



Indigenous Mechanism of Homicide Reparation: The Case of ‘Gumaa’ among Tulama Oromo of Kuyu District, Northern Shewa

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ABSTRACT

The study discusses indigenous mechanism of homicide reparation with particular emphasis on the Gumaa. To realize the objectives of the study, I employed qualitative research approach. In this study both primary and secondary data collection techniques were used. The primary sources of data were collected through observation, informant interviews, and case studies. As a result, both the secondary and primary data were organized thematically and analyzed through triangulation to increase the consistency and strength of the finding of the study. The study dealt with the processes and procedures for conflict resolution with particular emphasis on a homicide case, which is handled through Gumaa mechanism, thus reconciling both slayer’s and victim’s sides. Therefore, the findings of the study reveal that Gumaa proceedings pass through various stages of deliberations and rituals so as to reconcile and heal the parties in feud. In addition, the result of the findings also shows that the main concern of Gumaa proceedings is to promote a more peaceful coexistence between parties in conflict, the restoration of social harmony and the reintegration of the slayer into the community.

Keywords: Blood price, *Gumaa*, Purification, Reconciliation, Ritual

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an aspect of every society’s life. Thus, thinking a society free of conflict is not more than a fantasy (Assefa, 2005). In so far as any society is not free of conflict, there should be a mechanism to resolve these conflicts. In a large number of developing countries, one can see various types of community-based justice and conflict resolution systems that have been used to handle conflicts between different groups (Werner, 2010). Many researchers have paid attention to the study of conflict prevention, management and resolution in Africa and elsewhere all over the world (Kelemework, 2011). In their study, they have given emphasis to the study of African traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. Many scholars claimed that traditional approaches of conflict resolution are a significant component of the cultural heritage of African societies.

As Brock-Utne (2001) pointed out, the principal purpose of African traditional elders in conflict resolution is to reinstate the broken relationship, rectify wrong deeds, and restore justice. Similarly, the Oromo societies have been settling their quarrels

through various indigenous means that they have been experiencing for a century. According to Mamo (2006), the Oromo people resolve the majority of disputes through their indigenous institutions. As Meron (2010) states, there are four main reasons why societies favor the indigenous mechanisms of conflict resolution- it focuses on reconciliation and re-establishing social harmony which the formal court fails to do, due to its flexible procedures, due to its embeddedness into the culture of community, due to societies’ lack of confidence in the trustworthiness of the state legal system.

Some scholars such as Dejene (2002), and Areba and Berhanu (2008) have studied the *Gumaa* mechanism of conflict resolution. Dejene (2002) gives more emphasis on the imposition the central state laws that had considerable impacts for the gradual decline of the indigenous institutions. In this regard, he shared some elements with this study. There is no study that discuss the various symbolic objects that are widely used in rituals practices and their role to govern the conflicting parties to be abided by the decisions.

However, the Tulama Oromo in general and the Kuyu district in particular have not been given due attention by researchers. Thus, this study is concerned with

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indigenous conflict resolution mechanism with particular emphasis to *Gumaa* in Kuyu district. The study was conducted in two research sites namely 'Dhalchaa' reconciliation place and 'Laga Qalla' purification center which are found in *Amuma Wuchale kebele* while 'Sisu' reconciliation place and 'Laga Kotte' purification centers are found in *Biriti kebele*. Thus, these four centers were selected on the basis of their importance for *Gumaa* proceedings.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

The Concept of *Gumaa*

Gumaa tradition has been widely practiced among the Oromo societies since the past. In the Kuyu district, this tradition is still widely practiced. The term *Gumaa* is defined differently by different scholars. Tilahun (1989), defines *Gumaa* as "retaliation, vendetta or vengeance; blood-feuds, blood money." *Gumaa baasuu* means "avenge or be revenged on somebody, pay or settle or wipe off old scores, revenge, retaliate, take vengeance, or wreak one's vengeance." Knutsson (1967) defines *Gumaa* in the following way: "*Gumaa* is reconciliation after homicide carried out by the parties under the supervision of a *gula* and *qaalluu*". One of my informants¹ conceptualized *Gumaa* is the process through which the slayer group are reconciled with the deceased one. Here, blood compensation is also part of the process for reconciliation. My study correlates with Dejene (2002) who explained that *Gumaa* is performed for two fundamental necessities (i.e., for jurial responsibilities and supernatural requirements). The study further reveals that there were sayings which display the jurial responsibilities of the clan like *Gumaa gosatu baasa* (the clan who belongs to the slayer party is required to pay *Gumaa*) and *Gumaa gosatu nyaata* (the clan who belongs to the slain party is expected to receive *Gumaa*). In this study, I used the term *Gumaa* both for blood compensation price for victimized body and the whole process.

Theories and Causes of Conflict

In discussing the major causes of conflicts scholars like Marx (1965) and Dahrendorf (1976) whose works mentioned (as cited in Tonder *et al* 2008) basically identified various causes of conflict which include, "... poverty, social mobility, absence of security, unemployment, competition and class consciousness". Moreover, Radcliffe- Brown (1952), one of the proponents of the structural- functionalism, argues that a society was an equilibrium system in which each element functioned to the maintenance of the whole. According to this theme of argument, it is unlikely to maintain a society without conflict as well as unchanging society. Although, there are several

theories which explain the causes of conflict, Jeong (2000) (as cited in Dereje 2010) identified some principal theories such as Frustration Aggression Theory, Relative Deprivation Theory and Basic Need Theory. According to the Frustration Theory, human beings are goal-oriented and rational causes the outbreak to conflicts. However, many of the modern writers stated that economic, social and political factors are the main source of conflict. These views are directly or indirectly supportive argument and theory to elucidate briefly the major sources among the Tulama Oromo of the Kuyu district.

The Role of Rituals in Conflict Resolution

The "ritual is not a particularly or solely religious phenomenon" (Seligman, Robert, Michael, and Benett, 2008). Besides, the researchers stated that ritual is not restricted to the realm that can be defined in modern parameters as "religious," or even to "secular ritual". For social functionalists, ritual is a means to regulate and stabilize the life of social system, adjust its internal interactions, maintain its group ethos, and restore a state of harmony after any disturbance (Bell, 1997). The indigenous dispute resolution process commonly begins with an opening ceremony, ritual or prayer as stated by Cisnero (2008). The ritual is performed to thank the spirits for their guidance and presence during the process of conflict resolution as to seal the agreement and bind the parties to the agreement.

Among various ethnic groups of Ethiopia, there are also various ritual ceremonies which are undertaken during reconciliation which signals the end of hostility as many scholars revealed. For example, Asebe (2007) states that '*Gondoro*' tradition is complex ritual procedures and strong symbolic representation of purification of the 'curse' and reconciliation. Therefore, largely, the main concern of this study, is analyzing the practices of *Gumaa* ritual and its role in conflict resolution from the local community's emic perspectives.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The desired data for this research was collected from both primary and secondary data sources. The researcher employed purposive sampling techniques in order to get key informants from various individuals' purposively. In this study, qualitative data gathering approach was used. Thus, the type of data I collected was purely qualitative in nature and thus I analyzed it purely qualitatively.

Interview: in this study, experienced elders in *Gumaa* were interviewed. The interviewees were selected by considering their active participation in the process of conflict resolution.

Focus Group Discussion: It enables the researcher to come up with the commonly shared norms, traditions, and values of the community. I conducted three equally sized focus groups, each having eight participants. They were selected on the basis of needed issues to be discussed and researcher's purposeful inclusion of knowledgeable individuals.

Observation: I made personal observations in the people's natural setting. Besides, I participated in three *Gumaa* proceedings when I was in the field. These forums were conducted so as to resolve three homicide cases.

Case Study: concrete *Gumaa* cases were collected. These case materials were used to look into the extent to which *Gumaa* is effective in reconciling the disputants. Considering ethics of research undertaking, I have used false names for the plaintiffs and defendants that are described in this article.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Cases Handled Before *Gumaa*

According to my informant², various criminal cases are treated through *Gumaa*. For instance, serious crimes like burning houses, breaking one's leg or hands, teeth, and bones also demands the verdict of *Jaarsa Biyyaa* (elders of the community) through *Gumaa* procedures. In this regard, Mamo (2008) state that various serious crimes like homicide are resolved through *Gumaa* among the Arsi Oromo. Moreover, causing serious physical injuries on one's individual body parts such as breaking one's teeth, breaking one's leg or hand etc, comprise those type of body injury followed by serious punishment and classified with group of wrongs known as *Gumaa fakii* as Mamo (2008) examined. He states that it is treated just like homicide due to its symbolic significance. Mamo's (2008) observation is also true among the Oromo of Kuyu although the category of wrongs varies. The initial step of the *Gumaa* procedure is to make the injured person recover as much as possible. Then, *Jaarsa Biyyaa* calls for reconciliation in reference to customary laws. However, such decision is not applicable if the injured person quickly recovers. My informant³ claims that among the local communities of the Kuyu district, it is believed that *kiisii hin nyaataani ni maaru malee* (one should not take compensation; one should forgive).

2. Actors in *Gumaa* Processing

Jaarsa Biyyaa is an expert in supervising the whole process of *Gumaa*. According to one of my informants⁴, being respected members of the society, both *abbaa ayyaanaa* and orthodox Christian priest actively participate in *Gumaa* process. Besides, there

are also various actors such as the victim party, the defendant party, clans (from both sides), and *lukoo* (representatives) are involved in *Gumaa* process. The roles of religious leaders are largely paramount in convincing the deceased group. It is common to hear such words as, *kallacha nutti baasan* (they have come to us with *Kallacha*⁵), *taaboota nutti dawwalan* (they have rung the church bell to us), *masqalii nutti baasan* (they have come to us with cross), *nuu daabeessan* (they make us sinful) at a time of crisis. The slayer family and clan use such techniques so as to end the conflict. Besides, through *waabeekaa* (knowledgeable fortune teller), the *ekeraa* (spirit of the dead) tells the story of the causes and the courses of the death. According to my informant⁶, when deceased family consults *waabeekaa*, they are usually told: *Guyyuma kootu ga'een duu'e Gumaa koo nyaadhaa araaraamaa malee daamii koo baasuuf hin barbaadiinaa* (I died due to the conclusion of my earthly life, thus please don't try to avenge the killers party rather make peace with them through reconciliation). Thus, the collective efforts of all these institutions bring the reconciliation.

3. Procedures of *Gumaa* Proceedings

According to one of my informants⁷, the neutral elders of the neighborhood begin *Isgootaa* (a sort of pleading for mercy) at the time of lamentation when someone kills another. Following this, the neutral clan (on behalf of the slayer group) repeatedly says: *Isgootaa lubbuu nama du'eeti olqabnaa Gumaa nuu nyaadhaa* (we have taken up the case of lost life please accept the blood money). Usually, when someone kills somebody else either intentionally or unintentionally, the case is brought to the court. After court process, the clan member of the slayer brings the case to *Jaarsummaa* (elders' council) decision.

Gradually, after consensus is reached among the *Jaarsa Biyyaa* the *lukoo* (representatives) from both sides fix the date and place for *Gumaa* proceeding and blood compensation. The date for *Gumaa* proceeding is purposefully chosen. The best day to talk about his/her *Gumaa* is on the odd days. Among the Kuyu society, it is believed that days like Monday, Wednesday and Friday are not considered full days. They are considered as odd days. Accordingly, the three *Gumaa* proceedings undertaken when I was in the field were conducted on Monday. With regard to the ritual place for *Gumaa*, Bartels (1983) stated that "the peace negotiations took place under a *laaftoon* (umbrella acacia) tree. Its branches spread far in all directions and many can sit in its shadow. Such is also the peace of the Oromo". However, currently, there is shortage of *laaftoo* due to deforestation. Thus, the proceedings are taking place in the open field just as among the Arsi Oromo as Mamo (2006) elucidated.

One of my informants⁸ underline that the selection of the place of *Gumaa* proceedings is purposefully chosen by *Jaarsa Biyyaa*. Accordingly, *Jaarsa Biyyaa* and representatives from both sides arrange a specific day, time and place for the *Gumaa* proceedings. Beginning from the day of the crime up until the *Jaarsa Biyyaa* arrange for reconciliation with the family and clan of the deceased, the transgressor lives at hidden place. This can be seen as a way of handling the escalation of conflict.

4. The Collection of Blood Price and Scale of Compensation

According to the decision passed by the *Jaarsummaa* process, the slayer has to pay blood compensation price. According to my informants⁹, the blood price is collected from slayer relatives, clan (lineage), and friends and through begging. The slayer begs for contribution of money for blood price at market places. The slayer also shakes the chain in his hands saying: *lubbuu namaatu na harkatti bade na hirphaa yaa obboloota koo* (A person's life is lost on my hand please help me my brothers and sisters). It is the symbolic indication that his hand is impure, that there is blood on his and thus he is not free. It also implies that the killer is asking apology for his mistake in front of the public. According to my informant¹⁰, *Gumaa* does not differ across various social strata. However, *Gumaa* compensation payment varies based on whether the homicide is intentional or unintentional one. From the subsequent case study one can further understand the dynamics exist among the scale of compensation.

Case 1: Justice closed at the state court is opened at *Jaarsummaa*.

On March 08, 2012 Caalaa was killed by Mengistu. The cause of the conflict was drunkenness and the previous hate relationship that existed between them. The whole day both slain and slayer drank an alcohol lonely at different places. However, at the night time, both of them met on the way to their home compound and quarreled with each other. Firstly, the dead individual tried to push and get into conflict with the killer. Unfortunately, the slayer had a spear in his hand, which he picked up and thrust into the stomach of the slain. Then, the slayer went to his home and told the story only to his wife. The next day in the morning, a passerby saw the dead body and shouted. No sooner had the man shouted than the deceased heard and came to the scene. They identified that the dead man was theirs. They began to investigate who the killer was with the help of the police force. The first man they suspected was the one who was together with the killed man the previous night. However, that man indicated that he was not guilty. He indicated to have

seen a quarrel between Mengistu and Caalaa but that he left them and went to his home. He pointed out that he did not see what happened afterwards. The police put Mengistu under its control and questioned him if he had committed the crime. But he refused to admit the offense. The police put him under arrest. In the meantime, his family and close relatives quickly evacuated their home compound in fear of counter revenge. Nevertheless, Mengistu repeatedly rejected the case even at the court. After six months imprisonment, Mengistu was freely released due to the absence of evidence. But the case was confirmed following the evacuation of his family and his close relatives from their home compound. Then, the slayer and his clan began pleading for peace through the *Gumaa*. The deceased family agreed and the *Gumaa* proceeding was undertaken through the support of *Jaarsa Biyyaa* and other facilitators. Thus, the compensation was fixed at six thousand Ethiopian Birr as my informant¹¹ stated.

The case shows that the act of killing was intentional and serious. Consequently, *Jaarsa Biyyaa* decided that the killer should pay six thousand Ethiopian Birr.

Case 2: Killing for property snatched.

On Wednesday, April 10, 2002 while coming back from *Wilincoo* market, Gameda was killed by Tola. Formerly, the uncle of Gameda snatched gun from the father of Tola. After long process of investigation, the slayer and his father realized that Gameda's uncle seized their gun. They tried to regain their gun through what is locally called *geessa gosaa* (clan facilitator). However, Gameda's uncle repeatedly rejected the request. As the gun was snatched during the night time, there was no evidence to accuse the culprit before the law. Consequently, the owner of the gun decided to take revenge by killing the beloved one from the family members who snatched his gun. Tola killed Gameda by a bullet at a crossroad near a forest at the presence of the younger brother of the victim. The deceased family reported the case to the police and the slayer was arrested. After five years imprisonment, the slayer was released following the millennium pardon given to prisoners by the Ethiopian government. The slayer's agnates soon pleaded the victim's side to settle the case. After several *Isgootaa*, the victim's relatives have agreed to negotiate. The *Jaarsa Biyyaa* have classified the killing as intentional, and have decided the *Gumaa* of four thousand Ethiopian Birr as one of my key informants¹² stated.

Generally speaking, *Gumaa* is not as such about money as it is about making peace through the application of norm, truth, custom, forgiveness as well as restoration of social harmony among the society at large.

Case 3: Individual action causes group dispersion but *Gumaa* is the actual means of their reunification.

In 1983, Gelana was killed by Guta in intra-clan conflict. Unlike today, *Dhaaye* and Kuyu clans were hostile to each other. The slayer party belongs to *Dhaaye* while the victim party belongs to Kuyu clan. Gelana and Guta are from *Dhaaye* and Kuyu clans respectively. They met at a drinking house and Guta decided to kill Gelana due to the previously existing antipathy resulted from clan differentiation. Guta

Jaarsa Biyyaa

Yaa waaq nagaan nu bulchite nagaadhaan nu oolchi
(Oh God, we have spent the night in peace you
help us pass the day peacefully)
Biyyi keenya, biyya nagaa haa ta'u
Let peace be on our land
Namni keenya, nama nagaa haata'u
Let peace be for our people
Deessuun nagayaan yaa deessu
May women deliver safely
Xiqqaan yaa guddatu
May the small grow up
Guddaan yaa bulu
May old live long may
Waaqni nu haa roobu
May God give us rain
Rooba nagayaan nuuf haa ta'u
May the rain bring us peace
Eebbi keenya kan milkii haa ta'u
May our blessing result in good fortune
Warra wallole kana waaqni walitti haa araarsu
May God bring reconciliation among these disputing pa

deceived Gelana successively. Guta killed Gelana using his own gun. Then, the slayer and his intimate relatives evacuated their home base. The slayer hid himself at a distant place and remained at large. However, the slayer's clan began pleading for *Gumaa* so as to pay blood compensation and perform purification ritual through the help of *Jaarsa Biyyaa*. Gradually, the two clans reached a consensus after several *isgootaa* and consequently *Gumaa* proceedings took place. The compensation was fixed at four thousand Ethiopian Birr as my informant¹³ explained.

The case took long time to get processed because of the distance between the two conflicting parties. If the residence of the slayer and the deceased group is very close to each other, the likelihood of the intensification of the conflict is high. Thus, the slayer group strongly calls for reconciliation as urgently as possible.

5. *Gumaa* Ritual Process and Reconciliation

The *Jaarsa Biyyaa* began reconciliation through the following short prayer and the process of *Isgootaa* to

the slain family and clans. *Jaarsa Biyyaa* starts blessings and the elders' choruses respond to pleading:

Elders Chorus

nagaadhaan nu oolchi
help us pass the day peacefully

haa ta'u
let it be
haa ta'u
let it be
yaa deessu
may she deliver safely
yaa guddatu
let them grow
yaabulu
they live long
nu haa roobu
may he give us rain
haa ta'u
let it be
haa ta'u
let it be
haa araarsu
may he reconcile them

The *Jaarsa Biyyaa* asking and pleading for forgiveness for the act of wrongdoing on behalf of the slayer group. Various objects and symbols are presented to support oath, curse and blessing as well as the ritual of promise. These objects include *eeboo* (spear), *alangee roobii* (whip), *tambo* (tobacco), and *ejersa* (olive tree). According to my informants¹⁴, such symbolic representations have several implications. Whip is respected among the Oromo of Kuyu as a sign of law. One of my informants¹⁵ illustrates that breaking of tobacco into two among themselves indicates that *tamboon aaraa*, *aara nu gidduudhaa yaa balleessu* (tobacco is smoky and let our anger escape like this smoke). Another symbol presented during the preceding is *ejersa*. It is believed that olive tree is the head of all plants and the strongest of all. Thus, people believe that their law is as strong as the olive tree. Besides, *eeboo* is another symbolic representation. During oath taking, cursing and blessings at *Gumaa* proceedings both parties are made to hold spear (see Fig. 1). This ritual symbolizes the end of hostility.

My informants¹⁶ state that refusing custom is expected to subject the parties to 'supernatural punishments'. Thus, fearing such type of curse, everybody would conform to the decision of the *Jaarsa Biyyaa*. Lastly, the *Jaarsa Biyyaa* concludes the ceremony by blessing the peace to be long-lasting. Thus, such kind of powerful ritual proceedings pave the way for the next purification rituals to be held at a river.



Fig.1: The ritual of oath taking, cursing and blessings at *Gumaa* proceedings held at ‘Sisu, in Biriti kebele. Source: Photograph taken during field observation, 3rd February, 2013

6. The Purification Ritual at the River

After the payment of *Gumaa* the *Jaarsa Biyyaa* asks the slain party by saying: *Gumaa naa nyaatte! Harka na dhiqachiisi siin jedha obbooleessi kee!* (You have already received *Gumaa* payment and now your brother requests you to let him wash his hand. Then, *Jaarsa Biyyaa* guides the *lukoo* of both parties to bring all members of both parties. The transgressor party is expected to provide an old sheep. The river side is carefully chosen. The area is *lafa golbaa* (inaccessible place), which is preferable to purify the sin from an individual. According to my informants¹⁷, the selection of the place is based on the assumptions that, just like the wrong act, the difficult terrain should be selected. My informant¹⁸ explains that its implications is based on the believed notion that *gocha dabaa lafa dabaatti hiikkatu* (this literally means a wrong action should be straightened at inaccessible place). Various materials such as *farsoo* (local beer), *maaddii* (a container with food), *dhadhaa muudaaf* (butter for anointing), *damma* (honey) are also brought. This ritual of purification is opened by *tumaa* (making-law) of *Jaarsa biyyaa*. The *Jaarsa Biyyaa* order the *lukooto* kneel down and swear an oath. The oath taker repeats what the *Jaarsa Biyyaa* has to say. The killer himself takes no part in the prayer or oath, but keeps himself at a distance. After the prayers have been said, he approaches to the river. A sheep is now brought for sacrifice and reconciliation. The killer holds the head of the sheep while the slain’s close relative slaughters it. Then, the parties cut open its belly behind the ribs with a vertical slash on each side. One of my informants¹⁹ states that a black sheep is preferable for *harka baafannaa* (cleaning impure hand). The color

of the ship symbolizes the bad feeling among the opponents.

Having slaughtered the sheep, the conflicting parties are expected to shake hands sliding their hands through a pierced belly of the slaughtered sheep. Shaking hands through this way is believed to renovate the severed relationship. A ritual of purification (locally called *harka dhiqaa*- meaning washing hands) continues. The deceased party says to the slayer party that he is cleaning him from dirt (*xuriin sirraa dhiqa*-meaning I am cleaning dirt from you). The implication of *harka dhiqaa* ritual is more or less similar with Dejene’s (2002) explanation of purification process among the Macha Oromo of Waliso.



Fig. 2: The Ritual of Purification taken place at ‘Laga Kotte’, in Biriti kebele. Source: Photograph taken during field observation, 3rd February, 2013.

The slayer and victims’ family or clans provide various foods and drinks. According to informants²⁰, once the conflicting parties enjoy the milk together, they will be suitable to each other. Drinking milk from the same bowl symbolizes that the two enemies have now become friends. They also eat honey together. The idea is that by sharing honey together, the conflicting parties will be sweet to each other. Then, women anoint the conflicting parties with butter turn by turn. This implies that the two parties have now regretfully accepted the ceremony. The rite permits the victims to suppress their anger and hatred and hence brings peace. Therefore, this time onwards, there will be no more avoidance since peace and harmony are recovered.

7. *Dabdee*²¹ *Warra Duurii Baasuu* (paying the unlawful act of forefathers)

This kind of ritual is more or less similar with *Gumaa baasuu* (paying *Gumaa*). According to my

informant's²² explanation, when an individual or a group who is confronted difficulties repeatedly is expected to deliver this kind of proceeding after he/she has consulted *waabeekaa*. Unlike *Gumaa baasuu*, the slain party is unknown in *dabdee baasuu* and only the slayer party facilitates the proceedings. Only the giver exists and it is concluded with the belief that *Gumaa warra du'e Waaqa fi Lafa biratti baasne* (this literally means that we paid the blood compensation of dead ancestors before the God and the earth).

The procedures of *dabdee baasuu* are almost similar with *Gumaa* proceedings except that some rituals are not performed. For instance, for *dabdee baasuu*, there is no ritual of kneeling down ceremonies, and paying blood compensation money to the slain party. Rather they throw fifty coins of five-cents and fifty *hiddii* (solanaceous fruit) on the main road. The fifty *hiddii* symbolizes cattle which marks the compensation in kind while fifty coins of five cents indicate the payment of compensation in cash which is similar with Dejene's (2002) observation among Waliso Oromo of Macha. The concerned group performs a ritual at a river under the guidance of *Jaarsa Biyyaa*. This process can be further elaborated by the following case study:

Case 4: *Gumaa* reconciles not only the disputing parties but also the innocent with the supernatural

Dabale is a resident of small village of rural kebele called *Amuma Wuchale* farmer association. He had large family members. However, he lost his beloved two boys of sixteen and nineteen years old, without any serious sickness within a year. It was a great sorrow to the family and the neighbors. Then, in his journey to investigate the reason, Dabale consulted *waabeekaa* to identify the supposedly cause for the death of his children. Consequently, he was told that he was under the ritual impurity of one of his forefathers who had shed human blood. Anybody who has shed human blood is under the condition of being impure. Then, he hanged a chain on his hand and begged for contribution of money in and around public gatherings for nine days. This money helped him to buy a sheep which would be slaughtered at the river. Therefore, Dabale performed the *dabdee baasuu* and its purification ritual through the help of *Jaarsa Biyyaa* as one of my informants²³ stated.

However, *waabeekaa* never identified the deceased party, place and time of the crime committed. He only guided the Dabale on how he would be purified from this impurity in the future.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, I have drawn the following conclusion. The process of conflict

resolution passes through coordinated stages in the case of treating severe situations caused by homicide case. Thus, the *Gumaa* method serves the community in resolving conflicts. In the *Gumaa* tradition, *Jaarsa Biyyaa* has played an important role. The *Jaarsa Biyyaa* uses ritual ceremonies and oath of promise to avoid overlapping interest among them.

The symbolic representation of those materials is directly or indirectly related to the socioeconomic ways of life of the society. The ritual of promise including oath taking, cursing and blessings are associated with the great social value. On the contrary, if an individual violates claimed promises and oaths, he/ she could be cursed. Thus, the *Gumaa* system is helping in restoring the previous relationships. Although the Ethiopian constitution has limited the mandate of the customary institutions to private and family matters, the indigenous institutions are playing a very significant role in the area of criminal matters like homicide case. The strong social tie that exists in the community contributes in the reconciliation process and has inseparable role in indigenous institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As anthropologist, from this study I recommend that the roles of different customary institutions like *warra ayyaanaa*, Christianity and other traditional practices that contribute in maintaining societal order are not dealt intensively. This is one of the limitations of this study and extensive efforts should be under way to improve the prevailing gap in academic researches. Besides, based on my research findings, I recommend that both government and other non-government organization should give due recognition for its continuous survival and longevity. Finally, I suggest further study to be conducted on the role of religious institutions in curbing violence and crimes.

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- ¹Interview with Abbi Faye at Amuma Wuchale kebele on January 18, 2013
- ²Interview with Nagawo Aduna at Biriti kebele on February 19, 2013
- ²Interview with Guta Assefa at Biriti kebele on January 18, 2013
- ⁴Interview with Galan Arado at Biriti kebele on January 20, 2013
- ⁵Kallacha is a type of metal that falls with thunders and it is the sacred object. It is believed that any requests when made before kallacha may not be rejected.
- ⁶Interview with Dame Worku at Amuma Wuchale kebele on January 04, 2013
- ⁷Interview with Tufa Gurmu at Amuma Wuchale kebele on January 04, 2013
- ⁸Interview with Tufa Gurmu at Amuma Wuchale kebele on February 18, 2013
- ⁹Interview with Wakjira Jima and DhabaTola at Biriti kebele on February 03, 2013
- ¹⁰ Interview with Galan Arado at Biriti kebele on January 20, 2013
- ¹¹Interview with AbebeTullu at AmumaWuchalekebele on February 02, 2013
- ¹² Interview with Adilu Wodajo at Amuma Wuchale kebele on February 03, 2013

¹³Interview with Nugusu Dadhi at *Gura Biriti kebele* on February 03, 2013

¹⁴Interview with Negawo Aduna at *Biriti kebele* on February 03,2013

¹⁵Interview with Tufa Lalise at *Amuma Wuchale kebele* on February 18, 2013

¹⁶Interview with Adamu Biratu and Badhadha Damu at *Biriti kebele* on February 03, 2013

¹⁷ Interview with Adamu Biratu at *Biriti kebele* on February 03,2013

¹⁸Interview with DhabaTola at *Biriti kebele* on February 03, 2013

¹⁹Interview with DhabaTola at *Biriti kebele* on February 03, 2013

²⁰Interview with Wakjira Jima and DhabaTola at *Biriti kebele* on February 03, 2013

²¹ *Dabdee* is a series crime most probably like homicide and burning house that have been committed by one's own forefather. It is believed that such kinds of crime which had been committed many years ago.

²² Interview with Qano Dabalo at *Amuma Wuchale kebele* on February 25, 2013

²³ Interview withTadesa Arado at *Amuma Wuchale kebele* on February 25, 2013
