



Full Length Research Paper

**Women's Position in Indigenous Peace Building Processes: The Role of Siiqqee
Institution in the Oromoo Gadaa System**

Debela Fituma*

Hora Bule University, College of Social Sciences and Humanities

Email: defima24@gmail.com

Submission Date: Oct. 14, 2019

Acceptance Date: June 15, 2020

Abstract

The role of gender in peace building is currently at the forefront of global peace agenda since excluding women from peace process is tantamount to neglecting half of the humanity. Though the efforts those women have to add up to culture of peace has hardly been considered, no rational society can undermine their contributions. For the Oromoo nation, women have well-established functions in decision-making, conflict resolution and peace building that are embedded in the egalitarian Oromoo world system. As active engagement of women in the building sustainable peace deemed imperative, the role of siiqqee as a timeless essential should be well recognized at all level. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively through content and thematic analysis. The findings reveal that the Gadaa system promotes culture of peace whereby the siiqqee institution in particular has immense roles in peace building processes. Rooted in the Oromoo world view, the siiqqee institution encouraged the Oromoo women to consolidate their holistic devotion capable of bringing structural changes required to enhance equality, social justice, solidarity, and sustainable peace and development. Through siiqqee institution the Oromoo women have been serving essentially as symbol of peace, operationally as peace educators and diplomatically as peace envoys in the societal relations. The totality of this makes the Oromoo women know the cost incurred from conflict and thereby get equipped to transform it in advance. As a result, they are proven of vital roles in building bridges, at a far different from mere walls, using the power of siiqqee to enhance and uphold social cohesion. Thus, the siiqqee institution as a reservoir is full of important indigenous values that enrich gender capacities necessary to guarantee a lasting peace. It is, therefore, indispensable, as found recommendable, to effectively coordinate, reinstate and uphold the open up viable space, where Oromoo women can play their efforts and leverage up their indigenous share in peace building processes through siiqqee institution.

Keywords: *Gadaa System, Indigenous, Oromoo, Peace Building, and Siiqqee Institution*

* Corresponding author.

Axareeraa

Gahee koorniyaan nageenya buusuufi ijaaruu keessatti qabu dhimma nageenya addunyaa yeroo ammaa keessatti isa adda duree waan ta'eef, gahee dubartoota dhimma nageenyaa ala gochuun gartokkee hawaasaa dhimma nagaa buusuufi tiksutiin ala gochuu jechuun dha. Osoo aadaa nagaa buusuufi tiksuu keessatti dhamaatiin dubartoota kanaa hubatamee nageenya eegsisuu ala hintaasifaman ture; hawaasni hubataa ta'es gahee isaanii gadi hinxiqqeessu. Uummata Oromoo biratti gaheen dubartoonni murteessuu, wal dhabdee furuu, nageenya buusuufi tiksuu keessatti qaban sirna bulchiinsa Oromoo keessatti taa'ee jira. Sirna dubartoonni Oromoo nageenya ittiin walitti fufinsaan eegsaniifi sirna nagaa buusuu keessatti si'aayinaan hirmaatan kan yeroon hindaangofne, kan hedduu murteessaa ta'e sirni siiqqee, sirna xiyyeeffannoo guddaan yeroo ammaa kana itti kennamuu qabudha. Odeeffannoon dhimma kanarratti funaaname, qabiyyeefi yaadijooonsaa mala akkamtaatiin xiinxalame. Argannoon qorannoo kanaas kan agarsiisu sirni Gadaa aadaa nageenyaan jiraachuu kan jajjabeessuufi sirni Siiqqeemmoo addatti adeemsa nageenya buusuufi tiksuu keessatti gahee olaanaa akka qabu agarsiisa. Falaasama Oromoo keessatti sirni siiqqee hirmannaa dubartoonni gama maraan qaban jajjabeessuun cinatti bifa ijaaramaafi caaseffama qabuun walqixxummaaf, haqaaf akka dhaabbatan, tokkummaa akka jabeessaniifi nageenyaafi misooma itti fufaa ta'e keessatti gahee isaanii akka bahatan tolcheera. Dubartoonni Oromoo karaa Siiqqee sududaan akka mallattoo nageenyaatti kan tajaajilan yoo ta'u, keessa galamee yoo ilaalamu nageenya kan barsiisaniifi ambaasaaddera nageenyaa walitti dhufeenya hawaasa jechuu dandeenya. Walumaa galatti kun kan agarsiisu dubartoonni Oromoo gatii wal dhabbiin nama kaffalchiisu waan beekaniif kana gara nageenyaatti fiduun barbaachisaa akka ta'e hubachuu isaaniiti. Kanaafuu, nageenya buusuufi tiksuu hawwu qofa osoo hintaane qabatamaan keessa seenanii furuun hawaasa gidduutti riqicha nageenyaafi waliin jiraachuu ijaaruuf shoora murteessaa ta'e aangoo sirni siiqqee isaaniif keenne gargaaramuun mirkaneessu. Kanaafuu, sirni Siiqqee sona asilii baay'ee murteessaa kan koorniya sirna nagaa buusuufi tiksuu keessatti aangomsuuf wabii ta'ee dha. Kana waan ta'eef, sirna siiqqee kan dubartoonni Oromoo qooda dubartummaa isaanii keessatti ba'atan kana itti fufsiisuuf, sirriitti qindeessuu, tajaajila siiqqeen kennu bakka ganamaatti deebisuun hedduu barbaachisaa dha.

Jechoota Ijoo: Sirna Gadaa, Asilii, Falaasama, Nagaa Buusuu, Nageenya Tiksuu, Sirna Siiqqee

1. Introduction

Conflict is inevitable phenomenon in every society and hence the processes of conflict resolution and peace building are expected to recognize the grass roots efforts and interests of each respective community. Building a lasting peace that sustains overall development requires full participation of each citizen (Agbajobi, 2010). Peace building activities either from below or above must include the issues of all stakeholders, expressly the women who are often marginalized in the process, to bring a durable peace elsewhere. The local actors [the insiders] ownership of peace building process is increasingly considered as a demanding lens for understanding and crafting sustainable peace based on their bottom-up view and participation (Coning, 2013). The need for recognizing such community-based approach in peace building empowers the local actors providing them direct control over their own affairs (Haider, 2009). The basic premise for such demanding approach (peace building from below) is, moreover, to make the local communities better placed in identifying their own shared needs and actions necessary in peace processes. Thus, taking charge of these processes would contribute to a sense of community owned peace building approach that more underwrite the sustainability of possible solutions.

Importantly, gender equality and the in/exclusion of women in decision-making is paramount within the processes of building sustainable peace. Hence, it is important to (re)consider the status of African women in these indigenous peace building approaches. A feature of gender-based inequality is a failure to recognize or enable women's roles in conflict resolution and as agents of change in building peaceful and democratic societies. However, despite the immense role of indigenous approaches in Africa, some feminists, whether from an academic or activist position, have criticized these approaches as they have ignored the importance of gender in the issues of conflict resolution and peace building processes (Villegas, 2010). Realizing effective peace building processes in post conflict environment needs the considerations of gender roles because it is unrealizable to build a durable peace if women are not encouraged to participate in creating a gender inclusive peace (Maina, 2012). In this regards, Kaberuka (2014), Isike and Okeke (2009) argued that, women have always been at the center of peace building processes across different pre-colonial African societies under their respective indigenous mechanisms. Therefore, since peace building contributions made by women in African communities through their indigenous approaches is significantly important, gender roles in such approaches needs to be consciously addressed in order to foster their contribution in the today's context.

Most importantly, the concept of understanding peace has been reshaped to include the gender variable under positive peace served to expand the notion of peace from a mere absence of direct violence to include it with strategies of social justice and democracy among others. To achieve these intended goals, reinstating and/or harnessing the available indigenous capacities for peace should be guiding principles of peace building agenda in the contemporary Africa. Furthermore, reflection on African women's actual experiences of peace building from indigenous perspective would help to identify the gaps in policy and practice that promotes the ways in which women's peace practice can be better supported and incorporated into peace initiatives today through home-grown approaches. Hence, coordination of peace building activities at different level of societies (especially the women) is of utmost importance. Particularly, the indigenous knowledge system and structures of leadership and communal life (like the Oromoo Gadaa system and others in African society) would have vital roles in building sustainable peace in Africa as home-grown approaches. Therefore, this paper addresses both concepts of indigenous culture and gender questions in peace building from below by considering the indigenous approaches of peace building and inclusion of women's as the central focus points. This can be enriched by changing significantly from top-down peace building process to what is collectively referred to as peace building from below. The paper brings various competing views together to address gaps and a challenge produced by different scholars and suggests a viable way out.

Among the African societies, the Oromoo are rich in indigenous institutions of conflict resolution, justice administration and peace building based on their own world view under the Gadaa system (Keneni, 2012). However, the status of women in the wider Gadaa system appears contested concept where several writers have reflected divergently so far. Several have argued that the Oromoo women were "excluded" in the Gadaa system, particularly in the Gadaa grade-sets in the political participation. According to SIHA's report in 2012, the Oromoo "Women are not directly a part of the Gadaa and they do not have a role in the Gadaa grade systems [and] customary law mechanisms under the Gadaa system are inherently male-biased as men are the only decision-makers and judges in these traditional dispute resolution systems". On the other hand, others have reversed the above perspective arguing for the "inclusion" of women in the Gadaa system with their own institution and its respective functions parallel to the men. Notably, for Tabor Wami (2015), "In all cases without the women's participation there is no Gadaa system [they] are the pillar of the Gadaa system." Thus, since the moves towards gender equality are central to positive peace, the main cleavages of inequality in all societies have to be addressed as a part of peace building.

Despite, the arguments against the Oromoo Gadaa system for the perception of "exclusion" of women (which this paper contests) the roles of *siiqqee institution* is and be among the parts of the core in contemporary peace building project from below. The critiques of Gadaa system for its gender exclusion are wrong and misguided. In the Oromoo Gadaa system, *siiqqee institution* is used by women as a check and balance system as it provides a political and social platform for Oromoo women

to effectively voice their concern and address their social justice issues (Jalata and Schaffer, 2013). So, it is reasonable to identify the roles of Oromoo women through their *siiqqee institution* as it can be made to play an exemplar role in resolving conflicts and building peace in contemporary Africa at large. The objective is to show that the *siiqqee institution* can be considered as one model of African women for peace building which can be utilized as an institution to resolve conflict and create conducive environment for sustainable peace. The rationale behind arise from the premise that, the potential roles of *siiqqee institution* in the Oromoo Gadaa system would provide a useful insights into the relevance of African indigenous approaches as well as inspire a positive social change which promotes women's actual roles in peace building process at all levels and forms. Hence, it is important to validate the roles of women as part of the Oromoo community being indispensable in the wider Gadaa system through *siiqqee institution* from peace building perspective. Relying on the roles of *siiqqee institution* within the Gadaa system, this paper explains the gender dimension of peace building in the Oromoo indigenous system. It also unearths the Oromoo women's actual experiences and potential contributions to the peace building, which helps identify the gaps in policy and practices, and suggests alternative ways of incorporating them into peace initiatives. In general, indigenous peace building approach based on Oromoo world view offers the greatest opportunity to redress gender role through the women's *siiqqee institution*. This is because the conceptualization of indigenous peace building is particularly pertinent in terms of the relationship between gender relations and justice. Peace building involves operational and structural activities for more sustainable and peaceful relationships, this paper add the gender equality, mutual respect, and inclusivity which are all among the hallmarks of the Gadaa system.

2. Methods and Materials

This work employed qualitative approach to understand the societal situation by explaining the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a given social setting/context (Creswell, 2009). The qualitative research is also chosen because it has been associated with a feminist sensitivity allowing women's voices to be heard and to realize the emancipatory goals. In relation to this approach, the study is shaped by what Creswell (2009) calls social constructivism worldview where meanings are based upon on the context where people live and work. Typically with this strategy, the detailed data are gathered from both primary (through key informant interviews from Abba Gadaas, Culture and Tourism Office experts, and researchers on the theme) and secondary sources (from related previous research works, books, articles, reports, and etc.) which were formed into categories and themes for discussion and analysis. These collected data were analyzed and interpreted qualitatively using content and thematic analysis methods.

3. Results and Discussions

This part contains two sections to provide discussions to meet the objectives of the paper. The first section covers the descriptions of *siiqqee institution* providing its meanings and definitions and the roles of Oromoo women in peace building process. The second section covers the practical workings of *siiqqee institution* in indigenous peace building process rooted in the Oromoo world view. Here, the Oromoo conceptions of peace under the values of their world view allow women to participate in building peace through the *siiqqee institution*.

3.1. Conceptualizing *Siiqqee Institution* in the Gadaa System

The Oromoo term *siiqqee* as defined by several scholars can be conceptualized from two perspectives. First, physically based on its actual appearance and; second symbolically based on its institutional functions in the Oromoo community. Physically, *siiqqee* is *ulee* (translated as a thin lofty stick) which every Oromoo woman receive on their wedding day from their mothers based on the customary marriage principle (Kumsa, 1997), (Østebø, 2009), and (Demissie, 2011). Symbolically, *siiqqee* is a social institution sanctioned with set of rights which is exercised by Oromoo women signifying honor, blessing, instrument of peace, religious prayer and etc., (Kumsa, 1997), (Østebø, 2009) and (Kebe, 2016). Importantly as Østebø (2009) explained, *siiqqee* is not merely a term for a material symbol rather it refers to an institution in which women have *exclusive* religious, political, and other functions. In the Gadaa system, as Doyo (2015) explained it, [women] are linked through men using *siiqqee* and

this signifies the Megerssa's (2005) position which asserts that, in the Gadaa system there was a check and balance mechanism built as *siiqqee* was institutionalized where women formed a parallel organizations of their own to preserve and maintain their rights. As to Kelly (1992) cited in Kumsa (1997), the interdependence of the male and the female is considered a precondition for peace and prosperity in the metaphysical as well as the practical sense of Oromoo society. Thus, *siiqqee* and *horooroo* (translated as stick given to Oromoo man on his marriage day) are symbolic regulators of a healthy and balanced power relation between female and male Oromoo for as long as they live as a part and parcel of the general cosmic order of *Waaqa* conceptualized as *safuu* (Megerssa, 2005). Generally, the Oromoo women have the *siiqqee* as a parallel institution to the Gadaa system functioning together to maintain *safuu* in Oromoo society by enabling Oromoo women to have control over any of their issues by deterring men from infringing upon their individual and collective rights (Hinew, 2012).

As argument goes, for some “the Gadaa system is only for men [and] its ‘egalitarian’ nature has clear limitations. Women are not directly a part of the Gadaa and they do not have a role in the Gadaa grade systems.” (SIHA,2012). Also for others, as women are excluded from Gadaa System especially in politics and military participation their political and democratic rights cannot be represented and respected through their *siiqqee* as a separate institution (Tefaye, 2012). On the other side, according to Ginbar (2011) cited in Hinew (2012), Gadaa effectively enforced a gender-based division of labor in Oromoo society where men passes through age-sets and generation-sets social divisions. Here, Gadaa demands tough military and hunting exercise activities and fitness, which a female being is thought to be unfit ascribed to females’ nature for life-giving quality and other variables. Hence, gender oriented labor division in the Gadaa system is logical and reasonable factors associated with the nature of the task, the ability of the performer, and other internal and external conditions. Nevertheless, it is unfair and blind accusation to judge Gadaa system as if it has established a functional discriminatory institution whereby female identities were oppressed. This scruntly captures the interesting account of Wami (2015) which states that, there is no effective Gadaa System without women’s participation in it as they are the pillar of the system itself.

Therefore, this paper supports the view stated in the report of Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau (2015) which postulates that the Gadaa is a system in which the rights of women are respected. The instrument through which women's rights are duly respected is known as *Siiqqee*- which is a procedure in which women organize themselves in group to stand up for their rights. In this procedure, women carry a thin stick known as *Siiqqee* which is given to every girl by her mother on her wedding day. With this gift, the bride is reminded of her power to demand her rights to be respected in her future life. Whenever a woman's right is violated, be it by her own husband or by another person, the women around make a sound (*illillii*) to notify each other. Upon hearing the sound, women quickly move to her the place, carrying their *Siiqqee* stick. Here, it is the obligation of every woman to respond to the call. At this time, it is the obligation of the husbands to look after the homes which women have left behind. This shows the strong determination to respect the rights of women. Likewise, a man who meets a woman carrying her stick on his is required to greet her properly before passing her. A woman who has gone out for help of other carrying her *Siiqqee* stick certainly gets the support she seeks. For instance, a woman who is needy and does not have anything to sustain her family would carry her stick and go to those who have ample and able to get the required assistance. Accordingly, the families who are asked to provide assistance would do so as much as they are able to do (Ibid).

Due to the strong respect that the Oromoo have for the Gadaa system, every sanction it imposes on the society was observed with respect. Therefore, it is warranted to conclude that the value embedded in *siiqqee* emanates from the overall respect given to the Gadaa system, and the reverence to the stick has long been associated with this respect (Getachew, 2012). It is also important to note that *siiqqee* is not merely a term for a material symbol, it also refers to an institution, namely to a women’s organization that excludes men, and that has socio-cultural, economic, environmental, religious and political functions. As a result, the next section shows the way under which the Oromoo women put their finger print in peace building from below based on their indigenous *siiqqee institution*. The expected roles of

siiqqee institution are analyzed and explained based on the way in which the Oromoo women use *siiqqee* as a weapon in their overall societal relations. The actual experiences of Oromoo women to build peace in several parts of the society are used to substantiate the findings.

3.2. The Role of *Siiqqee Institution* in Indigenous Peace Building Processes

Peace is everyone's responsibility and its building process seeks to prevent, reduce, transform, and help people recover from conflict and violence in all of their forms. As such, the effort of women as stakeholders in peace building process from below through their indigenous institutions is hard to miss nowadays. Here, the involvement of women in conflict resolution and peace building is expected to be well explained based on their own actual experiences as they have been known to play prominent roles. When it comes to Oromoo women, as Qumbi (1989) explained it in Kuwe (1997), "The very old, the very young and all women, in the Gadaa system, are considered as innocent and peace-loving." Also, as Kebe (2016) stated it, "women in the Oromoo society are considered as symbol of mediation and peace building pride." Thus, the following six themes present the Oromoo women's role in building peace through their indigenous *siiqqee institution* under Gadaa system. The first is

- a) ***Siiqqee as symbol of motherhood/womanhood:*** when the Oromoo women receive *siiqqee* on their wedding day they are expected to start a new life with adjacent responsibilities. As such, the women possess roles and status as mother which is the first and most valuable school in social life of the Oromoo society. The Oromoo women are the nurturers of values like forgiveness, tolerance, cooperation, respect and acceptance of others, all of which are conducive to peace amongst and between groups. The Oromoo women being and becoming a mother always strive to bring up their children with positive social norms and ethos viewing to build a family equipped to contribute for the foundation of a decent society with culture of peace. They make every effort to lay the foundation for a healthy and peaceful society that can take charge of its destiny. In this way, the Oromoo women have always played a critical role in maintaining equilibrium in their society by bringing up their children as responsible members of the community. Women taught their daughters and sons proper behavior and the ethos of society i.e. *safuu* and impressed on them the importance of the *safuu* values (honesty, uprightness and the necessity to compromise). As such, the Oromoo women have always been active promoters of harmony in the community that can be referred as a culture of peace. Therefore, Oromoo women have served as peace educator mothers nurturing the value of peace, respect and empathy for others with their children particularly and the whole society in general.
- b) ***The second is Siiqqee as tool of human rights advocacy and awareness rising:*** women's goal in peace building has been both to improve the whole society in general and to improve their own position within that society. Under the Gadaa system, *siiqqee* was used by women as a check and balance system to counter the male dominated roles. This *siiqqee institution* gave a political and social platform for Oromoo women to effectively voice their concern and address their social justice issues (Jalata and Schaffer, 2013). This makes women instrumental in bringing human rights violations and abuses to the wider public for relevant solution. As Megerssa (1995) asserted it, *siiqqee* was the weapon by which the Oromoo women fought for their rights and it helped them as a defense to contest against any force that threatens their basic human rights. Also, the *siiqqee* was granted to the married women to use whenever she performs important ritual performances and to symbolize her feminine rights and respect (Sirika, 2009). According to Kumsa (1997), "Married women have the right to organize and form the *siiqqee* sisterhood and solidarity. They get together regularly for prayers as well as for other important individual and community matters. If men try to stop women from attending these *walargee* (meetings), it is considered against *safuu*." Oromoo women used several *siiqqee* mechanisms to maintain their rights. Such mechanisms include: the law of *muuka laaftu* (soften wood), the *abarsa* (curse), *iyya siiqqee* (scream), and *godaana siiqqee* (trek). Specially, when there were violations of their rights, women left their homes, children,

and resources and traveled to a place where there was a big tree called *qilxxu* and assembled there until the problems were solved through negotiation by elders of men and women (Kumsa, 1997). Here, *siiqqee institution* is found as a 'soft power' for building peace through the ability to exert influence as an alternative option to peace by persuasion rather than using force or coercion. Oromoo women through their *siiqqee institution* have advocated for change seeking to gain support for change by increasing a group's power (solidarity) to address issues, and ripen the conditions needed to transform relationships. *Siiqqee institution* has served as Oromoo women's networking tool that allowed them to coordinate their action and multiply their power to bring about change in their community. Totally, through *siiqqee institution*, the Oromoo women have played exemplar role in reducing direct violence by restraining perpetrators of violence, relieving the immediate suffering of victims of violence, and creating a safe space for peace building activities in other categories that could address the root causes of the conflicts.

- c) **The third is *Siiqqee as an inviolable gender bridge*:** according to Gadaa system customary law, women are among the group of people that cannot and should not be harmed even during an ongoing conflict. *Siiqqee* symbolizes the respect and the power that a married woman has in which nobody shouldn't fight with her if a woman has a *siiqqee in* her hand (Østebø, 2009). Also as Demissie (2011) explained it, women with *siiqqee* are highly respected and no one dares to refuse any instruction given by a woman with *siiqqee* where whatever she demands is given to her. Even when woman with *siiqqee* met someone on the road everyone is expected to receive blessing from her and get permission to pass. In times of conflict if the Oromoo women with *siiqqee* are present the lives and properties will not be violated. Therefore, *siiqqee* institution of the Oromoo women represents their contribution to build peace and transform any ongoing conflict.
- d) **The fourth is *Siiqqee as a symbol of promoting humanitarian and social welfare*:** *siiqqee institution* allowed the Oromoo women to control essential economic assets within the sphere of their household (Jalata and Schaffer, 2013). In the Gadaa system, family asset is controlled by women and it is the responsibility of women to manage what is harvested and to allocate the proportion to be used for household consumption, to be sold in the market to earn cash, and to purchase other goods and services needed by the family (OCTB, 2015). Thus, the Oromoo women have provided capacity building that promotes long term peace building efforts by enhancing the existing societal capacities to meet needs and rights aimed to build a just structure that support a sustainable culture of peace. Also, the *siiqqee institution* empowers the Oromoo women who left their own families and communities to live with their husband's families and communities, to protect themselves and each other from abuse (Jalata and Schaffer, 2013). In addition, networks, support and solidarity that were practiced among the Oromoo women would serve as building blocks for cooperation and development purposes. Importantly, according to Scott-Villiers *etal* (2011), the Oromoo women have their own specific forms of *daimtu* (i.e. exchanging information between themselves and with others) as part of the community. They meet at certain women-only places and at water points, markets, weddings and funerals, and the information they share on actual or rumored conflict reaches the ears and minds of men. They sing songs and give blessings or encouragements that have a profound influence on the society.
- e) **The fifth is *Siiqqee as a symbol of peacemaking and preventive diplomacy*:** according to OCTB (2015), in the Gadaa system women have the power to end any act of hostilities whether it is taking place between different clans or with other ethnic groups. Whenever there is conflict going on and women arrive at the place carrying their *siiqqee* and they go between the parties at conflict and both parties are expected to promptly give up the fight. Even, Demissie (2011) stated that, the women who enter the battle field with their *siiqqee* have special song named "*Diloo*" used to end the atrocities of the conflict. The song goes as: "*I don't have a weapon; I do have only my siiqqee with me; I don't challenge you with force...*"

Thus, the Oromoo women have been capable of practicing building bridges of dialogue and empathy among conflicting parties that go beyond the reasons for the armed confrontation and the deep rooted hatred and division. They have commended positions in common from which to initiate a rapprochement and search for new ways of living together. Cognizant of this, the Oromoo women have actual experiences in local conflict resolution and peace building process. For instance, the role of Guji Oromoo women in conflict resolution based on their involvement as a link between the opponents has explained by Debsu (2009) stated as: *the role of women in the peacemaking process is enormous, especially in the conflicts that arise between the Borana and the Guji. Following major conflicts between them, the two groups have a cultural practice of sending peace messengers to the adversary group. The party first interested in peace sends a lichoo, a female peace envoy, to the hayyu, judge, of the opponent group. While traveling in the territory of the enemy, the custom confers respect to a lichoo and protects her from any harm...* (Debsu, 2009). Also according to Doyo (2014), the role of Borana Oromoo women in conflict resolution and building peace during the ethnic conflicts between Borana and Hamar, and Borana and Harbooree was narrated as: *It was us (women) who stopped the conflict that even the government failed to solve for long time. We came to consensus over one common assumption in that we all admitted that revenge could never return lost lives and raise the dead or the incumbent or clan, million birr would never replace lost lives and raided assets. It is after that we got rest. Today, we and the Hamar and Harbooree are brothers and sisters who lean on the same sources* (Doyo, 2014). Generally, the Oromoo women have always aimed to transform destructive relationships with an array of processes that address trauma to transform conflict and restore a sense of justice. They act as intermediaries in conflict situations, undertaking reconnaissance missions to assess possibilities for peace and subsequently facilitating communication and peace negotiations. They used as bridge building blocks between the hostile or fighting communities.

- f) *The sixth is Siiqqee as a tool of spiritual mediator and harmony making:* If the peace between men and women was broken, a *siiqqee institution* was initiated to restore the law of *Waaqa* and the moral and ethical order (*safuu*) of society. The Oromoo woman, also, makes prayers to *Waaqa* on behalf of the whole nation. In particular, when there is a problem facing the community such as drought, epidemic outbreak, etc., they go to a river or lake the nearby carrying green grasses to perform the ritual of prayers so that *Waaqa* intervene and solve their problem (OCTB, 2015). This role of women is due to the belief that women have the power to mediate between *Waaqa* and the whole community. Thus, *siiqqee* has a religious role as women are considered as intermediary figures between *Waaqa* and the physical world (Kebe, 2016). Thus, the Oromoo believe that women are deemed closer to the nature in their nurturing and life sustaining activities. Also, according to Kumsa (1997), women wield a special religious power where they draw an enormous moral and ritual authority. They enjoy special sacred power as a class; people respect and revere them because *Waaqa* made them to be respected and revered. In the Oromoo world view, it is believed that, interference with a woman's sacred authority is regarded as violating *seera Waaqa* and *safuu*. Generally, the women's respect and rights among the Oromoo is based on the fear of the *siiqqee* which stems mainly from the perception that women are closer to *Waaqa* than men because they are more humble, they are soft, they are innocent and they do not fight. This leads to the conclusion that *Waaqa* tends to listen more to women than men within the Oromoo world view. The one whom woman blesses will be blessed and what she curses will be cursed.

4. Conclusion

Africa's quest for a durable peace is inextricably tied to the quest for gender equality where bringing gender cases into peace building are paramount as a gendered perspective represents a process of inclusion. But, women's attempts at peace building often go undocumented and unrecognized by organizations involved in conflict resolution. There is a need to involve women as major stakeholders in mechanisms for conflict management and resolution because their active participation in peacemaking is known to modify and influence the vision of conflicting parties. The Oromoo Gadaa

system promotes culture of peace and the *siiqqee institution* in particular has immense roles in building peace encouraging Oromoo women to consolidate their holistic devotion capable of bringing about structural changes required to enhance equality, social justice, solidarity, and sustainable peace and development. The Oromoo women have socially recognized ways of categorizing the roles and status to enjoy different rights and privileges according to their seniority (Hussein, 2004). Specially, under the indigenous *siiqqee institution*, the Oromoo women have proven themselves to be successful peace builders basing their strategies on the principles of inclusivity, collaboration, and on the methodology of peace building.

The Gadaa system and *siiqqee institutions* helped to maintain *safuu* in Oromoo society by enabling Oromoo women to have control over resources and private spaces, social status and respect, sisterhood and solidarity by deterring men from infringing upon their individual and collective rights (Jalata and Schaffer, 2013). Under the *siiqqee institution* the Oromoo women have mobilized for peace and have played active roles as peacemakers in conflict situations, yet remain the pivotal points in holding together their families and communities in times of crisis and have acted as activists advocating for peace by using their soft power in pursuing democracy and human rights. For generations, the Oromoo women have been serving; essentially as symbol of peace, operationally as peace educators and diplomatically as peace envoys in the societal relations. The totality of this makes the Oromoo women know the cost incurred from conflict and thereby get equipped to transform it in advance, and the *siiqqee institution*, as a reservoir, full of important indigenous values that enrich gender capacities necessary to guarantee lasting peace. As the way forward, building lasting peace and security requires women's active participation as half of the world's population cannot make a whole peace. The Oromoo women, by virtue of their position in the society, have a unique perspective on *siiqqee* essential values, which well attests their indispensable and instrumental in peace building. Harnessing this indigenous Oromoo women's potential requires enhancing commitment, leadership and accountability, improving institutional capacity and increasing the financial and human resources of formal and informal peace and security sectors in the country. In order to promote an appropriate follow-up of the present study it is better to: elicit a consensus about the Gadaa values to be reinstated as it could effectively contribute to fostering and strengthening a culture of peace in the Oromoo society; expose the essential roles women should play through *siiqqee institution* in strengthening peace and social harmony; examine ways in which modern women can be admitted to this indigenous institution; and the necessary stakeholders should empower Oromoo women with their indigenous *siiqqee institution*.

References

- Africa, E. C. (2007). *Relevance of African Traditional Institutions of Governance*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Economic Commission for Africa.
- Agbajobi, D. (2010). The Role of Women in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding. *Understanding Africa's Contemporary Conflicts: Origins, Challenges and Peacebuilding*, pp. 233-254.
- Asafa Jalata and Harwood Schaffer. (2013). The Oromoo, Gadaa/Siiqqee Democracy
- Christopher Isike and Ufo Okeke. (2009). Towards an Indigenous Model of Women's Roles as Traditional Peace: Women's roles as Traditional Peacebuilders. 32-58.
- Coning, C. d. (2013). Understanding Peacebuilding as Essentially Local. *Stability*, 1-6.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*.
- Debsu, D. N. (2009). Gender and Culture in Southern Ethiopia: An Ethnographic Analysis of Guji-Oromoo Women's Customary Rights. *African Study Monographs*, 30(1), 15-36.

- Demissie, D. (2011). *Oromoo Wisdom in Black Civilization*. Finfinnee, Ethiopia: Finfinee Printing and Publication SC.
- Doyo, G. (2014). *FDRE Constitutional Rights and Customary Laws Regarding Pastoral Communities: Workshop on the Rights and Role of Women's Participation in Conflict Resolution and Peace building*. Yabello, Oromiya: Oromia Pastoralist Association (OPA) .
- Getachew, A. (2012). *Customary Laws in Ethiopia: A Need for Better Recognition? A Women's Rights Perspective*. Copenhagen: Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR).
- Haider, H. (2009). *Community-based Approaches to Peacebuilding in Conflict-affected and Fragile Contexts*. Birmingham: International Development Department, University of Birmingham.
- Hinew, D. (2012). History of Oromoo Social Organization: Gadaa Grades Based Roles and Responsibilities. *Science, Technology and Arts Research Journal*, 88-96.
- Hussein, J. W. (2004). A Cultural Representation of Women in the Oromoo Society. *African Study Monographs*, 25(3): October 2004, 103-147.
- Kaberuka, D. (2014). *Ending Conflict & Building Peace in Africa: A Call to Action*.
- Kebe, S. (2016). *Oromoo Nationalism*. Finfinnee, Oromiyaa: Sgli General Printing and Promotion Plc.
- Keneni, T. (2012). Exploring Gumaa as an Indispensable Psycho-social Method of Conflict Resolution and Justice Administration. 37-57.
- Kumsa, K. (1997). The Siiqqee Institution of Oromoo Women. *The Journal of Oromoo Studies*, Volume 4, Numbers 1 & 2, 115-152.
- Maina, G. (2012). An Overview of the Situation of Women in Conflict and Post-Conflict Africa. (pp. 1-12). South Africa: African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD).
- Megerssa, G. (2005). The Oromoo World-view. *The Journal of Oromoo Studies*, Volume 12, Numbers 1 & 2, 68-79.
- Murithi, T. (2009). *The Ethics of Peace Building*. 22 George Square, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- OCTB. (2015, March). Regarding Sending to you a petition by the Oromoo people for the inscription of the Gada System on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. . Addis Ababa, Oromiya, Ethiopia: Oromiya Cultura and Turism Bereau.
- Østebø, M. (2009). Wayyuu – Women's Respect and Rights among the Arsi-Oromoo. In: *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, ed. by Svein Ege, Harald Aspen, Birhanu Teferra and Shiferaw Bekele., (pp. 1049-1060). Trondheim.
- Patta Scott-Villiers, Hussein Boru Ungiti, Diba Kiyana, Molu Kullu, Tumul Or to, Eugenie Reidy and Adan Sora. (2011). *The Long Conversation: Customary Approaches to Peace Management in Southern Ethiopia and Northern Kenya*. Future Agriculture.

- SIHA. (2012). *Between Modernism and Heritage: The Application of the Parallel Legal System to the Oromoo Women of Ethiopia*. Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA) Network.
- Sirika, B. (2009). Socio-economic Status of Handicraft Women among Macca Oromoo of West Wallaga, Southwest Ethiopia. *Return to March 2009 Newsletter*: <http://www.diaspora.uiuc.edu/news0309/news0309.html> , 1-20.
- Tesfaye, Z. (2012). *Ethiopia: When the Gadaa Democracy Rules in a Federal State Bridging Indigenous Institutions of Governance to Modern Democracy*.
- Villellas, M. (2010). The Participation of Women in Peace Processes: The Other Tables. *ICIP Working Papers*, 1-59.
- Wami, T. (2015). *Partisan Discourse and Authentic History*. Finfinnee, Oromiyaa.