

Full Length Research Paper

A historical glimpse of *Hiriyoo*: Rethinking the indigenous defense system and military mobilization of the Kingdom of Kafa prior to 1897, Southwest Ethiopia

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The present article attempts to reconstruct the fascinating nature of the indigenous defense system and means of military mobilization of the kingdom of Kafa prior to 1897. Kafa, located in today's South-western Ethiopia, was historically one of the powerful and independent kingdoms prior to its subjugation in 1897. In this study, the researcher relied on available previous multiple sources which include oral testimonies, travel lore, scientific materials and ethnographic data. The researcher employed ethnographic qualitative analysis method comparing them with historical narratives, which is naturalistic approach that helps to understand historic processes and human experiences in a specific historical setting. The findings of the study portray that the kingdom of Kafa had its own distinct defense system and traditional military mobilization for longer years. Among these untold traditional defense system, Hiriyoo (long ditch) was one of the manmade defensive systems dug deep, long and wide around the border areas where enemies might intrude the kingdom. In addition, the kingdom dug Kotino and Kuripo as another supplementary defense system; different insects and natural landscapes; Hokko (drum) used for communication during military mobilization and Kelloo (land gate) system in all corners of the boundary until the final collapse of the kingdom in 1897.

Key words: *Kafa, Hiriyoo, Hokko, Mikerecho, Kuripo.*

INTRODUCTION

The Ethiopian society, like the rest of Africa, went through continuous processes of creating and recreating political structures. The Empire of Ethiopia, as it exists today, is an amalgamation of several distinct peoples,

some organized into kingdoms and others living in simpler and smaller socio-political units. These processes of political development were not linear and similar everywhere.

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Prior to nineteenth century, different parts of the country followed a different type of political development and established diversified political communities and structures. Thus, complex and diversified political structures were created and recreated throughout the long history of Ethiopia. Likewise the people of Kafa among others were capable of establishing their kingdom in the dense forest of South western Ethiopia, south of Gojeb River with complex socio-political institution with its peculiar defense system as military strategy. However, such diverse historical knowledge of the people under study has never been studied as it deserves.

Nevertheless, our limited knowledge about the general history of Kafa comes from the previous works of mainly foreign travellers and missionaries, such as Beke (1845), Bieber (1920), Cerulli (1933), Grühl (1932), Orent (1969) and Lange (1982). But due to lack of focus and an extreme dependency on written sources, historical as well as cultural researches has given little attention to the socio-economic, cultural and political in general and indigenous defense systems in particular.

The kingdom of Kafa before its incorporation into the Ethiopian Empire had a fascinating and remarkable indigenous and manmade defense system (Hiriyou, Kotino, Kuripoo, dense forest and mountain peak) as well as distinct means of army mobilization for ages (Bekele, 2010).

Hence, the present article intends to explore and reconstructs one of the very less known specific historical knowledge pertinent to defense system, military mobilization and war weapons of the kingdom of Kafa.

First of all, what is our understanding about military system? In general speaking, military system and mobilization can be expressed as a set of elements actively interrelated and operating in a regular pattern as complex whole. As historical sources pinpointed, some of the components of military institution were organization of army and its command of structure, types of instruments or weapons, training and knowledge of defense system (Osadolor, 2001).

It is commonly understandable that there is considerable diversity in the ways in which defence systems and military mobilization have evolved differently in different societies in countries of the world in history. In this regard, for instance, the Great Wall of China was built from third century BC to seventeenth century AD to keep them from external attacks (Mounir and Andrea, 2001). In the European context, as it is revealed in the academic work of Brantz, the first trench systems were constructed in distinctive styles of trench building in their military strategies as landscape entrenchment as trench warfare system was in Western Front during the WWI, 1914-1918 (Brantz, 2009). He further describes that Trench warfare is a type of land

warfare using occupied fighting lines largely comprising military trenches which serves to protect the troops from enemy, which was initially experienced by the Germans and the Britain (Ibid.)

In the pre-colonial period at large, the early period of state formation through employing diversified skills of statesmanship knowledge that evolved by enormous strategies of reconciliation, clan based ritualization and coordination that were evolved by persuasive efforts to gain political authority and other collective benefits (Otoide, 2001). Nevertheless, historical studies indicate that the frequent conflicts and the trajectories of forceful territorial expansion and conquest employing several military system and defense mechanisms would have also contributed a significant role for the formation of the states in Africa (Osarhieme, 2001). Other closer study conducted in field of military organization indicates that war has been greatly essential in determining Africa's past. It has been both sort run and long-lasting impact on the larger political and socio-economic changes. This proves to the fact that a strong military organization was the main issue in state formation and consolidation in pre-colonial Africa earlier states (Tedla and Reddy, 2018). As it was argued in the same study, "*War made the state, and the state made war*" coined this argument. Each African state had its own inherent organizational and administrative principles, military discipline and order (Ibid).

In the same source, it is also argued that warfare could be considered as an expression of state's involvement in the larger social formation. Furthermore, what we understand from the above writer's views is that the formation of states in many parts of pre-colonial African involved not only centralisation of power, but also development of the means for internal control, defence and expansion.

In consideration with the above thoughts, different African countries were also constructed either walls or underground trenches for the socio economic, political and military purposes. Among others, Great Zimbabwe built Great Zimbabwe Wall from 1100 – 1450 AD as enclosure; Koso defense Mud Wall in Nigeria from 1000 to 1500 AD so as to control its trade and political center (Admasu and Zelalem, 2015).

Ethiopia as part of one of the ancient Sub-Saharan African state was not such a unified country prior to the late 19th century. Nevertheless, it was after the protracted war of conquest and expansion that Ethiopian nation building and unification came to achieved. Indeed the intermittent wars were common events in the long history of Ethiopia. These war aimed and anticipated territorial expansion, controlling long distance trade routes, raiding to capture slaves, competing for political authority and disputes over various causes such as religious issues were the main factors for internal wars

(Tedla and Reddy, 2018). It is the fact that, the first half of the nineteenth century was an important landmark in the history of modern Ethiopian Empire. It was since this period that Northern Ethiopian rulers had come out with idea of territorial unification under the umbrella of central government. Hence, the Ethiopian kingdoms and polities saw strong determinations by their rulers to expand their borders, centralize and consolidate their power at the expense of others by employing several military mobilization strategy (Ibid). Moreover, the process of expansion and centralization agenda was intensified during Menelik's territorial unification and modernization project. In the late nineteenth century, Menelik's target during this period was to South and South-western part of Ethiopia. This was largely because most of these areas are very rich in natural resource as well as endowed with valuable export goods so that he wanted to acquire these rich areas under his jurisdiction to support his centralization project. However, in fact it was commonly true that different areas were administered by their local chieftain, kings and sultans and with their distinct defense systems prior to the unification of modern Ethiopia under central government in the early twentieth century.

Just to figure out some of this in this regard, the *Jegol* wall of Harrar City in Eastern Ethiopia and King *Halal's* defensive wall of the medieval Dawuro kingdom of southwestern were also the indication of the defensive walls constructed during the medieval and pre modern period (Ibid). Unlike these, the former kingdom of Kafa lying south and southwest of Abyssinia (current southwestern Ethiopia) has had its own peculiar defence trench system and military mobilization so that the kingdom defended its population and sovereignty from any external intruders since its inception to its forceful incorporation (Bahru, 1998).

According to the meager works produced by very few indigenous scholars and foreign anthropologists or ethnologists, the people of Kafa under the former kingdom of Kafa have produced one of the most polysepalous political system, complex socio-cultural and worldview setting by African standard, an elaborate military and defense system until they fell under the imperial conquest of Menilik II (Bekele, 2010). Though, the earliest history of Kafa mainly before sixteenth century was shrouded in obscure, evidences collected by scholars strongly trace the origins of such powerful kingdom to fourteenth century (Bahru, 1998).

It is possible to say that the complex social structure, religious and political institutions have been largely ignored in the historical studies so that most of the knowledge dynamics of the Kingdom were blurred. Nonetheless, few travel accounts of mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, prominent European travelers and missionaries pinpointed that the Kingdom Kafa was

one of the historical independent kingdoms prior to its subjugation in 1897 and its subsequent incorporation in Ethiopia as an Ethiopian Province (Beke, 1843; Bieber, 1920, 1923). However, it was described in Lange's meticulous work, the kingdom of Kafa and its complex culture as one of Africa's least known cultures and states despite its enormous significance from the few ancient Cushitic Gonga people to survive the ravages of the past (Lange, 1982).

Although few anthropological studies mainly on the ethnological and lineage structure have been conducted, very intensive and exclusive studies are not accessible in this subject due to the limitations inherent to oral traditions. The scholarly literature on the history and culture of the Kafa people is very limited and almost exclusively composed by foreign scholars while these were important as on local primary sources.

As noted above, Kafa was an independent kingdom before its incorporation into the Ethiopian Empire, had a fascinating and remarkable political institution and traditional and natural defense systems (Bahru, 1998).

The kingdom had a peculiar historical traditions of digging defense ditches or trenches (*Hiriyo and Kuripoo*), which apparently is considered as the pioneer trench warfare in pre modern African countries in general. Among others, Kafa's impassable dense forest and mountain peak as well as distinct means of army mobilization which have been strongly associated with forested landscape remarkably contributed for the survival of the sovereignty of the kingdom until its forceful conquest by the imperial Ethiopian Emperor. However, such historical military knowledge has never been well studied and recognized in previous endeavors.

Therefore, the main objective of this study was to explore and reconstruct the defining aspects underpinning the traditional defense mechanisms and means of army mobilization of the kingdom of Kafa prior to its final collapse.

Geographical and ecological glimpse

The early modern scientific travelers and missionaries came to the land of Kafa and attempted to depict the relative location of the former kingdom of Kafa on their travel documents (Athill, 1920; d' Abbadie, 1890; Bieber, 1920, 1923). In these accounts, they tried to put down a detail description about the geographical and territorial information including the map sketch (Cecchi, 1885). It has been indicated that, the kingdom of Kafa was one of the strongest and expansive autonomous kingdoms with its socio- political institutions and territorial entities, located in today's southwest Ethiopia that occupied vast territories of the highland region (Lange, 1982; Orent, 1969; Wolbert, 2003). The old kingdom of Kafa lay

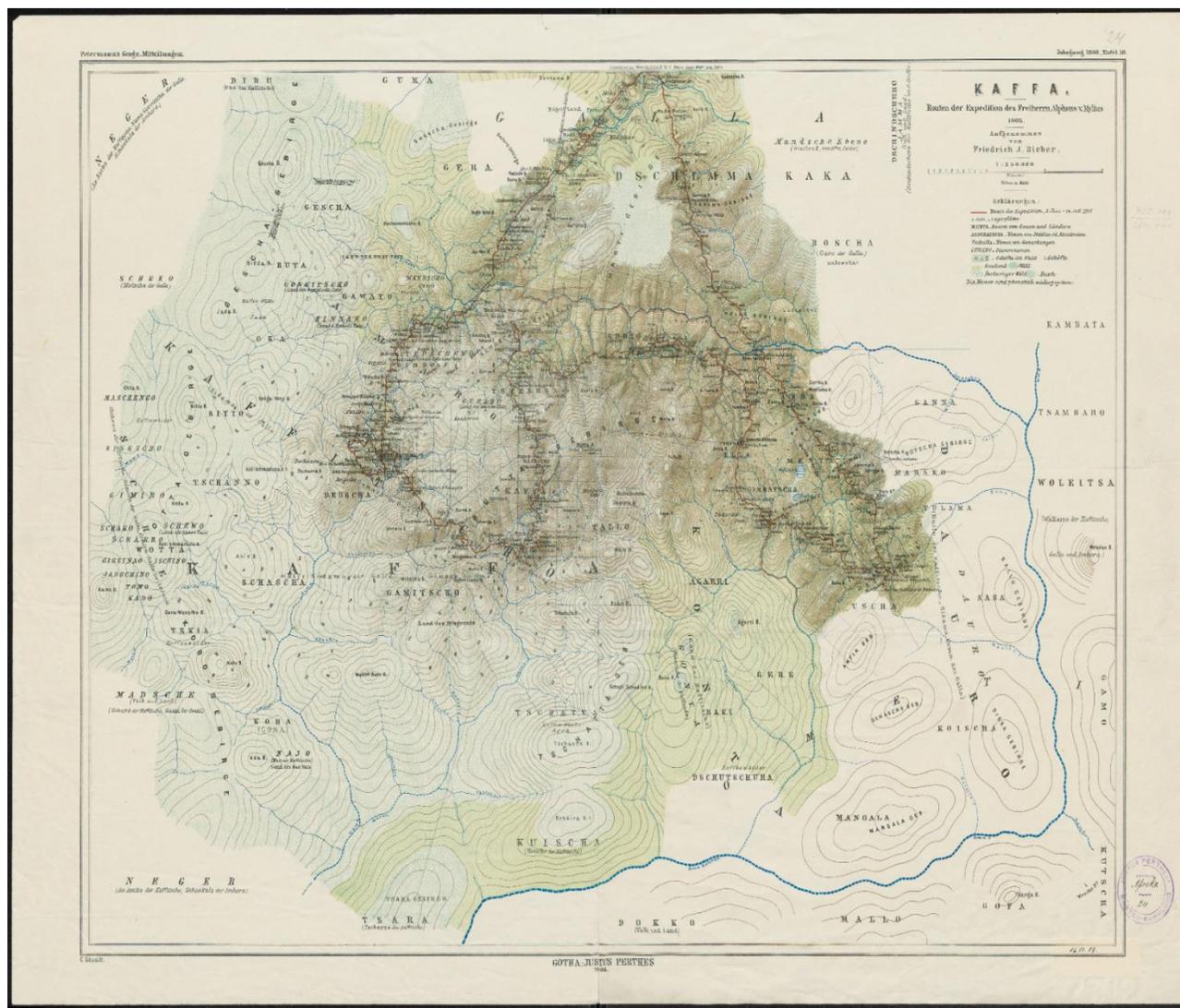


Figure 1. Map of Kafa By Bieber in 1905 (published in Gotha, Germany, 1908).

between 1.5° north and 1° south of the 7th parallel, and between 35° and 37° east of the longitude line (Orent, 1969) (Figure 1). According to the tradition from the communities which corroborated with the scanty sources, there was time that the land Kafa stretches to west from plains of Sudan to the great Rift (from upper Akobo-Gilo to lower Omo river basin), Gibe River on the north, the Sudan and Kenya border on the south to Lake Rudolf until the sixteenth century Oromo expansion and the subsequent formation five Gibe Oromo states (Grhul, 1932). Likely, the work of Negasso Gidada also shed light on the pre Oromo territorial extent of Northern Kafa. In this work, he reveals that the kings of Kafa must have been in control of large areas to the upper Gibe and the

Abay (Negasso, 2001).

Moreover, Beke also gave his insight that Kafa is a quite wealthy land and extensive territory and was more powerful than any of the (Oromo) kingdoms (Beke, 1843). However, the modern Province of Kafa within the Ethiopian State only includes the highland between the Southern bank of Gojeb and the Omo Rivers. It was boarded from the east by Omo, Konta and Dawuro and on the southern frontier are Gofa, Malo and Bako with populations which to a large extent belong to the Cushitic groups. It is also boarded from the western frontier by Maji, Bench, Mocha [Sheka] and Massango [Majengir], populated partly by Cushitic and partly Sudanese peoples and on the north by the medieval

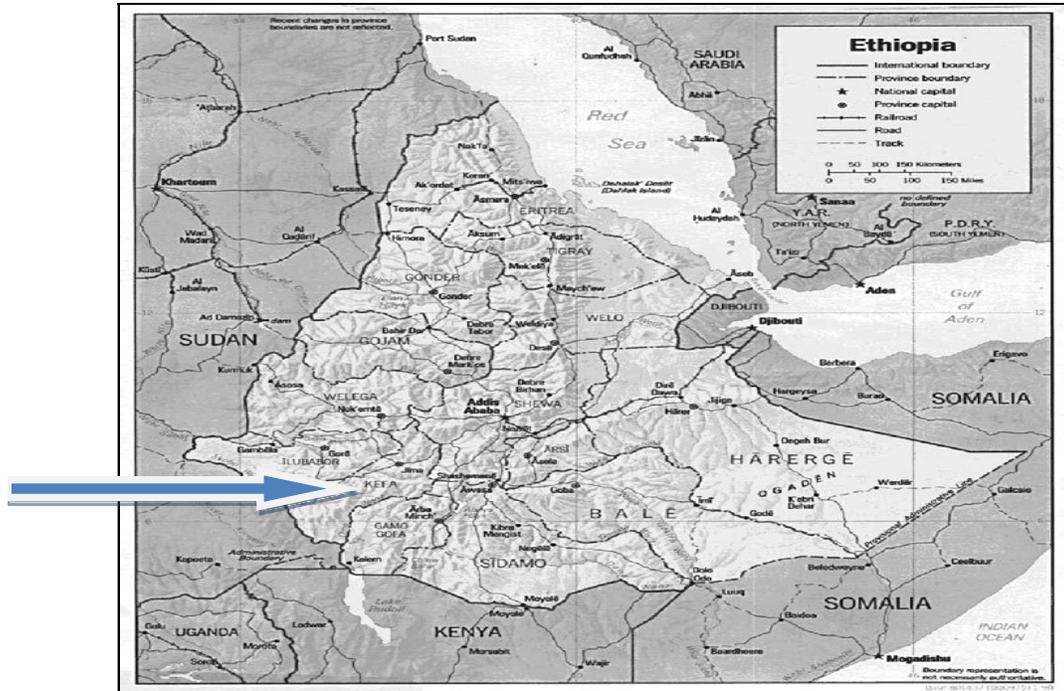


Figure 2. Ethiopia, ca. 1900 -1991(Bahru, 2002).

small kingdoms of Gera, Gomma and Jimma, populated by the Oromo (Ibid.; Orent, 1970).

Historical evidences indicated that, Kafa during the time of the kingdom was divided into 12 administrative regions locally called *Woraafo* (region) until the mid-19th century. It was the Bonge-Taato (Bonga king), the sixth king of Kafa, who died ten generations ago; ruled about in the years 1565-1605, ordered the first division of the kingdom of Kafa into 12 dominions of *Woraafo* (regions) or sometimes called as *Iraashe-Showo*. These 12 regions were: Kafa, Geesha, Gimbo, Gawato, Charra, Addio, Shasha, Bitto, Deecha, Buta, Wotta and allegedly Goba (Cecchi, 1885 and Bieber, 1920, 1923; Huntingford, 1955) (Figure 2).

These administrative units later developed and expanded into 18 *woraafo* after the late nineteenth century to the last decades of 19th century (Lange, 1982). Orent in his work also confirmed that Kafa country was divided into 12 administrative provinces (*woraafos*) during the time of Bonga king (Boongi Taato) in the 1500's. However, it was during the time of King Galli Ginoch (1675-1710), the territory of Kafa expanded during this period and anticipated for the redivision of the kingdom into 18 regions (*woraafos*) (Orent, 1970).

Since integration to modern Ethiopian Empire, Kafa has been administratively restructured as *Kafa Kafa Awuraja* under *Teklay gizat*, *Kafa Kiflehager*, *Kafa*

akababi Astedader and *Kafa Zone* during the reign of Imperial regime, the Derg regime and the current EFDR government respectively. This shows the dynamism undergone in the expansion and shrinking processes of territories at different times. Hence Kafa was an *Awuraja* with its capital in Jimma, ruled by central appointees of the state during the imperial and the Derg period; Kafa as *Kifle-hager* or regional administration with its capital of Mizan Teferi at about the end of the Derg regime. Under the current Federal Government, Kafa gained the status of a Zone within the southern regional state. It was restructured based on ethnic, not ancient historical principles as Kafecho-Shekecho Zonal administration, which brought together the Kafecho and Shekecho people. However, since 2002 Kafa became a separate zone (Gezahegn, 2001). Therefore, currently Kafa is one of the administrative Zones located in the Southern Nations Nationalities Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS), one of the nine Regional States of the Ethiopian Federal Government. The region is situated at 4° 43' 8" 58' latitude North and 34° 88'39" 14' longitude East (Figure 3). It could be observed from its relative location, that the SNNPRS is bordered by Kenya to the south, the Sudan Republic to the southwest, Gambela Region to the northwest and Oromiya Region to the northeast (Zegeye, 2017).

It has been commonly said that the environment of the

not only been remote but also distinct for its wide variety of agro ecological conditions, biodiversities, and ethnic multiplicities.

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to employ an ethno-historical approach using mainly local primary sources and oral traditions and use an ethnographic qualitative analysis comparing them with historical narratives. This approach helps to understand historic processes and human experiences in a specific historical setting. In this study, the researcher relied on available previous multiple sources including oral testimonies, travel lore, scientific materials and ethnographic data. The field data used in the study were collected in 2019 and 2020. Extensive fieldwork was also conducted to collect historic and generate emic ethnographic data as proposed by Creswell (2014) and Vansina (1985) to reconstruct the specific historical settings of the people under study. Reliable oral data and various historical reminiscence or narratives were gathered from Key informant interview and Group interview. 20 informants were selected purposively based on their good ability in historical knowledge and oral tradition, occupation and custodian responsibility. Besides, the researcher's personal and field experience has been helped to obtain various ethnographic data.

In addition to plethora oral tradition, the researcher also carefully consulted all existing local and foreign literature and travelogues produced on Kafa culture history in general. These include the works of local and foreign scholars who conducted their BA and MA thesis as well as PhD dissertations on the history of the Kafa.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Traditional defence and military systems of the kingdom of Kafa, from eighteenth to the late nineteenth century

The people of Kafa had their own distinct defence system and traditional military mobilization for longer years. The investigation of the pattern and dynamics of such untold knowledge of military system and defence skill indeed throws some light and insights into the political history of former state formation process and the survival of the kingdom of Kafa before the unification of modern Ethiopian empire.

It is apparently unquestionable that the survival of any political sovereignty is hardly without the capacity to develop own or borrow defensive mechanisms from elsewhere. Likewise, the former kingdom of Kafa developed various defensive systems and used it to protect its people and territorial sovereignty during the time of war and any other external intruders.

The kingdom of Kafa used both manmade and natural systems underpinning defense mechanisms and military mobilization before its demise. As indicated in meager historical sources which indeed was concurred by informants, manmade defense mechanisms include Hiriyo (manmade ditch/trench), *Kuripoa* and *Kotino*, a

kind of horse training hole and also said to have been used as another defense system (Bekele, 2010). The second type includes forest, mountain peaks, big rivers, animal species; ants, beeves and horses (Ibid). Hence, it is not overemphasized that the kingdom of Kafa had its own peculiar civilized defense system that was apparently not commonly practiced beyond the kingdom during the period (Bahru, 1998; Kafa Zone Bahel Turizemna Mengest Communication Gudayoch (Memeriya, 2003), It was the seven councilors of the state, *Mikkerecho*¹ in general and the Katemee rasho (commander in-chief of the army) in particular that monitor the overall steps and function of the state machine and the military system as well.

Hiriyo, Kuripo and Kotino: Refocusing on the salient features of the Indigenous Defence system of the kingdom of Kafa

In parallel with the institutionalization and consolidation of the kingdom, the supreme seven councilors of the kingdom, *Mikkerecho* which was the highest administrative institution of the kingdom directed the digging of different types of ditches/trenches. As ethnographic field data corroborated with the existing historical sources, Hiriyo (long ditch) was one of the manmade defensive systems dug deep, long and wide around the border areas where enemies might intrude the kingdom (Bekele, 2010). Bekele also noted that, Hiriyo was dug from one end of the mountain to the other end of the mountain or from the end of the river to another river (Ibid). It was built by digging the land vertically and horizontally up to 5 min deep down and 3 to 4 m wide. It was dug to defend the king, the land and the people from intruders crossing the border of the kingdom (Bieber, 1920).

It was dug vertically and horizontally around the border areas of the entire kingdom to defend the territorial sovereignty as one of the strategies of the military program under the supervision of Katemee rasho (Hintingford, 1955; Inf. T.Sh).

Moreover, as discussed in few literature and tradition, Hiriyo as a trench like impassable ditches surrounded the kingdom's boundary where there were no natural defenses like big River, mountain ranges and deep forest (Wodebushoo, 1986; Hantingford, 1955; Bieber, 1948). This defensive ditch was dug like a ditch bay in a

¹ According to the informant, Assefa Alemayehu, the word is locally could be described as *taatee booyee keexo*, which means members of top state councillors and the advisors of the king. As indicated by this informant, the word was derived from one of the name of the Maatto king called, king *Mekkerochi*, literal meant the one who have charismatic power to influence the other. But there is no other informant supported such mythological claim on the etymology of *Mikkerecho*.

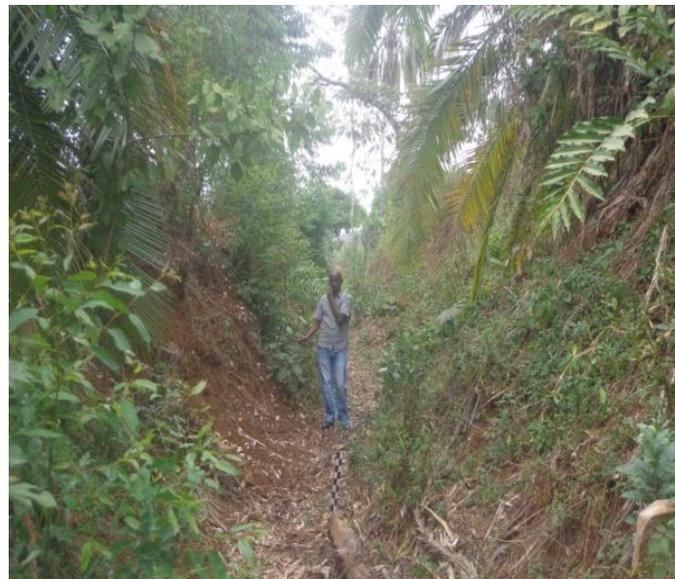


Figure 4. Depiction of one of the remnants of Hiriyo located northern part Kafa at present (taken from Solomon, 2015).

vertical and horizontal trench structure. Thus, it deepens 8 m down and stretches 6 m wide and its shape looks like a ditch bay channel (Solomon, 2015). It usually contains beehives, swarm hoisted by cavity, ants inside the hollow space, spears and javelins that appeared in the hole in cross like structure (Hantingford, 1955).

One of the remnants of such defensive sites is located between the border of Bonga town (historically one of the political and religious centers of the former kingdom and present administrative seat of Kafa Zone) and Gimbo *Wored*; they are frequently vested by the present researcher and other researchers (Figure 4).

It covers large area and surrounds the whole border area far and wide from one land gate to the next to prohibit intruders to the kingdom of Kafa (Ibid).

According to informants from the community, the length of Hiriyo is determined by the vulnerability of the areas by enemies from the adjacent areas. Places where enemies could enter easily were critically examined and similar ditches were repeated after a certain distance. In addition to border areas, the defensive Hiriyo commonly dug around royal palaces, royal graves, ritual places as well as market areas of the Kingdom of Kafa (Inf: A.A. and A.G.). Particularly, the ditch was primarily dug as the main base for the launching of offensive and defensive military campaigns (Ibid). On the other hand, it also served to control the access roads into the territory of the kingdom. Similarly, it served as a bastion of fortress; it was meant to place the enemy in difficult situation of attack or staining any siege. It was also created to control the collection of tolls from traders and foreigners as trade

and commerce was under royal monopoly (Inf. W.W. and T.Sh.).

As the informants stated, the digging was done by sharpened metal and locally prepared bamboo as handle hoe (Ibid). Accordingly, the digging was carried out by local people in a campaign to show respect to their king and loyalty to their respective provincial governors (*woraafe-rasho*). After digging of the defensive ditch, a sharpened bamboo was planted deep into the ditch and well fed ants were dispersed in it (Inf. T. Sh. and Z. O.).

Another kind of ditch was called *Kuripo*; it was a kind of ditch which was widely and openly prepared road at the entrance so that troops hardly retreat or jump out of it and so get confused and easily surrendered. However this ditch served to train the horse of the Kafa warriors for future war and misleads the enemy army. The hole is not as long as the hole of Hiriyo' rather it was one meter long and dug in great number in each and every one's backdoor (Ibid). On the other hand, *Kotino*, as a kind of hole in a swampy area was also said to be used as defense ditches of Kafa army. It was deep, round and was covered by the leaves of trees which hampered enemies from viewing it. As stated by Bekele, some iron bars and the sharpened bamboo trees were planted under them in order to injure the fallen enemies (Wodeebusho, 1986; Bekele, 2010). It is spared from mud which made it difficult to move from place to place. *Kotino* is prepared near *Kuripo* for special purpose to strengthen war horse (Inf. T.Sh. and A. G.) (Figure 5).

In this regard, well versed elders further stated the



Figure 5. Depiction of the remnant of Kuripo, (Photo by the researcher, 2019).

following:

“.....after digging the ditch, the local cavalries would be given repeated training sessions before they engage in any military campaign. Extensive horse trainings were given in places of these two special types of ditches (locally named Kurupo and Kotino); the former is a small encircled pit dug up to 10 in number for training the horse before the advent of actual military campaign with external intruders. If these ditches were discovered by enemies, after entering the borders, the only chance of the enemy was either to jump over or return back. In fact, the horses of the enemies which had travelled long distance could not jump and would fall into one of the ditches particularly in the hiriyoo and the surrounding Kuripos. During the actual war of engagement, the horses and local warriors know the areas and upon reaching the grass covered trench the horses will jump and cross to the mainland...”²

One of the well-known writer of African culture and history, G. P. Mudrock forwarded his impression that , *Hiriyoo* defensive system had been very special and unique and indeed except the Great Wall of China and a few section of Imperial Rome’s frontier defenses, no other known people have lavished such defensive experience like *Hiriyoo* by Kafa peoples (Murdock, 1959).

² Informants: Assefa G/Mariam; This information also corroborated with the informants recorded by Bekele (2010: 234).

Moreover, one of the chief secretary and chronicler Menilik II Tsehafe Tizaz Gebre Selassie stated the following extracts:

ካፋ የሚባለው ሀገር ምችጉም (ምሽጉም) ጉድባውም እጅግ አስቸጋሪ ነው። ስለሰፍራውም ክፋት እየተዋጋ አልገብርም ብሎ ንጉሠ ከአንድ ቦታ ወደ አንድ ቦታ እየተዘዋወረ የካፋ ሀገሩም ጠፋ ሰውም አለቀ። ከዘመናቸው ብዙ ሰራዊት አለቀ ከዚህም በኋላ ዘጠኝ ወር ሙሉ ተዋግቶ በነሐሴ 29 የካፋ ንጉስ ተማረከ... በማለት አስቀምጠዋል።

Literally translated:

“.....Everywhere in Kafa ditches was a serious problem to the invading force. Because of the nature of the terrain and defense system, the king of Kafa moved from place to place , fought and refused to surrender; many invading and resisting troops were killed from both sides. However after nine month of fierce fighting the king of Kafa surrendered.....” (Tsehafe Tizaz, 1978).

As it was noted, war ditches have symbolic meaning; as a symbol of power on the landscape, intended to discourage attack and impress people with the power of a group or a leader, rather actually to protect in battle (Keeley, 2001). Fortifications have symbolic force only because people know what they are for. In this regard, the *Hiriyoo* site is an innovation by Kafa Kings and people to defend themselves and their community from enemies that become threat to the survival of the kingdom. However after 1897 theses border ditches and wolf pits have not been kept up. They have mostly gone to ruin, been flooded, and overgrown by the forest.



Figure 6. Partial depiction of Godefo (Gojeb) River at northern border of Kafa (photo by researcher, 2019) on the southern border in Chatta (Bieber, 1920:60).

The role of nature, insects and animals in military system and defense mechanisms of the kingdom of Kafa: Retrospective overview

In addition to the preceding manmade military defense system, the kingdom of Kafa used several natural geomorphologic features like mountainous landscape, dense forest, and big river such as Gojeb River as impassable natural barriers of the people and sovereignty of the kingdom (Hassen, 1983). As described earlier, from enormous distinct natural features of Kafa, Gojeb (*Godefo*) River in spite of its function as defense mechanisms, it also served as border indicator of the kingdom from north, north west, and north east (Figure 6).

On the other hand, ants surprisingly play a key role as the defense system in the course of the war. Mostly they are found in a great horde in buffer zone by which it was expected as a gate way of enemies to invade the kingdom (Kafa Zone Bahel Turizemna Mengest communication Gudayoch Memeriya, 1992).

They have given deliberately certain food like meet and fillet of got, sheep, pigs and dead animal. The flock was ready to invade whatsoever appeared to them. It was with the contribution of this scene in its own part that the kingdom was able to resist an invasion made by the counter parts of the country even from the central government till 1897 (Ibid).

Likely, some notable elements regarding this issue were collected and scrutinized by Bekele as follows:

“.....In the same manner ants were collected in skin sacks, locally *molexxo* and were thrown on the unprepared army or enemy position. Ants were more effective than bees at short range. But bees were fierce and better for attacking people who had travelled long distance. In addition to this, flowering plants were planted to attack enemies permanently. Traditionally bees were used for many ages as means of defense. However, ants were collected by means of meat, bones, and by dropping pieces of food...” (Bekele, 2010 Bulatovich, 1900).

History attested that ancient Persia was well known and advanced in horse fighting. This system of war is termed “cavalry” warfare. Before the fourth century AD, the empire was the most powerful empire followed by Roman and Axumite Empire, the second and third century respectively. As of the Persian Empire, the medieval kingdom of Kafa was well known in cavalry warfare. Horse that was managed to the cavalry warfare is consciously protected and comforted (Bekele, 2010; Inf. T. Sh and A. G.).

Once or twice a week, the horses got body wash service. They were not exposed to hot weather for a long time, rather to a cooler area. The place where they lie down was unique and they are separated from other domestic animals. Horses were acquainted and preserved only for battle field training for war; they were not involved in other activities (Bekele, 2010; Bulatovich, 1900). Likewise, the swarm of bees was necessary in

the history of defensive mechanism of ancient kingdom of Kafa. The bees were proposed to sight aliens. The beehives were many in number and hooked near the Hiriyo. Basically, Hiriyo was situated near the main border or territory of the kingdom. While their army wanted to destroy the military of the enemy, they returned back as though they were dread and hence surrendered; it was a time that the enemies appeared toward them, and they perturbed the bees to invade the enemies on the part approaching the cavalry of the kingdom. It was revealed that, the hoisted hives were disturbed by the night of Kafa by jumping the Hiriyo nearby; the bees confused the intruders while crossing to the boundary of the kingdom of Kafa (Bekele, 2010). Furthermore, it was also said that the key materials prepared to activate the success of the kingdom and defeat the enemies in a short period of time within the Hiriyo are javelins and spears (manmade), ants (natural) (Kafa Zone Bahel Turizemna Mengest communication Gudayoch Memeriya, 1992; Bedelu, 2000).

As mentioned earlier, the sharpened spears and ants are put into deep hole and many beehives are hoisted near Hiriyo. Since the nights were adopted, they jump it and at the same time they smack the hives to leave the bees so as to chase and nibble the coming enemies in chasing/pursue in order to catch/ them. The bee's noble together with inhuman trained materials inside Hiriyo attack them (Inf. M. G.).

Military mobilization, communication system and war weapons

It is noted that the Kafa king had no standing army (Wodeebusho, 1986; Hantingford, 1955). But the provincial heads (*woraafe –rashoes*) coordinated and mobilized armies within short period of time to the administrative center and to the war front. It was Kateeme rasho, who was one of the highest and prestigious members of the seven state councilors, that acted as Commander-in-chief of the army; he maneuvered the overall activities of the military sector and warfare (Orent, 1970). As described earlier, Katemee rasho as one of the outstanding members of the councilor of the state (*Mikerecho*) is usually considered as the main symbolic protector of the king and the whole kingdom at large. (Inf. A. G, M. M, A. A). He was also acted as chief councilor and the commander-in-chief of the army in time of war (Ibid). He had the responsibilities to command the king's guard and ordering under his sphere of influence to prepare defense ditches and training center of hours and cavalry, commanding to put war drum in all gates (Ibid).

According to Beiber and Orent, even though the

position Katemee rasho was monopolized by *Hio* clan for a long period, any one could also be recruited from any clan if he could be a good warrior (Beiber, 1923; Orent, 1970 and Lange, 1982). Traditionally the people of Kafa were soulful towards their fellow citizens and ready to combat the enemies of the kingdom with morality (Ibid). These trends induce them to do anything together.

Thus, each of the provincial governors and district chiefs ordered to keep a small number of armed retainers, who in peace time worked in their employ households and in war time formed the nucleus of an army (Huntingford, 1955). The governors' provincial (*Woraafe rashas*) assigned the border garrisons on border areas to pass messages to the central authority whenever they detected an intruder (Bekele, 2010).

Therefore, it was the fact that, all the borders of the kingdom were very well fortified and examined by selected warriors, guards, border gates keepers and ditches. The border and regional fief of the kingdom was gardened by gate keepers, locally called *Kelle quyecho* along the Kafa border with approximately 50 armed keepers (Lange, 1982). According to the available historical sources supported by the present informants, most of these gate keepers are mainly recruited from the Manjo clan, who passed the message by beating the hallow- wooden drum, locally called Hokkoo (Bekele, 2010). This was because the Manjos were believed to be very strong physically and they were very loyal to the king performing the given duties in this regard (Inf. M.M).

However, one of the informants disagrees with the above premise that it was not necessarily only the Manjo clan that possesses the passion of gate keeper (*Kellee quyecho*) but also from any clan of Kafa (Gomaro) (Inf. T.Sh).

With regard to drums, one of the pioneer native scholars of the subject, Bekele stated the following narrative extracts about when and how the drum disseminated the message as well as the meaning of message trajectories when beaten from border to center and vise-versa:

"...The drums (locally, Hokkoo) were kept in areas where enemies were expected to attack. The drums were hidden from the enemies in big trees. The distance between each drum was about 10 to 15 kilometers, taking into consideration the nature of the terrain. These drums were usually kept secretly in areas where enemies could enter and attach. These suspected border areas were Kafa-Jimma border, Dawuro border and Bench border. These hallow-wooden drums were beaten in a relay from borders to center of the kingdom. Thus, any drum beat from the border was described or meant to approach the enemy and it was simply a call to war. So the center did the same war call to the entire nation. Thus, with the beat of the drums, the army of Kafa could

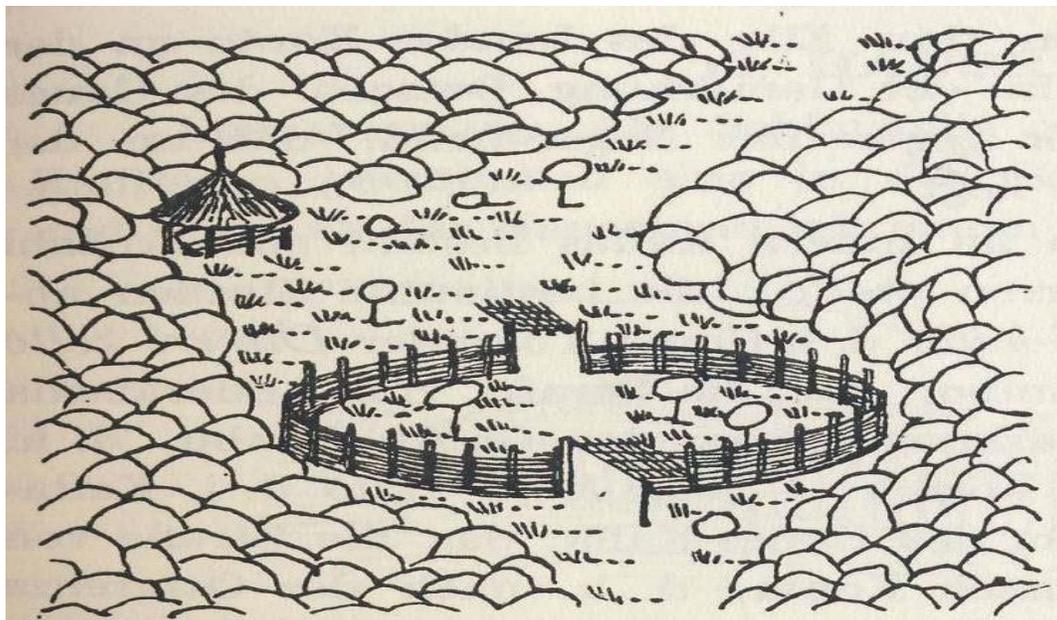


Figure 7. Sketch of Kelloo (gate system) by Bieber (1905).

be mobilized against the enemy

...”(Bekele, 2010).

Moreover, indeed the *Kelloo* (gate) system also served the local notion of border and territoriality among the Kafecho. As the scant historical sources reveal that entry to or departure from Kafa was and is possible and permitted only via *Kelloo* (gate). These gates found in different direction of the Kingdom were visibly shown in the map of Bieber. These gates normally consist of a strong post fence set up across the road itself. This post fence is circular and forms a holding ring of about 20 m in diameter, enclosing and shutting off a stretch of the road. Besides the post fence, there is normally a hut as shelter for the *kellee quyecho* (gate guard) (Bieber, 1920).

As stated in the travel account of Bieber, in his 1904 journey to Kafa, it was common to traverse by different ancient gate system around the ditches, which locally is called *Kelloo*, and had both political and border notion among the Kafecho during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Bieber, 1908).

As it is indicated such land gates had partly the purpose of hindering entry to Kafa by strangers and allowing the monitoring of strangers admitted to Kafa, as well as to make it impossible for strangers, slaves, criminals or others to leave without authorization (Bieber, 1920). It was also partly served to facilitate the levying

of gate money. In addition, in case of unexpected warlike raids, gate keepers were to detain enemies until the Kaffitsho were ready to repulse the hostile attack (Ibid).

Beiber in one of his meticulous works pointed out the notable gates (*kelloo*) systems of the former kingdom of Kafa (Figure 7):

Kankati kello (Kankato gate), the area also called *Obbi* (*Oberi*) and *Yabbi kello* (*Shabe kello*), leads to Jimma Kaka, on the northern border of Kafa, namely in Gimbo region; *Gaawati kello* (the Gawata gate) in the direction of Gera, on the northern western border of Kafa, namely in Gawato region; *Geeshi kello* (the Gesha gate) also in the direction of Didu on the northern western border of Kafa, namely in Gesha region; *Wooti kello* (the Wotta gate) in the direction of Maaji and Gimiro (Bench) on the western border of Kafa, namely in Wotta region; *Catti kello* (Chatta gate) in the direction of Kucha on the southern border of Kafa, namely in Chatta region; *Baki* (*Baaqi*) *kello* (the Bako gate) in the direction of Bako region of the land Konta on the eastern border of Kafa, namely in Chatta region; *Manjiye kello* (the Mandsho (manjiyo) gate) in the direction of Konta, sometimes called the Damota gate, on the eastern border of Kafa, namely in Tallo region; *Deechi kello* (the Detcha gate) in the direction of Ella region of the land Konta on the eastern border of Kafa, namely in Detcha district of Addio region; and finally a gate towards the Negro land,

which lies on the southern border in Chatta (Figure 7) (Bieber, 1920:60).

According to the tradition of the people of Kafa during the Kingdom, the land gates hinder entry to Kafa by strangers, allow the monitoring of strangers admitted to Kafa, make it impossible for strangers, slaves, criminals or others to leave without authorization or escape, facilitate the levying of gate money and duty from strangers admitted to Kafa and from Kafecho passing through. In addition, in case of unexpected warlike raids, they were to detain enemies until the Kafecho were ready to repulse the hostile attack. Since 1897 the land gates on the borders of Kafa are used merely as customs offices, for collecting gate money.

Thus, when war was declared in Kafa by beating the drum, it was traditionally common for the people of Kafa to prepare as soon as possible. The contours of high and border towers are visible on which at any given time tow warriors day out and day face the hostile country; they have to report everything immediately as soon as the empire is in danger. While a mobilization call for war is made by *Hokkoo*, this night guards march towards the war with the equipment that they own and have been trained with. Hence, *Hokkoo* to communicate with the interior at time of national emergence, border guards beat these *Hokkoo* conveying their message to the nearest interior station; this message is repeated until it ultimately reaches the Kafa capital, Anderacha or Bonga, in which all gates were so located that there was a direct communication line with Anderacha or Bonga. In this way the mobilization of the people is awarded the war heard and appeared in a brief period of the time in the corner of principalities (Lange, 1982).

According to the informants, the people of Kafa had proverbs which motivate a person going to war and which demoralize a person who did not go to war. The elders sing as follows:

Qaxxer Ne moggoon kichi imbe tifebon
Qaaniit ne macoon biishi imbe yebbebon
koni bushoone Goddoon qeeyaa eddeemmo
koni bushoone Gondoone Boongee beqqeemmo

Literally translated as:

give your weapon prepared for war
 give me your horsey horse on behalf of you
 who scour turfs
 Who can see baddish at Bonga (Inf. W. W and T. Sh.)

The weapons of war

The knowledge of Kafa people in producing different distinct weapons enabled Kafa warriors to use a variety

of weapons such as bows and arrows, spears, swords (*Kusho*), different lances (*gino*) and a few rifles (*gun*), locally called *Qawoo* (Bekele, 2010; Inf. M.M). The variety of weapons used for war made it possible to compose the warriors into divisions of swordsmen, archers, spearmen and crossbowmen.

The swords produced in Kafa were the curved single-edged swords (*Kusho* or sometimes as *Shikko*) which is remembered in the people of Kafa tradition as one of the oldest of all fighting weapons (Inf. M.G.). They use it as weapon and also as tool. They are strong daggers, with an approximately 30 cm long double blade that is 4 ½ cm broad on top and that has a short blood drain on both sides; it is placed into a horn handle, which is decorated with a ball shaped bronze pommel. The following items are normally attached to this strap: - a lighter (*burado*) consisting of a flint stone and a horseshoe-shaped beating iron; it is kept in a little leather bag with bronze wire decorations and humps (Bekele, 2010).

Kafa warriors also used different types of spear or lances, locally called *gino* with single, paired and tripled sharpened spears were also the chief weapon used in battle (Ibid). F. J. Bieber, an Austrian traveller who wrote a lot on Kafa describes the spear (*gino*):

“..... the main weapon of the Kafecho was the spear or lance locally called gino. This spear is a stabbing spear. It consists of the cutting edge which is always made in a usual shape; it is 20 cm long and 3 ½ cm at the bottom, 2 cm broad before the point, endorsed by a middle rib, blank at the cutting edges but generally black. It is usually placed into a 36 cm long blade stick; into this, a spear shaft is placed; it has gripping leather and an iron shaft holder at the lower end. For making the spear shafts the wood of the caouchouc tree (gayo) is used. At the end of the blade stick there is the spear ring (dikillo), i.e. a wavy band made from smoothed bronze. This spear ring should only be attached to those spears, which have killed a man in combat or a big animal in a hunt....”(Beiber, 1920).

It is plausible to argue that since Kafa warriors were successful in most of their campaigns, they and their commanders may have excelled in the strategy and tactics which were appropriate to the use of the locally produced weapons. The use of weapons alone was not the only factor which enhanced success in warfare. The overall strength of the people of Kafa was the result of the strength of its component parts which possessed armies that could be called up on to perform its tasks.

On the other hand, Javelins, locally named *Shango* is made from bamboo and other strong steak sharp of its edge like a spear. Together with spear it was preferred to stand inside the Hiriyou. The javelin which is hoisted in the hole appears in a great number (Beiber, 1920).

Unlike the javelin, spears were made by black smiths from metal, since the kingdom is rich of materials; the iron is firstly prepared in a traditional way like axe, hummer, swords, spears, hoe (a long handled gardening tool with a thin metal blade). After the extraction, the spear prepared for putting into Hiriyoo by local black smith is strong enough to resist and attack the enemies (Bekele, 1920; Kafa Zone Culture Tourism Office, 2004).

Thus, Kafa warriors used variety of these weapons which are made professionally, partly by blacksmiths and partly by tanners, like the shields. They are also not offered at the markets but usually made on demand.

In tradition of Kafa, all troops carried apparently a unique cultural food called *chachimicho*, which could not easily be spoiled and used for longer days. In addition, all Kafa warriors held a traditional long cotton belt for tightening the injured parts of their body; other groups also carried a kind of bed, locally called *Koofo* to pick up wounded soldiers (Bekele, 1920).

Kafa women have made a great contribution in the course of the war. As pinpointed by the living informants that corroborated with Bekele (2010), they did not only serve in food and beverage preparation but also took care of the wounded soldiers (Bekele, 1920, Inf. W.W, M.M).

As most of Kafa tradition strongly indicates, those who resisted taking part in the warfare were considered as traitors to the state or even to the king. On the other hand, those who actively involved and scored brilliant heroic success in the course of the war were rewarded with high political position or the land. These permanent rewards would apparently transfer to coming generation of one's close relatives of the gallant warriors. These permanent reward was locally known as *Buuroo* (Inf. T. Sh.).

In order to acquire the reward from the king, the brilliant heroic warrior should capture numerous war captives and present to the *Aadiyo* (king) on behalf of the *Kateme-rasho*. Then after, the king would select and take one tenth of the war captives as his own slaves. However, the rest were handed over to the responsible man for the state slave, *Guuje -rasho* (Lange, 1982).

Regarding this ceremonial occasion, Lange pinpointed the following:

"..... then the trumpets (locally, shameto) were blown, drums (Hokkoo) were beaten and the reward ceremony followed. The war heroes were called up on by Kateme – rasho and the king rewarded them. At last big feasts were held for the warriors..."(Lange, 1982:282).

In general, scholars worked in the subject agreed that, it was through the *Hiriyoo* as war trenches the Kafa people protected themselves from the external intruders until

the conquest (Bahru, 1998; Bekele, 2010). Furthermore, the Kafa people gave a very hard time for Menelik's expanding army to south and south west parts of their the present day regions . Thus, it was after nine months of fierce resistance that the Kingdom of Kafa was subdued and became part of the imperial state of Ethiopia. In this regard, the traditional military knowledge employed by Kafa kings for protecting their people was of historic and cultural significance. Thus, the site could serve as an exemplary trench of defeating an enemy by pulling all inside the ditches.

Resilience of the Kafa's defence system and military resistance against the assault prior to 1897

The former kingdom of Kafa indeed would have survived as an autonomous polity by using the natural protections which were later strengthened by an elaborate complex manmade trench defence system. It was in fact due to the distinct knowledge of defensive system of the kingdom that the triumphal advance of the Sadacha section of Macha Oromo invaders failed to cross the Gojeb River into Kafa (Mohammed Hassen, 1983). Mohammed Hassen in his work further described that, the Sadacha Oromo found formidable natural barriers of the hot valley of the Gojeb, infested both with terrible mosquitoes and tsetse fly, covered with tall grass and dense-forest, made rapid cavalry attack and retreat virtually impossible that opposed their advance towards Kafa (Ibid).

Thus, Gojeb River remained the boundary between the Gibe Oromo states and kingdom of Kafa since the sixteenth century and also serves as the northern border of the present Kafa. On the other hand, prior to the subjugation of Kafa, indeed Menelik embarked on the campaigns of war with different Oromo monarchies, east, southeast, south and southwest of the Gibe Oromo states and the Omotic states. In the course of his territorial unity, Menelik employed two poles of reaction (peaceful submission and forceful subjugation) so that he completed such endeavour in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Before expedition to Kafa, the army of Gojjam was under the general of Teklehaymanot at Embabo (1882), when Menelik got upper military position and high psychological makeup to continue up to Kafa by conquering the Gibe states one another; then the war with Arsi Oromo (1886), Harar at chellenqo (1887), Gibe Oromo states (1879) and Wolaita (1894) (Tensay, 2019). In 1881, Ras Gobena, the general of Menelik attempted an attack on Kafa; however the attempts were successfully repealed by the people of Kafa (Grühl, 1932). Ras Gobena indeed never gives up and made second attempt to conquer Kafa in 1885 but failed.

Thus, he was replaced by Dejjazmach Basha Aboye in 1886 and military campaign to conquer Kafa (Bekele, 2010). Nevertheless the war ended by the victory of the Kafa army at the battle of Merra (Ibid). Similarly, the Oromo's expansionist attempt to cross Gojeb River was also wiped out by the strong defensive tactics of the Kafa army based on their distinct defensive traditions (Bekele, 2010). It was after the battle of Adwa, the military confrontation between the army of the Menilik II and the army of the Kafa in 1897 was one of the bloodiest and dramatic wars that held for consecutive nine months in the nineteenth century in Kafa (Grühl, 1932). The military confrontation was a great war between the well equipped and outnumbered army of Menelik II and traditionally equipped and less numbered army of Kafa, under the leadership of king (*Taato or Aadiyo*) Gaakki Sharecho, the last king of the kingdom of Kafa.

The military system of the kingdom of Kafa up to the time of confrontation with allied force of Menelik had provided a basis for pride in past achievements in state-formation and kingdom - building capacity through expansion in the forest region of southwest Ethiopia for over more than five hundred years. In the whole August, 1897 the system attempted to stop the advance of the Menilik's force under commander of Ras Woldegiorgis from achieving their war aims based on the strength of its calculated resistance but failed to stop the force of Ras Woldegiorgis.

The final stage of the war was on the southern outskirts; the conquest of Kafa was operated and led by different Abyssinian military appointees of Menelik and other early conquered areas leaders: Dejjazmach Tessema Nadew, Dejjazmach Demissew, Aba Jifar of Jimma and Ras Wolde Gyiorgis encircled from all directions (Bekele, 2010; Grühl, 1932).

In fact, after the battle of Adwa emperor Menelik captured different army arsenals and equipped his arm with this more advanced weapon before the final war of campaign in Kafa. Then after, Menelik gave orders to the above generals to attack Kafa from three sides at once. He entrusted the overall leadership to *Ras Wolde Gyiorgis*, to whom he had granted the right of ownership of all the land he conquered (Bekele, 2010; Lange, 1982; Orent, 1970).

It was nearly for eight months bloody war invasions; the army of Kafa defended the political sovereignty of the kingdom using their defensive systems with desperate, traditional spears and less numbered army; however such bloody war culminated the decisive defeat of the Kafa army in 1897 under the force of Ras Wolde Gyiorgis. From 1897 onward, Kafa lost its sovereignty which it deserved for long period of time and the last king Gaki sharochi vanished and was taken to prison in *ankober* (Bekele, 2010; Lange, 1982; Orent,

1970).

In the course of the war, the kingdom of Kafa's resistance was defeated, mainly because they were using traditional military weaponry; whereas the army of Menelik was supplied with modern firearms. This was the fact that the Ethiopian army under Menilik had defeated Italy, the powerful European armies at Adwa on March 1, 1896; took eight months to defeat the army of Kafa with high moral from victory at Adwa and with captured Italian war armaments and equipped his huge number of armies. Thus, the armies of Menelik were both numerically outnumbered and logistically superior to the traditionally organized Kafa armies. Thus, due to such unequal military campaign coupled with different internal problems, the long lived Kafa traditional defensive system and military organization that helped the kingdom to survive for hundreds of years was lastly destroyed, and the kingdom was incorporated into the Ethiopian Empire (Bekele, 2010).

The aftermath of Menelik's victory was followed by massacre, plunder, and massive enslavement (Lange, 1982). Land was distributed to the soldiers of the victorious army, who were granted the right to levy taxes which anticipated the imposed exploitation and the eviction of vanquished peasant population (Bekele, 2010).

Conclusion

Indeed, this study set out to investigate and reconstruct the defining aspects underpinning the traditional defense systems and means of army mobilization of the kingdom of Kafa prior to its conquest.

In light of this research finding, the people of Kafa had given special place to the provision of defensive system and military organization during the time of the kingdom. Despite the inevitable socio-cultural, economic and political interconnectedness, the peculiar knowledge and traditions of the people of Kafa in making defensive systems and military mobilization remarkably contributed to keeping the security and autonomy of the kingdom of Kafa until its final demise. One of these known defense systems of the kingdom of Kafa was the Hiriyoo, the defensive ditch/trench dug in the border areas of the entire kingdom.

The people of Kafa and the kings usually appreciated the war heroes who performed unique bravery action in war or hunting. Heroes awarded various gifts from the king such as land, slaves and other grants locally, *Buuroo*. Therefore, warfare helped many individuals to accumulate wealth and gain privileges from the society. At the same time, the people of Kafa and the king disgraced those who hid and retreated from war and sentenced them to harsh punishments. Fulfilling the

military service including digging the trenches request of the kings was taken as an obligation of every male member of the kingdom under the close supervision of the Kateeme rasha. Every other member of the kingdom including women had their own contribution and duty in time of war in preparation of provisions and taking care of the land of those who marched to campaign and fulfilling other responsibilities.

The military resistance of Kafa and repulsion of Menelik's generals' repeated aggressions, which were armed with modern firearms with backward traditional weapons for the consecutive nine months showed the strength of Kafa's military organization and the resilience of the defence systems of the people.

The Kafa's long term military resistance was finally crushed and incorporated into Ethiopian empire in 1897 after the bloodiest war under the command ship of Ras Wolde Giorgis with the active participation of Menelik's other most experienced generals and army equipped with sophisticated and advanced guns.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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