

Indigenous Religious Institution and Conflict Management in Northern Shewa of Oromia, Ethiopia

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Abstract: This article explored how a local religious institution operated to manage conflict among individuals in Ethiopia. The name of the institution is *qaalluu*¹ which is a word used in the Oromo language belonging to the Cushitic language family². *Qaalluu* means a person on which spirit descends or spiritual leader of Oromo indigenous religion. *Qaalluu* is a person also serves as a guardian and interpreter of law of *Waaqaa* (God) and the compound where *qaalluu* resides functions as an institution for dispute settlement and prayer because of its sacredness. It is a religious institution that provides conflict resolution in addition to its religious service. Therefore, it is because of its holiness that people bring their conflict cases here to get solutions. The case studies in this article revealed that there are various factors that made people to opt for conflict resolution at *qaalluu*. Unlike state court, *qaalluu* institution is highly value oriented and embedded in the religious belief system of the society. People believe that *qaalluu* has 'divine power' to punish offenders and it has the capacity to distinguish truth from falsehood via the power of *ayyaanaa* (spirit). Some of the cases that are judged by the *qaalluu* lack evidence while the cases that have evidences are brought to the state court. It is believed that the *ayyaanaa* (spirit) will disclose the wrongdoers with evidence. This is the major reason why local people sought help from this sacred institution to resolve their conflict and settle disputes.

Key words: Oromo, *Qaalluu*, conflict resolution, *shanachaa* (jury elders), *dhugaa* (truth), *ayyaanaa* (spirit)