the reason for conflict are being challenging. It is now widely argued that contemporary conflicts among East African pastoralists are driven not only by the scarcity of pastoral resources (which was prominent in the past), but also by competition over new sources of revenue (e.g., government funds) and control of market centres and strategic places. Thus, he asserts that resource-centred solutions are unlikely to bring sustained peace in these areas.

In pastoralist communities in Ethiopia, major causes of conflict include competition for pasture and water, among other things (Ministry of Peace, 2019). Both intra and inter-clan conflicts occur in the lowlands during times when water and grazing resources are scarce. As the population is growing and disasters are become more frequent and intense, resources have become even scarcer and traditional coping mechanisms have been pushed to the breaking point, giving rise to conflict (Van den Akker, Berdel & Murele, 2015). For instance, in 2000, three major conflicts occurred between the main pastoral groups in Borena lowlands: Borena versus Garri, Merehan versus Digodi, and Digodi versus Borena. These conflicts,

in combination with severe drought, resulted in the death and displacement of hundreds of people (Dejene & Abdurahman, 2001).

In the Afar Regional State and its surroundings, differences in value systems exist between Afar pastoralists and others. But such differences were not primary sources of conflict in the past. Rather, past conflicts occurred for two basic reasons: encroachment on a living space (without agreement) and use of scarce resources (without consent). For instance, the wide-scale westward expansion of Issa Somalis in the past decades has led to recurrent bloodshed between the two ethnic groups, most notably in 2002 (Bekele, 2010). The invasion of the Afar boundary by Tigrigna speaking ethnic groups from the northwest is another example of territorial conflict. Tesfay and Tafere (2004) elaborated that in the period prior to the Italian occupation of the region, the Afar experienced a series of raids from Tigrayan highlanders, particularly from the Wajirat and Raya communities, which culminated in considerable loss of life and property on both sides. A report by the Government of Ethiopia, Ministry of Peace found that the clan system can be "both a stabilizing and destabilizing force" (Ministry of Peace, 2019, p. 38). The report identifies that the clan system can be regarded as 'conflict multiplier', as its communal nature can draw the entire clan into a conflict. Tesfay and Tafere (2004) also added that socio-cultural factors, such as the quest for social honour and prestige, are important causes of conflict, although they concluded that economic ones were more compelling in the above case. The next sections look more closely at mobility and conflict in the study area to identify the sources of conflict and the mechanisms for managing and resolving conflict.

The case of Kalkalsa, Finto and Garriro

In the following sections we zoom in on the reality in the Afar region, with specific reference to three *kebeles*: Hidelu, Finto and Garriro. Hidelu is located within Awra district and in Hidelu, Kalkalsa villagers are found. The people of Garriro (Chifra District) live on the outskirts of Chifra town. The Kalkalsa and Finto (both in Awra District) live a

pastoral lifestyle, while the people in Garriro are agro-pastoralists. The aim of the study was to investigate how conflicts evolved and are managed within and between these groups. Before looking at conflict management in the study area, this section looks at resource ownership and use; social interactions; mobility patterns; and sources of conflict in the study area.

Resource ownership and use

The key resources of the Afar are livestock, land, water and pasture. The resource base declines from time to time due to drought. Key bases are seriously affected, despite efforts by the government and non-government organisations to rehabilitate the region. Due to this, conflict emerges between groups over resources.

As far as water is concerned, the pastoralists in Kalkalsa, Finto and Garriro mainly rely on rivers to water their animals. The people of Hiddelu (Kalkalsa) and Finto mostly use the Awra River for their camels, whereas the people of Garriro, who live on the fringe of Chifra town, use Mille River. Abdulatife and Ebro (2015) list the major sources of water for livestock in Chifra District (where the Garriro live) as permanent rivers, temporary rivers, ponds and traditional wells. They also report that the sources of water for animals and humans are the same, which means that the water may not be clean. In addition to such rivers, alternative man-made water reserves, which are mostly seasonal, are also used by the communities. These include, hand dug wells, shallow ponds and deep wells. In the communities, access to such reserves is open to all clan members. There are critical water shortages during the dry season.

In relation to land resources, the regional land law dictates that all forms of non-grazing land is under the direct control of the state, while grazing land can be used by various clans. Accordingly, each clan exclusively owns a patch of territory. The clan land and its borders are clearly known to clan members, as well as members of neighbouring clans. The tenure over clan land is communal and each clan member has the right to use the land and resources of its clan (Getachew, 2004).

Unlike in Hiddelu (Kalkalsa) and Finto, where the people are purely pastoralists, the people in Garriro are agro-pastoralists. As a result, arable land is a critical resource among Garriro residents. Arable land and irrigable land are distributed to locals to produce grain alongside cattle keeping, but rangeland is commonly owned.

Many rangeland pasture reserves are exhausted for several months of the year. For instance, the reserves in Finto are not sufficient to feed animals for more than three months a year. In this respect, Kalkalsa is in relatively better condition, but is still deteriorating. Due to this, pastoralists have moved into Yallo, Teru, Kelo and Gewane. Pasture reserves in Garriro also persist longer than in Finto. As an alternative to migration, the agro-pastoralists in Garriro supplement animal feeding with crop residue and purchased fodder. In an extensive study Abdulatife and Ebro (2015) concluded that pastoral-based livestock is still the major source of income, but that the communities perceive that rangelands have deteriorated in the last two decades. They conclude that there is a need to restore rangelands. Gina (2015) emphasises that participatory approaches involving the farmers are needed for such restoration to be successful and to ensure that efforts are based on cultural values and customs relevant to the communities and in line with their ability to maintain their rangelands.

Social interaction
The social interaction of pastoralist communities is generally kinship based. But beyond kinship ties, the various clans and lineage groups in the three selected *kebeles* also engage in a complex and dynamic process of cooperation, conflict resolution and consensus building, as well as confrontation. There are also institutions aimed at strengthen community cooperation, which provide *zakat* (charity/social support) and other informal forms of support. *Zakat* is a traditional form of social protection arranged within the community. According to the Pastoral Forum Ethiopia, the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction and the Development Fund (PFE, IIRR & DF, 2010), support in the form of *zakat* is provided to people who have lost animals due to epidemics or raids.

Given the mobile nature of communities in the study areas, contacts are created with other pastoralists or non-pastoralist communities. Communities interact with ethnic and tribal groups beyond their *kebeles*. For instance, pastoral communities in Garriro interact with neighbouring Amhara ethnic groups. They exchange livestock for certain food stuffs, including a local leaf used for leisure (*khat*) in the markets.

Most of the time, interactions among members of the same clan are built on the principles of trust, mutual cooperation and solidarity. Pankhurst and Piguet (2004) reported that historical relations between highlanders and lowlanders in the region have been characterised by periods of conflict as well as coexistence. Interrelations between highland agriculturalists and lowland pastoralists have involved some complementarity, notably in the exchange of livestock for grain, particularly in times of hardship.

Solidarity is expressed through collective resource and information sharing. It may also take the form of sharing punishments when one member of a clan is punished for the negative acts he commits towards non-members. According to Bekele (2010), any incoming compensation is also shared among clan members. Indeed, the principle of collective (as opposed to individual) guilt and responsibility for infractions against outsiders forms the basis for solidarity within Afar clans. However, there are occasional feuds and bloodshed among members of the same clan. Beyond this, inter-ethnic confrontations and conflict are also observed at the western border of the Afar region.

Mobility patterns
From Kalkalsa and Finto, pastoralists move northward to the districts of Yallo, Teru and Megale during periods of difficulty. In rare cases, they march as far south as Gewane. On the other hand, the communities of Garriro move westwards to Amhara region and eastwards to the districts of Asaita, Afambo and Detbahir.

The pastoralists move in groups belonging to the same clan or neighbourhood. The movement of pastoralist from Finto and Kalkalsa does not involve the entire family, except in rare cases. Usually adult men representing each household take the livestock together and stay away for a number of months. The elderly, women and children remain at home to look after the house and manage the domestic property.

The time to start moving for Kalkalsa and Finto pastoralists is December. The main drive behind this mobility is to seek pasture for animals. They stay in the destination for nearly half a year (December to May). However, some return in early April when there is a short shower of rain (*sugum*). The period from May to early June is the most difficult season for Afar pastoralists, not only because of the demand for pasture, but also because of the shortage of water, as it is a time when wells are dry. If *sugum* rain is delayed, the pasture deteriorates and animal fodder is endangered. This pushes communities to relocate to the aforementioned destinations.

Unlike the pastoralists in Kalkalsa and Finto, agro-pastoralists in Garriro use supplementary feed for their animals, but they are not relieved of mobility. The months immediately before the main rainy season (*karma*) are especially times of forced mobility. So, a delay in *karma* rain is a push factor for movement in Garriro. The same is true for other areas. For example, a lack of rain in 2016 due to El Nino had a drastic effect on the study communities, resulting in a massive exodus and change of conventional migration routes. For instance, the pastoralists in Finto do not regularly use the Gewane route, except in extreme circumstances. The shores of the Awash River hold pasture reserves. However, the security problems in Awash valley (which is a hub for Afar and non-Afar groups alike, including the Issa Somali clan) greatly limits mobility in this area. As a result, the people of Garriro avoid taking the route down to Zone 3.

People are mobile in cases where there is temporal and spatial variability in the distribution of resources. When the resources in a certain area are drained, communities drift into other areas and return

when the original place has recovered in terms of pasture. Unlike forced dislocation, pastoralist mobility is arranged following certain procedures and is not random, as an outsider may think. Mobility in the context of Finto and Kalkalsa pastoralists and Garriro agro-pastoralists is a planned operation. They exploit kinship networks and religious-political connections to arrange their mobility routes. For instance, prominent sheikhs (Islamic religious scholars, acting as community representatives) in neighbouring Habru District are often consulted by the Garriro agro-pastoralists before moving into the area.

The time and direction of mobility, as well as the duration of stay, is determined by the availability of water and pasture. In periods of *karma* (the long rainy season), people in all sites remain in their place of residence, because animal fodder and water are accessible. Conversely, during the dry seasons they move to other areas and stay for a long time until times of abundance. The movement of Afar, Somali and South Omo pastoralists is dictated by the seasonal flooding of the Awash, Wabi-Shabelle, Ganalle and Omo rivers, which threatens lives and livelihoods (PFE, IIRR & DF, 2010). The customary, culturally-embedded practices in place within and between the communities are critical for the management of mobility. As the Afar people have a tradition of arranging their movement before moving from one area to another, conflict happens only when such arrangements fail to materialise as planned.

Sources of conflict

Inter-group conflict arises between Afar lowlanders and pockets of neighbouring Amhara communities in the highlands due to cattle raiding and the use of water and land. The most common cause of conflict is rivalry over the use of resources. The major resources are range land and water, whose availability is insufficient. Awra and Mille rivers are of vital significance in the region and beyond. They are used for watering animals and irrigation activities. Access to land and water are a source of conflict in Garriro.

Conventional mobility increased during the El Nino-related drought in 2016, which prompted the massive movement of pastoralists. Mobility is a triggering factor for social conflict. During the dry season, communities move in different directions and over different distances, as far as Habru, Worebabu, Teru, Yallo, Asayta and Gewane. In the process they can come into conflict with other clans, especially when they enter a *deso* (enclosure).

According to the research, cattle raiding caused conflict between clans from Hiddelu and Finto *kebeles* at the end of 2015. At that time, pastoralists from Hiddelu took one camel from their counterparts in Finto. In response, members of Finto took two camels belonging to Hiddelu pastoralists. The conflict escalated until it became out of the control of the clan leaders, pointing to the important role such leaders can play in conflict resolution based on values shared and accepted within the communities.

In addition, a conflict over access to water broke out between the *kebeles* of Chifra District and the Sodoma area of Habru District (the Sodoma are ethnic Amhara and largely Muslim). Chifra belongs to the Afar, whereas Habru District belongs to the Amhara. The cause of this conflict was the water sources of Zemzem and Akela in Sodoma, over which the Afar agro-pastoralists are denied access by the host community. The Afar pastoralists claim that the water source of Akela is meant for both them and the Amharas, as the area is located near the border. But the Sodoma herders do not accept this claim and want exclusive control of this water.

Another case of conflict was reported in the vicinity of Garriro between the Afars and Gafera herdsmen. Gafera is in Habru District in North Wollo Zone, where there is a water source developed by government. This water source has different names for each group. The Afars call it Afar Ela, which indicates their affiliation to this water source. But the Gafera assume they have sole possession. This ownership disagreement creates continuous conflict.

Perceived scarcity of land can also cause conflict, and may be the result of multiple factors such as land degradation and demographic, economic and political factors, causing population pressure and inequitable distribution of land. In Awra District (where Kalkalsa and Finto are found), village-level *kebeles* are marred by internal conflict over the boundary of arable land. Sometimes this conflict spills over to neighbouring *kebeles*, because of kinship links.

Unlike water-based conflict, land-based conflict on the borders of Afar and Amhara at Chifra has a long history. A place called Shul-gora is a disputed territory among the two. Reportedly, conflict occurred in July 2016 and continued up to November 2016 when it was time to harvest crops. According to information received, the conflict took the lives of 6 and wounded 14 Afar people. It also claimed the lives and wounded an unknown number of Sodoma Amhara.

Pasture is also a cause of conflict especially when there is drought. Most of the time, conflict associated with the movement of pastoralists occurs when there is a *deso* (enclosure) or where hatred has existed between the Afar and the people in the place of destination for a long time. The pastoralists in Finto face conflict during their movement into other areas. The agro-pastoralists of Garriro also move to neighbouring Amhara territory in times of drought with or without the consent of the host community. When there is open consent, the parties usually agree to trade animal fodder (hay and other types of dry grass) among themselves. On such occasions, reciprocal arrangements are created. There is a sense of trust and confidence among the Afar pastoralists in Chifra and Amhara herders from Worebabu District. This situation has enabled the Afar agro-pastoralists to cross the boundaries with neighbouring people even without open consent from the host. However, the research also found that the Gafera now prohibit the Afar from sharing pasture. This is a potential new source of conflict. When the situation becomes tense, it can become life-threatening resulting in mutual attacks in the areas, cattle raiding and slaughter.

Last, but not least, there are *kebeles* from Awra District, which are bordered by North Wollo in Amhara Region, which is known for sporadic conflict. The conflict includes Deraytu, Hidda and Ali-marih-masgid. Transgression of the boundary during drought is the cause of the conflict in these areas. This conflict has great potential to spill over into other *kebeles* if not successfully resolved.

The frequency and intensity of conflict has increased in recent times due to the recurrent droughts facing the Afar people. The pattern of using land, water, and other natural resources among the neighbouring agro-pastoral communities follows a different form than that used by the Afar. Thus, conflicts emerge when the two groups collide over use of the same resources.

Conflict management in Afar Regional State

Conflict management involves mechanisms designed to ensure monitoring and evaluation of the conflict, and the behaviour and compliance of parties to the conflict, with resolutions on ending violence, demobilisation and disarmament, or making concessions and remedies, vital in easing tensions (Akpuru-Aja, 2007). The process assumes that there is some convergence of cultural values. If there is no convergence, the level of cultural entropy becomes too high and conflict management breaks down, making conflict inevitable. The process of conflict management includes techniques such as negotiation, mediation and arbitration. The procedures vary in each case, but all of them rely on social processes, as people need to get along with one another and subscribe to the cultural values involved in the process. This section looks at the mechanisms and institutions for conflict management in the Afar region, in general, and the study areas, in particular.

Customary, Sharia and formal law
A report on the Pastoralist Community Development Program (Ministry of Peace, 2019) revealed that pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities use various mechanisms to resolve conflict. As well as traditional/customary mechanisms, in which community leaders, clan leaders and prominent community members administer, manage, and

mediate conflicts between different groups and individuals, the Afar also use modern institutions, such as local courts, as well as religious institutions, such as Sharia courts. The three systems for conflict management in the study sites – customary institutions, formal courts of law and administrative agents, and Sharia courts – are both supplementary and complementary, as envisioned in Article 78 (5) of the Ethiopian Constitution. This article gives regional state councils the power to establish or give official recognition to religious and customary courts to adjudicate disputes (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1995). In accordance with this provision, the Afar religious courts have branches in different parts of the region and Afar customary institutions are functional in every district of the region.

The actors involved and the techniques used to manage or resolve conflict vary in each case, although they sometimes overlap. When law courts and administrative agents are used, the actors are professional jurists who make up tribunals or other legal bodies to hear cases and provide judgements. *Kebele* administrators, district or regional leaders, social workers, members of the police force, peace committees, and the military are responsible for applying and executing the court rulings. In the case of customary institutions, the actors are clan leaders (*kidu aba*), tribal councils (*makabons*) and executives (*fie'ma aba*) and elders. In the Sharia courts, the actors are religious judges (*qadi*).

In the Afar region and districts, the administrative political elites have excessive power to act, but the normative tradition at the societal level restricts them from applying their decisive power, except in some politicised conflicts. In addition, actors in customary institutions have a wide mandate. The *kidu aba*, *makabons*, and elders have the mandate to use customary law (*mada'a*) to negotiate, decide cases and punish offenders, as well as recommend the timing of formal interventions. The formal administrative agents prefer to play a supportive role to customary establishments and Sharia courts, rather than a lead role. Conflicts among close friends or neighbours, especially over property inheritance, marriage, divorce and family, are within the jurisdiction

of Sharia courts. Customary institutions have persisted over generations and are fundamental for maintaining peace and resolving conflict. They mostly deal with intra-clan or intra-group conflicts. They usually address conflicts over such issues as natural resource use, communal property sharing, cattle raiding, revenge killing and *absuma*[4] marriage. Furthermore, political conflicts of an inter-ethnic or inter-group nature fall within the jurisdiction of the formal legal and administrative agents. The process of conflict management through customary channels follows negotiation, mediation and arbitration techniques. This strengthens a value-based order, rather than an order imposed from above, which might be more dysfunction due to its distance from the people on the ground, which can lead to a high level of cultural entropy. As a result of this distance, and the related cultural entropy, the political structures may have more difficulty in imposing their policies on the ground.

In relation to traditional conflict resolution, there are three forms of assemblies used to manage conflict in the Afar region: *malbo*, *detto* and *billa-ara* (Getachew, 2004). *Malbo* is devoted to mitigating local conflict cases and *gereb*, a jointly established institution, is responsible for alleviating inter-ethnic disputes. In both *malbo* and *gereb* assemblies, a group of prominent elders are involved in a chain of negotiations and arbitration processes to resolve conflicts in an orderly and transparent manner (Tafere, 2006). The third traditional mechanism is *billa-ara*, which is defined by Getachew (2004) as a process of peace making between two different Afar clans in which members of the traditional jury who are elders selected from different clans, other than the clans involved in the conflict, engage in mediation. This process works because of the respect afforded to elders in the community.

In addition, in some place, such as Argoba Special Woreda (district), the government has established peace and security committees

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[4]*Absuma* marriage is a customary arranged marriage practice of the Afar people. It is a cross-cousin marriage in which a close male relation claims the right to marry a girl by virtue of his blood ties to her. The girl is traditionally not expected to turn down a marriage request from a close male relative.

including elders, clan leaders, religious leaders, and the district administrator. This committee handles cases that are beyond the ability of local elders to manage. For these systems to work, it is necessary for the members of the communities to share a minimum number of common values concerning the relevance of such mechanisms. Peace committees have also been established to manage conflict between the Afar and Amhara, but there are no joint customary institutions like *gereb*.

Conflict management in the study areas

The balance between the three systems (customary institutions, Sharia courts and formal law courts/administration) is recognised by those involved and, hence, the actors cooperate and generally attempt to contribute to social processes aiming to alleviate conflict without relinquishing the authority vested in them. For instance, the land-based conflict in Garriro in 2016 required religious blessings, cultural feasts, negotiation and formal court decisions. After several weeks of bloodshed, initial efforts were made by the peace committee in the conflicting areas to communicate the recent developments regarding the conflict. This committee is assigned and assisted by the administration agents in the *kebele*. The peace committee in Garriro initiated a peace dialogue, in which community representatives (elders) from both sides met face to face. Accordingly, elders of the Afar went to Sodoma, where they met the sheiks and elders of Sodoma Amhara in order to avoid conflict. In the long process of dialogue, the joint parties reviewed the details of what had happened on each side during the conflict, including the acts of instigators, violations of previous pacts, and the damage suffered. After dealing with all of this, the two sides arrived at a consensus that one of the Afar groups would pay compensation to the Sodoma Amhara, who lost hundreds of cattle during the raids. Conversely, the Sodoma agreed to avoid any retaliatory action in the future. In the meantime, the political administrative body of Garriro *kebele* decided to pay the compensation on behalf of the clan (involved in perpetration) by selling the wheat flour that was supposed to be distributed to them in the form of aid. In this way the fractured relations were mended, at least for the time being.

In order to create community buy-in, the two negotiating teams held a joint community-level briefing and issued orders for their respective community members to respect the pact. This was done at a feast prepared by the two communities. In the case of the Afar, a body called the *fie'ma aba* ensures that the agreed pact is maintained in its domain. It is responsible for preventing young members from violating the pact by regularly patrolling the area. It is vested with the power to punish individuals who deviate from community norms and agreements. In this sense, it is a regulatory body, with enforcement powers, while at the same time calming and redirecting members towards the normative framework enabling peace.

Despite these efforts, there are the occasional raids between conflicting parties and the truce between the Afar and the Sodoma Amhara has been violated, leading to direct conflict and loss of life. Such a situation may escalate beyond the control of clan leaders and elders. As a restraining move, government authorities may become involved and enforce peace through the military, which can then ban disputed areas to both conflicting groups. However, the involvement of the military remains restricted and when the military leave the potential for conflict remains. Before the Ethio-Eritrean war, the military were camped in the Afar region, near the conflicting zone. Later on, conflict between the Afar and the Sodoma arose when the military evacuated the area. After that there is another occasion of military intervention but not lasting. Ironically, the current military force camped at Jara is facing suspicion from both communities to the conflict, who complain that the military is taking sides.

As well as this specific example, there appear to be some differences as to when the government authorities should act. Some prefer the government to intervene, even if clan leaders do not necessarily invite such intervention. They urge government authorities to act to successfully control conflicts. While some may admire the military interventions in the past for the way they have handled situations when conflict has escalated, others hold the view that the government should intervene only at the invitation of clan leaders.

Whatever intervention takes place, conflicts may be diffused, but may not be completely resolved. Regular attempts at making concessions or cooling down tensions are made by representatives of the conflicting parties, particularly elders. The common trend in conflicts is to control the so-called *mishig* (fortification). The *mishig* is a natural terrain used in the disputed territory by the Sodoma Amhara to defend themselves from incoming Afar agro-pastoralists. Previously, the Afar were able to control this fortification when the Sodoma were not alert. This made it difficult for Sodoma farmers nearby to harvest their crops. As a result, the Sodoma mobilised their members and deployed a portion of the community to stand guard, while others harvested the crop. Meanwhile, the Afar agro-pastoralists left the area. When the Afar leave, the Sodoma will not move beyond the fortification deeper into Afar territory, because their sheikhs have firmly warned them not to do. Despite these confrontations and the loss of life and property suffered, the communities have the habit of temporary consensus building and agreement through their tribal representatives.

Such cooperation is also available in the resolution of conflicts that occur among people of the same clan and the mostly small disputes are quickly resolved. The main actors include elders, clan leaders and *fie'ma aba*. Inter-ethnic conflicts are also sometimes dealt with by indigenous institutions. But, when the traditional leaders fail to successfully control the conflict, formal administrative agents intervene. An example is a case of camel raiding in a dispute between clans in Finto and Hiddelu. To handle the case, the district administration became involved after earlier arrangements through clan leaders did not succeed. Its way of involvement, however, was not a legal proceeding. Instead, it conducted mediation by which an agreement was reached to give the Finto 5 goats, 1 camel and Ethiopian Birr (ETB) as compensation. In addition to the aforementioned techniques of negotiation and mediation, arbitration is also used. For instance, it is applied in *malbo* assemblies (council of clan leaders). A good example of this is one that happened between

two Afar clans in Chifra: one from Garriro and the other named Doda from nearby Ta'eboyarea.

When people of different clans enter into conflict, the *makabons* (neutral decision makers drawn from a clan or clans not taking part in the conflict) are often called upon to meet the leaders of the conflicting clans. In the meeting, cultural and religious rituals are performed including the slaughtering animals. Perpetrators are interrogated and their confessions accepted in front of the *makabons*. An oath is taken by injured clan members not to retaliate against the perpetrators until the investigation is finished and decisions made. Once decisions are made after investigation of the matter, punishments are imposed and compensation rendered, together with feasts and rituals. Compensation is given in kind (by giving animals) or in cash, as per Afar customary law. According to informants, the customary law specifies the compensation for human life as 100 camels (Alifnur, 2019).

Customary mechanisms are preferred by the indigenous people in the area. They have relative advantages in terms of responding to crises quickly and reducing the resources used for court cases, thereby saving scarce public funds. In addition, they are seen as more accessible, affordable and fair (Abebe, 2001). They are also advantageous in that they do not seek mere restitution and the upholding of injustice. They simultaneously strive to avert ruptures in social relations and create conditions conducive to peace in the future (Tesfay & Tafere, 2004). To take advantage of both methods, government institutions are engaging with indigenous systems. This institutional support from modern legal set-ups, along with the internal integrity of the indigenous institutions themselves, has contributed to the effectiveness and continued strength of the latter (Tafere, 2006). Proactive engagement by the government is also desirable, such as the activation of a joint peace committee, demarcation of the territory through judicial processes or the initiation of a development project on a disputed area that will benefit both parties, as well as managing day-to-day security by dispatching the police or military.

Conclusion

This chapter asked: *What are the main sources of conflict among Afar pastoralists and how are these conflicts managed and resolved?* For the pastoral and agro-pastoral communities in the Afar Regional State, mobility is a strategy for efficient resource utilisation, optimising livelihoods, coping with drought conditions, and optimising herd safety and there are customary procedures in place for mobility. Tafere argues that "The most important internal factor is that the indigenous institutions acquire their status of authority and power from Afar normative frameworks" (Tafere, 2004, p. 37). This study concurs with the view that mobility is a social process and, therefore, sometimes associated with conflict. Social procedures are followed among the Afar people to engage with the different parties to prevent conflict. However, sometimes mobility causes conflict, and conflict can cause mobility.

The direction and distance covered during mobility varies and the duration of stay depends on the availability of water and pasture. This study found that the main source of conflict among Afar pastoralists is rivalry over resource use. It also found that cultural entropy leads to conflict as values clash with challenges. These challenges emerge due to environmental pressure and climate change, scarce resources such as land and water, competing claims over these resources, and increasing population pressure and the pressure of different lifestyles trying to operate in the same environment. While cultural entropy exists between groups (Amhara peasants and Afar pastoralists), it was not found to be a main source of conflict in the region.

If conflict does arise, there are social structures in place to manage and resolve conflict in the Afar region. In order to mitigate conflict, social groups are structured to perform traditional and tested procedures to involve parties and to create possibilities for negotiation and conflict resolution. There are three systems or institutions that work together to manage and resolve conflict in the Afar region: customary institutions, the Sharia courts, and legal courts. Sharia courts and judicial process are formal arrangements, while the customary ones are informal. The parties involved in each

case are different, or they may come together at some point, depending on the complexity of conflict. Informal channels based on customary institutions are seen as most effective by the Afar people. They are timely in responding to crises, require less resources than formal court cases, and seen as more affordable and fair. They follow negotiation, mediation and arbitration techniques and are easily accessible by the people. For all these reasons, they enjoy buy-in and consensus from the local people.

While cultural entropy was not necessarily found to be a major factor causing conflict, it certainly played a part in managing conflict: where value systems were aligned between customary, religious and formal systems, or at least complemented and supported by each other, conflict was more likely to be managed or resolved. The involvement of leaders in customary forms of conflict management strengthens common values among communities. This strengthens convergence (decreases cultural entropy) and buy-in and, therefore, helps prevent full-blown conflict. When conflict breaks out despite these efforts and can no longer be contained, government institutions need to come in to restore calm, but formal institutions still rely on local efforts to create a renewed basis for social cohesion in the areas. The study shows that although cultural entropy can be high between conflicting groups (e.g., the Afar lowlanders and Amhara highlands), customary forms of conflict management tend to find convergence between value systems and are, therefore, more likely to lead to a solution. When cultural entropy is too high for customary systems to manage, the local sharia courts, formal courts and government administration (including police and federal military) can be useful in imposing a situation when conflict escalates out of hand, but only when there is buy-in and support from the customary actors. While such imposition may be needed at times to avoid conflict, it cannot deliver sustainable peace and is not cost effective. Therefore, the evidence of this research points to the importance of traditional mechanisms of leadership and problem-solving at the local level in maintaining peace within and between communities in the Afar.

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