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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### AN INVESTIGATION OF THE KNOWLEDGE TRADITIONS OF JAARSUMMAA CONFLICT RESOLUTION MECHANISM: THE CASE OF OROMO OF ILU ABBA BOR AND BUNNO BEDELE

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#### ABSTRACT

The main target of this ethnographic study was to explore jaarsummaa conflict resolution mechanism in Ilu and Bunno Oromos. In the study, interview and focus group discussion were used for data collection in the informants' natural setting. The collected data were analyzed from the folklore bearers and from observers' perspectives. The finding revealed the following. First of all, the informants asserted that jaarsummaa conflict resolution practice is a component of Oromo Gada system. Secondly, kinds of conflicts should be treated by jaarsummaa system are small scales disputes like: farmland, husband and wife, use of resources and other social issues which does not include death issue which would be treated by abba gada of the area. Similarly, the elders agree that jaarsummaa resolve conflicts from ground than modern law court system. However, jaarsummaa has been in challenges since the introduction of Minilik II to the area which sanctioned no to exercise as before. Gradually, the practice lacks its originality. However, it could not disappear completely since it had basic foundation. Currently, the application of jaarsummaa conflict resolution is better than after Oromo Gada system was registered to UNESCO. Lastly, we suggest that Gumii Abbootii Gadaa of salgan Iluu Oromo have to teach the people gada values for good governance and development.

## INTRODUCTION

Different sources address that the Ilu Oromo refers to the Tumme sub-Clans of Macha Oromo descendants who are indigenous to present Ilu Abba Bor and Bunno Bedele Zones (OCTB, 1996, Asefa, 2012, MeU, 2005, Busha et al, 2016). Additionally, the sources indicated that Ilu Oromo had been exercising indigenous democratic governing system prior to the invasion of the neftegna ruling classes in the late 19<sup>th</sup> c. Furthermore, Oda Dogi is a fascinating historical and cultural place where the Salgan Ilu Oromo used to exercise democracy, so that they accustomed to resolve societal problems in order to keep peace and harmony of the people (ibid). Among indigenous knowledge attached to the Ilu Oromo Gada System, resolving conflicts that resulted between individuals and groups is still prevailing. Like many African societies, Oromo has various indigenous institutions of conflict resolution and justice administration. Among these Jaarsummaa, ilaa-filaamee, Qaalluu court, Gadaa and Gumaa are the few. However, the current study emphasized on the Jasrsummaa conflict resolution mechanism in Ilu Oromo of Tummee descendants presently Ilu Abba Bor and Bunno Bedele Zones.

**Statement of the Problem:** Conflict is part of social life and it cannot be separated from humankind.

They are always together making two faces of the same coin (Assefa, 2005). According to Slabbert (2004), conflict is a process that begins when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affects, something that the first party cares about. In Oromo there are different types of conflict resolution mechanisms. Among these this study proposed the Jaarsummaa Conflict resolution mechanism pertaining to Ilu Oromo. Jaarsummaa plays a great role in dispute resolution among the society. However, depending on the survey conducted the researcher hardly came across any scientific research conducted on the Jaarsummaa conflict resolution mechanism yet, it is widely functional. In order to narrow the gap of literature it is proposed to be studied ethnographically. To the end, this study was proposed to answer the following basic research questions.

- How Jaarsummaa is described in Ilu and Bunno Oromo?
- What are the roles of Jaarsummaa conflict resolution?
- What are the procedures followed in Jaarsummaa conflict resolution mechanism of the study area?

- How the interaction between Jaarsummaa and legal court is described in dispute resolution pertaining to the study area?

## THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed qualitative approach of ethnographic study. Thus, in order to investigate indigenous knowledge attached to the Jaarsummaa conflict resolution mechanism descriptive research design was used. In this case the whole procedures involved were described.

**Instruments of Data Collection:** To collect the required trustworthy raw data from the participants of the study, three data collecting tools were employed. These were; interview, observation and focus group discussions.

**Sampling Techniques:** Because of the area of the study and the participants cannot be availed easily, taking representative samples is mandatory. Therefore, to select the research areas, the researcher used purposive sampling technique because they are directly or indirectly the part and parcel of the event especially in relation to the Salgan Ilu Gada assembly.

**Sampling of Participants of the Study:** Snow ball sampling for the elders and purposive sampling for the others were used. The participants of the study were heads and experts of Ilu Abba Bor Zone Culture and Tourism Bureau, Abba Gada leaders of the Macha and Tulama oromos, experts of Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau, the corresponding community elders assigned by Ilu Abba Bor Zone Culture and Tourism Bureau, Culture and Truism office workers of each district in the two zones participants of the study. These participants were considered as the overall sources of data for the research since they have a direct involvement for the stated problem.

## DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Who are the Ilu and Bunno Oromos? Ilu and Buunno Oromos are among Maccaa branches of Oromo who indigenously occupied wide areas of formerly named Ilu Abba Bor. According to elders the name “Ilu Abba Boor” was coined in the first quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the Nine Areda Gadas were organized under one confederation (Chaffee) at Odaa Dooggii in Yaayyoo during the prominent Abba Gada of the time Chali Shono. However, currently they are divided into two Zones namely Ilu and Bunno. Thus, this study was aimed to study the indigenous knowledge tradition of Jaarsummaa Conflict resolution mechanism due to the fact that they had been ruled under one Caffee (assembly) - Odaa Dooggii. Odaa Dooggii is located in Yayyoo and specifically called Dirre Abba Alange. It was at this place where the Ilu Oromos made their laws according to Oromo Gada tradition prior to the introduction of Minilik II. At this Caffee all the Nine Ilu Oromos participate equally as Gadas value orients. Therefore, the Gada system is coined from the Nine Ilu Oromoos Gada System (Sirna Gadaa Oromoo Salgan Iluu). This Gada geographically encompasses from Gumayi in Jimmaa to Dhidheessaa River to the East of Bedelle and reaches Baro Kalla to Gambella Region. Elders said that before the establishment of caffee Dooggii each balbala or warraa (sub-clan) had their own local gada. Jaarsonlii akka dubbatanitti akkuma balbala balbalaatti Odaa Magarfachuu tumaa qe'ee tumatanii ittiin walbulchaa turan.

Qe'een warra hangafaa bakka sana dурсee qubates abbaa gadaa ta'uun hangafummaan tumaa gadaan mirkana'a. Tumaanis tumaa gadaati hindabu hinjallatu. Tumaan tumames daangaa qubanna, uumaafi uumamaa isaanii kaasee hanga hariroo hawaasa giddutti ta'uu qabu hunda hammatutti. This implies at each local gada different laws, by which the community was governed should be proclaimed for instance, concerning geographical setting, nature, ways of life and societal ties. Thus, since Jaarsummaa is a basic component of Oromo Gada system it can be realized from that perspective. Here the native context of Jaarsummaa conflict resolution practices was considered. How Jaarsummaa is described in Ilu and Bunno Oromo?. Oromo community elders (jaarsa biyyaa) confirmed that Jaarsummaa is an indigenous Oromo conflict resolution system which passed down from ancestors. According to elders Jaarsummaa is a secondary conflict resolution mechanism preceded by Guma. In Guma there is a loss of life while Jaarsummaa is used to resolve societal disputes among Oromo or others (Dagafa, 2009 Gachi). Thus, Jaarsummaa is a small scale conflict resolution mechanism in Oromo as compared with Guma. The two have two different institutions. Conflicts can be treated under Jaarsummaa institution are disputes like: farmland, husband and wife, small scale disagreement, on the use of resources, clash between lineages, heritage, Galfata nyaachu, liqii nyaachu, waadaa cabsuu, bakka dheedumsaa, and kottu dhufeerra hafuu.

To put in short, what could be treated or resolved by Jaarsa Biyyaa (community elders) could be small scale disputes. Most of the conflicts are resulted from carelessness. For instance, the elders asserted using proverb “karaa gadhee sareen ibidda qammatti” which mean it is by the side of a lazy man that a dog warm fire. To make this idea clear, Obbo Dagafa, asserted that incase of farming if your neighbor farmer with whom you share a boundary is a lazy worker, by his side wild animals may harm your crops. During this time the victim can claim to Jaarsa Biyyas (Gachi, April, 2009). Under the umbrella of Gada System Oromo have indigenous system of conflict resolution mechanism among these Jaarsummaa is frequently exercised since conflict is routinely happened. In Oromo Jaarsummaa can be held depending on the magnitude of the conflict. According to this study Jaarsummaa is seen where elders (Jaarsa Biyyaa) are involved in their formalities. In the East part of Oromia jaarsummaa is similar to Shannachaa where community elders involve in a conflict resolution. In Ilu Gada system each Gada has its own local Jaarsa Biyyas who are privileged to resolve conflicts under the umbrella of salgan Ilu Gada system. The Salgan Oromo Ilu Gada system had nine Areda Gadas(local chaffee) which represent their nearest clan (balbalas'). Thus, each Areda Gada had their own Jaarsa Biyya in their localities. Generally, as elders narrate jaarsa biyyaa are based on the nearest village who shares many things in their localities. For instance, jars biyyaa knows about resources in their locality, boundary issues, marriage system, farming issues, daboo (cooperative work), generally “jiruu fi jireenyaa” (totality of life) of the very nearest people in their area very well, so that if things goes bad or conflicts happened they traditionally inherited the skills to resolve disputes. An elder who does not know the jiruu fi jireenyaa of the nearest community could not be jaarsa biyyaa of the area. To be elected as jaarsa biyyaa sharing Oromo gada values are mandatory. Additionally, hardworking, knowing the people culture, having wisdom for convincing easily by providing proverbs (mammaaksota), telling experiences, warning systematically, narrating about great deeds or evil deeds of the

past fates to the subjects are skills that needed. Generally, it is impossible to be jaasa biyyaa without living it and without a community full knowledge.

### **What are the roles of Jaarsumma conflict resolution?**

**According to Ilu and Bunno Oromo elders jaarsummaa has the following roles:**

- It resolves societal problems from ground. In jaarsummaa there is no ground for bias. Because nothing can escape from elders (jaarsa biyyas) or communities knowledge. However, in modern law court system possibility of bias is very wide.
- It is a peace building practices among individuals or groups who disputes on resources, boundaries around farmlands, irrigation resources, etc.
- It enables the Gada values to be exercised at **local level** in order to address problems at nearest distance
- It encourages cooperation in order to enhance development for instance if a man is absent from your “daboo” (cooperative work) without any serious problem one can claim to jaarsa biyya in order to get the right judge, so that the jaarsa biyyaa pass decisions which should be put into practice
- It enhances sustainable developments, because it is impossible to be careless worker, So that if one gets careless the surround people have right to claim to jaarsa biyyaa (community elders) who are elected for jaarsummaa.
- It builds societal tie unbreakable in generations
- It is justice guarantee for the people

### **What are the procedures followed in Jaarsummaa conflict resolution mechanism of the study area?**

This can be seen from two perspectives which are disputes raised at individual level and group levels. Here they were discussed below as elders were interviewed. According to elders the types of conflict to be resolved by jaarsa biyyaa can be conflicts raised between individuals or groups. The jaarsa biyyaa's of the community pass decisions depending on seriousness of the crime made to the victim. In short jaarsa biyyaa treats only small scale conflicts. In death case, in Oromo words “Gumaa”, is treated by Abbaa Gadaas. Every actions treated by jaarsa biyyaa has gada value based. Concerning the procedure the following steps of conflict resolution should be followed:

**1<sup>st</sup> Phase:** the victim claim his/her case to the nearest jaarsa biyya (community elders)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Phase:** having an information the jaarsa inform the case to all jaarsaas in the neighborhood

**3<sup>rd</sup> Phase:** after discussing the elders appoint the victim to a convenient day (morning)

**4<sup>th</sup>Phase:** the case is resolved

In Oromo jaasummaa never sit in door. It should be out door. In Ilu Oromo ever green tree is the best place for jaarsummaa. Additionally, the place should be very quiet. When jaarsaa start to investigate a case they first select an elders/jaarsaa who will lead the case or moderator.

Mostly, an elder who has a great wisdom is appointed to explicitly probe the case from both sides. Then after discussing on the investigation they pass decision. During the decision passing both sides have the right to express their feelings on the issue. During, investigation both sides should sit on opposite side because before decision is made or purification is conducted sitting on one side is impossible. However, during decision is told the jaarsa appoint a chief jaarsaa who told the decision made in front of the two sides. During that time the two sides stand facing the elders on opposite sides. How the interaction between Jaarsummaa and legal court are described in dispute resolution pertaining to the study area?. The elders agree that jaarsummaa conflict resolution mechanism has paramount advantages over modern legal court. The advantages are discussed in terms of time, distance, money, and post-jaarsummaa ways of life. To begin with time, it takes very short period of time mostly a maximum of one or two weeks in rare cases. Jaarsaa never pass decisions with simple evidences but has to deal with the case with the nearby witnesses face to face, so that there is no door for mischief. The values of Oromo Gada also psychologically mould the jaarsaas in right way. On the other hand regarding modern legal court it takes much time which sometimes in counts months to years.

The distance of the traditional conflict resolution and modern legal law court also differs in terms of distance the victim has to walk for application and follow-up of the disputes resolution. In the jaarummaa case the distance the two groups walk for application and getting resolution has no significant impact on their daily work compared with legal court. In legal court the two groups has to travel for days. Additionally, the legal court is too expensive. However, in jaarsummaa an issue can be treated while farming. In jaarsummaa a disputes are resolved early in the morning especially before breakfast is eaten. An elder from Yaayyoo Obbo Suleman said “ jaarsi suubii ka'ee osoo afaan isaa waan yaraa hindubbatin, gurri isaa waan hamaa hindhaga'in dubbi hiikuu qaba.” It means an elder has to resolve a conflict before speaking and hearing something bad. This implies that in Ilu Oromo jaarsaa has to treat an ap In Oromo coffee is served with neighborhood which mean in Oromo word (Ollaa). Two to more households drink coffee turn by turn in their own respective turn. It circles from one household to the other; so that each household is expected to prepare coffee in his/her turn. During this ceremony different issues could be raised which can be sometimes about criticizing someone's work. Similarly, backbites about certain issues or somebody may raise, so that hearing such issues may affect jaarsaas psychology which may indirectly influence decisions to be given. Elders may not be influenced. But being (afaan bulee) meaning (before breakfast) enable elders see things without any bias. In general, jaarsa biyyaa should sit for conflict resolution before making any speech or having foods/drink. However, after resolving a conflict for socialization they eat/drink coffee or any homemade from the hands of either sides. Feeding together from the bowel symbolizes the two groups have agreed to do the same thing in their future life. On the other hand, modern legal court never resolves conflicts from ground root. Satisfaction from the victim side is judged when someone who made a crime is jailed or pay large amount of money. If the defendant is jailed or pay large amount of money, it creates another crisis on his/her family life. Even after the punishment is completed the two sides never live together as they used to do before the disputes.

Thus, jaarsummaa should sit right after the guilty is released from jail. Unless elders mediate there will be possibility of clash between the two sides. This shows “jaarsummaa,” the people’s traditional conflict resolution mechanism is better than modern law courts. Obviously, in the society this is applicable even though jaarsummaa changes some of its traditional practices. Currently, many understood that jaarsa biyyaa should be any elder who bear gray hair. However, in Oromo bearing gray hair is not a sole ground to be jaarsa biyyaa as discussed formerly.

### **What are the oral lores attached to Jaarsummaa?**

Mammaaksota muraasa (few proverbs): The following proverbs are said during jaarsummaa or after conflicts are resolved. For instance even though the man was completely disgusted by the case made on him/her nothing can be escaped from jaarsaa biyyaa. Firstly, “Jaarsa malee hinjaaran” (Without jaarsaa it is impossible to be wealthy). This implies that jaarsa biyyaa are guarantee for once property. If justices are violated one can directly apply his/her case to the jaarsa biyyaas and get it resolved. Having much wealthy is not guarantee for once property’s security rather the jaarsa biyyaas are the most powerful decision makers which enable the community social balance. Therefore, there is no door to dominate others being rich. In Oromo having much wealthy is determined by the things that you do for your community. Secondly, “Jaarsarrraa hintarkaanfatan” (you can’t step over jaarsa, you are not allowed to refuse whatever decision jaarsaa pass. This proverb implies it is illegal to refuse whatever decision is made for the case happened. If someone refuses what jaarsa biyyaa pass he/she will face bad luck which may be ill life treatment. Thirdly, “Jaarsi qalchiisee nama guursisa” (Jaarsa can make you endure over decisions). Jaarsa biyyaa (community elders) are more powerful who can force you come to the point of disgust precisely without hide. If a problem creator tries to hide a case the elders have special wisdom to investigate the core issue during that time even the decision could be pass over the case also differs. But if he/she tells the truth the case without any hide he/she could get less punishment. Additionally, the jaarsa biyyaa (elders) warn the individual to correct his/her ill ideas using proverbs. For instance they say “hima diddeen du'a hindiddu.” In Oromo words it means “if you refuse what jaarsaa told you can't escape from bad fate you face.” Therefore, no one could be above jaarsaa (community lawyer).

Lastly, “Jaarsi ulee malee nama reeba” (Jaarsaa punish you without a physical stick). Elders (jaarsa biyyaa) are the chief mentors of the community. The way jaarsaa treat things is highly inculcated in gada tradition which takes generations to be jaarsa biyyaa of a community, so that they trained well in life and accumulated enormous wisdom.

**Some Challenges Jaarsummaa practices encountered:** Firstly, the elders agree that the introduction of Minilik II ruling system impact Jaarsummaa practices seriously. Here, the elders asserted that the ruling system of Tesema Nadow highly impacts the practices of jaarsummaa conflict resolution. Following the conquest of Minilik II force the practice of Oromo Gada values was deteriorated. Secondly, the teaching of Christianity and Muslim teaching system were another contributing factor for the deteriorating of jaarsummaa system. Thirdly, the intercultural practice which was highly dominated with the Abyssinian ruling

classes contributes a lot. That was following the conquest of Minilik II mobility of people from North part of Ethiopia spread to different part of Ilu Abba Bor, thus the dominance of the ruling class established. As a result, jaarsummaa was banned systematically by the ruling class. One of the systems was by narrating modernity by having new style which was Amharic writing system. The ruling class systematically, approached the people by the name of modernizing the judge to record cases which will be red in front of a notorious judge.

**Prospects of Jaarsummaa:** Currently, the gada values are being in revival. After the establishment of Gumi Abooti Gada (Oromo Gada council) at Oromia level lot of reforms were made including the registration of Oromo Gada system by UNESCO. Following that Oromo Gada institution has been reviving throughout Oromia. Among the Gada values jaarsummaa has got great attention since it resolve conflicts from ground root. At each local level jaarsummaa is actively working even during dictators. According to Ilu Oromo elders even after decision is passed by the law court jaarsummaa system is mandatory for socialization of the two groups. In many cases, currently jaarsummaa practice is recommended even after law court. Additionally, some issues like the case of marriage is being treated by jaarsa biyyaas which could be to live together or to separate. However, jaarsa biyyaa never recommend divorces but treat issues that leads to divorce.

Presently jaarsummaa conflict resolution is active even at law courts. Oromo Gada practices also recommend jaarsummaa in order to save time, money and tie great bond among the community not to over disputes on micro-issues but if happened it must be resolved locally. Thus, jaarsummaa is in reviving as gada recommends even at higher institutions. Jaarsa biyyaas are also actively participating in resolving conflicts.

**Data Discussion:** Under the leadership of Oromo Gada system the practices of Jaarsummaa conflict resolution was highly practiced under Salgan Ilu Oromo Gada system at local level to maintain peace. According to elders Oromo society never goes beyond the vicinities for justices. The jaarsa biyyaa (community elders) are well trained by their fore fathers how to resolve conflicts over ages traditionally. The elders not only interfere when someone commits mistakes over other individual but also when someone commits crime over other natures too. Jaarsummaa Conflict resolution mechanism is part and parcel of Oromo Gada values. Under gada system issues should be treat by jaarsa biyyaa (ommunity elders) are disputes happened between husband and wife, farmland conflicts, uses of natural resources, and other micro-disputes other than death issues. Death issue which is termed ‘Gumaa’ is treated by abbaa gada. Guma is ordered by abba gada of the clan. However, this needs another comprehensive study concerning to Ilu and Bunno Oromo. Jaarsummaa conflict resolution practices have to pass through procedures. First of all, a victim has to apply his/her application to one of a nearby jaarsa then the jaarsa present the issue to jaarsolii (elders). Hearing the information the jaasolii (elders) begin an investigation concerning to the case from the witness. The elders undergo different investigations in order to reach at the core issue for the problems or disputes. After the right investigation is made elders pass decision depending on the

seriousness of a crime. Lastly, a problem is said to be resolved when the two groups hug each other by the help of one of the elders' facilitator.

## Conclusion

Traditional societies have their own conflict resolution mechanism. That means before the development of modern law court different ethnic groups uses to judge incidents happened to someone by somebody else and pass decisions according to their localities. As a traditional society Oromo has developed different conflict resolution mechanisms by which conflict is resolved. These can be classified as jaarsummaa, siiqee and gumaa institutions. However, this study focused on the former. Jaarsummaa is a type of traditional conflict resolution mechanism among Oromo society pertaining to the study areas. In jaarsummaa every resolution is conducted by jaarsa biyyaa (men elders) which is traditionally conducted outdoor. A convenient place for jaarsummaa is under Odaa tree or tree with green leaves. Additionally, jaarsummaa should be conducted outdoor at quietest place. In the society elders select special place where attention is not influenced by certain disturbances. Traditionally, such places are known by people, so that no graze or any disturbance is performed at such sacred place. They are specifically called dirree jaarsaa or bakka araaraa (law court). Therefore, such places are protected by gada's law.

In Ilu and Bunno Oromo jaarsummaa conflict resolution practices was the nearest traditional law court. However, after the introduction of neftegna gebar ruling system jaarsummaa was highly influenced, and replaced by the governors' new system. In the new system every Oromo has to apply his/her cases only to the governor. There was an amount of payment for the judge for the service. The decision given was also depend on the amount of money they gave to the intermediate person or who pass decision over the case. To put in nut shell, the decision that had been made was not depend on the truth but on the amount of money or gifts the oromos pay for the notorious judge. In the study area, jaarsummaa treats issues allowed by gada since it has been governed by the goda's law. For instance, jaarsummaa never treats death cases. A death (gumaa) issue was chiefly judged by abba gada in power which is termed in Ilu and Bunno Oromo guma bituu. Therefore, jaarsummaa and gumaa institutions are different in the study areas.

## Recommendations

Ilu and Bunno Oromo have been using jaarsummaa in conflict resolution even though the degree varies due to different governing system the people encountered for centuries. However, jaarsummaa is not completely disappeared though influenced by modern law court system. Firstly, the system is not easily breakable because its social tie or bond is high. Secondly, the nature of law ratified by chaffee has local base. Above all, jaarsa biyyaas know everything in their locality, so that they can easily investigate and resolve conflicts.

However, after the introduction of new governing system to Ilu and Bunno Oromo jaarsummaa conflict resolution mechanism was highly influenced. But after gada was registered to UNESCO different gada values are being in

revival. Therefore, this study also contributes some to the revival of jaarsummaa if the following will be done: Firstly, the two zones culture and tourism bureaus have to facilitate stages where elders (jaarsa biyyaa) teach new generations. Secondly, different incidents, which may happen in the society, should be treated with jaasummaa so that the procedures and oral lores attached to jaarsummaa could be preserved. Thirdly, media had better give attention by consulting jaarsa araaraa/biyyaas (community elders) who have experiences. Enough budgets should be allocated for district culture and tourism researchers in addition to a trained man power (folklorists). Lastly, district and zonal bureaus have to be equipped with electronics materials as to record incidents which like Jila Gada, Irreechaa celebrations, and other rituals live.

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