



Full Length Research Paper

Gumaa beyond Compensation: Reconciliation and Reintegration among the Ituu Oromo

Boru Musa Burka¹ and Jira Mekonnen Choroke*²

¹and ² College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Jimma University, email: borumusa542@gmail.com; jira.mekonnen@ju.edu.et (Corresponding author)

Submission Date: April 02, 2024

Acceptance Date: January 20, 2026 DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gadaa.v9i1.3>

Abstract

This study was conducted to explore the gumaa institution beyond the regular compensation for a life taken in the hand of another person. The work describes the procedures of blood purification and offender's reintegration into the Ituu Oromo. Qualitative research was used and field methods like observation, interviews and focus group discussions were employed to gather primary data for the research. Existing documents on the gumaa institution were also analysed and incorporated. The study addressed the required procedures and steps for blood compensation, the reintegration of the offender, and eventual reconciliation of the victim's and offender's families. Knowledgeable persons from Oda Bultum, Gumbi-Bordode, and Fentalle districts were purposively selected for the fieldwork. The finding of the study shows that the Ituu have preserved the outstanding features of their traditional gumaa institution for blood price payment, reconciliation and reintegration. Some of the major gumaa types of the Ituu include darba, amba and daguu murders where Heera Diinoo, Heera Amboo and Heera Danuu are applied, respectively. In exceptional gumaa laws, the murder of a virgin and/or a gosaa head is addressed differently. The gumaa ritual follows a number of steps and takes various factors into account to resolve the conflict and to maintain peace among the two groups.

Keywords: Conflict resolution, gosaa, gumaa, Ituu Oromo, reintegration

Gumaa Gumaa Baasuun Olitti: Araara Buusuufi Hawwaasummaa Cimsuu akka Oromoo Ituutti

Axareeraa

Qorannoon kun akkaataa sirni gumaa Oromoo Ituu baha Oromiyaa jiraatan yoo namni nama walajjeese itti hiikaniifi namticha deebisanii hawaasatti makan qorachuudha. Qorannoo qulqulleeffataatti dhimma bahamee malleen qorannoo kanneen akka daawwannaa, af-gaaffiifi marii garee xiyyeeffataa hojiirra oolaniiru. Qorannoon kun adeemsa gumaa baasuu qorachuu, heerota gumaa baasuu keessatti hojiirra oolan xiinxaluufi gahee gumaan jiruufi jireenya Ituu keessatti qabu addeessuurratti xiyyeeffate. Namoonni beekumsa gahaa adeemsa gumaa baasuu irratti qaban aanaalee Odaa Bultum, Gumbi-Bordoddeefi Fantaallee keessaa filatamanii ragaalee barbaachisan kennaniiru. Argannoon qorannoo kanaa akka mul'isutti, lubbuun namaa nama harkatti yoo bade, Oromoon Ituu seera gumaatti fayyadamanii akka baasisan agarsiisa. Dabalataan, Oromoon Ituu muuxannoo jiruufi jireenya ofii irraa ka'anii gumaatti fayyadamaa akka turniifi ammallee jiran hubatameera. Heeronni gumaa bebbeekamoon heera diinoo, heera amboofi heera danuu jedhamu. Heeronni kunneen gumaa bifa garaa garaa kaffaluuf oolu. Akka Oromoo Ituutti, yoo dubarri yookiin ammoo hogganaan gosaa tokko ajjeefame, gumaan isaanii kan ba'u haala adda ta'een ta'uunis hubatameera. Adeemsi gumaa baasanii warra walajjeese walitti araarsuu sadarkaalee adda addaatti kan gaggeeffamu yemmuu ta'u adeemsa kana xumuruuf dhimmoota adda addaa irratti xiyyeeffachuun barbaachisaa akka ta'e beekameera. Ituun gumaa baasisiisee nagaa waaraan gareelee lamaan gidduutti akka bu'u taasissee, gareen lamaan jireenya naga-qabeessa duraaniitti akka deebi'an akka godhus beekameera.

Jechoota Ijoo: Wal-dhibbii furuu, gosa, gumaa, Oromoo Ituu, nagaa buusuu

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and justification

Many African societies apply indigenous approaches to settle conflicts at all levels. The Oromo are particularly rich in indigenous mechanisms for conflict resolution, justice administration and peace building, and reintegration (Gow, 2000; Gumi, 2016). 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 have always settled disputes through various indigenous means which they have accumulated over the centuries. They were mainly dependent on their own conflict resolution mechanisms until they were incorporated into imperial Ethiopia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Holcomb, 1999). Although the Oromo were subjected to a number of influences under the subsequent Ethiopian regimes, their traditional mechanisms of conflict resolutions have strived and survived in one form or another (Gemechu, 2002; Zeleke, 2010; Dibaba, 2012).

Among these conflict resolution mechanisms *jaarsummaa*, *siinqee* and *gumaa* are the most common and actively functioning institutions (Muchie and Bayeh, 2015; Miressa, 2018). *Jaarsummaa*, 'council of elders', is a mechanism by which a group of elders engage to settle a particular dispute as a third party (Ameyu and Melaku, 2020). In *jaarsummaa*, the concept '*jaarsa*', 'old' does not necessarily refer to the age of an individual but to the wisdom one owns in such a deliberation. That means a person of a certain age who can address and be able to

resolve a dispute can be considered as an elder (Miressa, 2018). Siinqee is a ritual stick that married women use to resolve conflicts or to get their rights restored in case it is denied or violated. *Gumaa* is blood compensation process through which a slayer's group is reconciled with the deceased families (Negash, 2018).

Several studies were conducted on the *gumaa* institution to analyse it from anthropological and methodological points of view (Gumi, 2016). According to Tsige (2002) and Dejene (2007), *gumaa* is Oromo's traditional way of resolving conflict and a mechanism of paying blood price for a victim's family. *Gumaa* among the Guji is called *Gondooroo* and its practice and implementation largely remains the same with the rest of Oromo areas (Gumi, 2016). Ameyu and Melaku (2020) and Negash (2013) conducted researches on the *gumaa* among the Tulama Oromo. Dejene (2002) gave more emphasis on the imposition of the central state laws that had considerably impacted the institution and contributed for its gradual decline among the Waliso of the Macha Oromo.

Though there are few basic elements which remain the same in *gumaa*, there are also differences in procedures, blood prices, rituals and emphasis on the institution across the various Oromo groups. This research among the Ituu of eastern Oromia addresses issues beyond the blood price payment for compensation to successfully healing the hostile relations that has occurred between the two parties to reintegrating them in post-conflict situations.

1.2. Brief history of the Ituu Oromo

The Ituu belong to the eastern Oromo group who come under the Barentu moiety. The Ituu, who are the sons of Murawa Barentu, had ten sons called *Ituu-kudhan*^a. The sons are further divided into two exogamous moieties, Kuraa and Galaan, who further divide into a number of clans, sub-clans and lineages (Afendi, 2020; Boru and Dejene, 2022). Geographically, they reside in the areas that extend from Carcar (currently West Hararghe) to Fantale district in East Shewa Zone (Alemayehu, 1998; Boru, 2021), and in parts of Wallo in the north (Jalata, 2010). Although they live in different locations, they mainly reside in Carcar, historically known as *Ona Ituu*, 'Ituu's district' (Alemayehu, 1998; Boru, 2021; Boru and Dejene, 2022). They border the Karrayyuu and the Afran Qal'oo Oromo in the west and east, respectively, and the Afar in the north and the Somali in the north-east. In the south and southwestern borders of the Ituu are the Anniya (Humbanna) and Arsi Oromo groups, respectively (Boru, 2021).

Regarding their social and political organisation, they are structured and organised by the *Gadaa* and *Gosaa* systems. Despite the pressure from the foreigners (Turko-Egyptians) and the Ethiopian states (particularly, during the 19th and 20th centuries imperial conquest), the Ituu were able to sustain most features of the *Gadaa* system (Afendi, 2020). They used to be traditional Oromo believers before they embraced Islam centuries ago. However, they still kept at least the basic elements of their institutions and rituals. With regard to their subsistence economy, the Ituu in the lowland areas of Carcar are agro-pastoralist whereas those in the highlands are predominantly farmers (Boru and Dejene, 2022).

^aThe ten sons of the Ituu are Baabboo, Gaamo, Afur-Galaan, Beerree-Hidhabuu, Baaye, Gaadullaa, Alga, Arroojjii, Addaayyo, and Waayyee. The first five *gosas* are under the Galaan sub-moiety while the later five are under the Kuraa sub-moiety (Boru, 2022).

2. Methodology and methods

A qualitative approach was employed to collect primary data. Purposive sampling was employed to select key informants and discussants from the three districts. The fieldwork was conducted from February 2022 to June 2022. The Ituu on both sides of the Awash River were addressed in this research. The researchers conducted three FGDs (one at each district), each having eight elder discussants. One of the researchers has participated in two *gumaa* proceedings that were conducted at Gumbii-Bordodde and Fentalle districts and observed when some rituals were performed at the homes of the two parties. Key informants' and in-depth interviews were conducted with elders who were active participants of the *gumaa* proceedings in the areas. The 2022 Ituu Oromo gada power transfer ceremony was used as an opportunity to interview most of the informants. The data obtained from the field were thematically organised and finally analysed.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. *Gumaa* as a conflict resolution mechanism among the Ituu Oromo

Gumaa, alone or in combination with other words, carries different meanings in different parts of Oromia. It sometimes refers to a slice of meat cut either raw or cooked. When combined with other words, *gumaa* could have extra meanings. For instance, *warra-gumaa* refers to the parties at blood feud; *gumaa baasuu* means 'paying blood price' or 'killing for a revenge' and purifying the slayer through compensation payment to the victim's family/*gosaa*; and *gumaa nyaachuu*, means 'receiving the blood price of a victim'. *Horii gumaa* refers to the animals (usually cattle) collected to pay for compensation.

In this article *gumaa* refers the purification process that follows a deliberate or a non-deliberate murder. It is the blood money paid for the victim's family/*gosaa* by the offender's family/*gosaa*. The *gumaa* compensation occurs when the life of a person is taken by another due to a number of reasons like dispute over resources, intra-border conflicts, cattle raids and many others. *Gumaa* is, therefore, the mechanism of compensating for a lost life that involves the resolution of the dispute and eventual reintegration of the offender back to his communities. It is the most widely practised mechanism to resolve such a conflict among the Oromo. In Ituu tradition, as is among the Oromo nation in general, blood compensation is largely undertaken by the *gosaa* institution. The *gumaa* compensation is paid not only for murder cases but also for crimes that inflict bodily injuries of different magnitude. In this article, however, we will discuss murder compensations only.

3.2. Types of murders and their corresponding *gumaa* laws

As murders are committed in different ways and due to different reasons, there are various governing laws and compensation mechanisms pertinent to the cases. That means the nature of the homicide decides the corresponding law to be applied to a particular case. This fact also determines the amount of blood price to be paid.

According to discussants, the intention of an offender could be deliberate, emotional with regret, or an unintentional one. Among the Ituu, murder in general can be categorized as *darba*, *amba* or *daguu* in nature. It follows that *Heera Diinoo*, *Heera Amboo* and *Heera Danuu* are

applied to the cases, respectively. In the subsequent sections, we will discuss at some length the different cases of murders (*ajjeechaa*) with their respective *gumaa* laws (*heera gumaa*).

3.2.1. The *Darba* murder

Darba murder got its name from *darbuu*, to ‘throw something away’ as in spear, *eeboo darbuu*. In Oromo tradition, long before the arrival of modern weapons, all able-bodied men carried spears and threw them to kill either wild lives or potential human enemies. This traditional tool is used during hunting expeditions or in cases of warfare. In the strict sense of the tradition, under normal circumstances, one should not throw a spear at someone else but if he does, it is assumed that the target should be an enemy. Conversely, if a person holds the metal part of a spear towards another person, it is also assumed that the spear is already thrown to the latter. Therefore, if a spear is thrown (*darbuu*) with the intension to inflict a damage, the *darba* murder is said to a deliberate one. Generally, the use and social meaning of a spear among the Ituu has given way for the *darba* murder designation and implementation.

At the present, in spite of the tool one may use to kill, if the murder was heavy-handed and the murderer showed little or no sign of regret for the crime, the act is said to be *darba* murder. This killing usually happens when the victim is an enemy. This deliberate murder is sometimes called *basaqqeessa*, ‘purposeful or planned murder’. The killing can also be called *cilicha* from *cilee* ‘charcoal’ implying that there is some kind of *blackness* to the killing. Regarding such an incident, the Ituu say *diina gurraacha* or *diina cilee*, a ‘black enemy’ or an ‘enemy as black (cruel) as a charcoal’. The concept of black in these expressions refers to the fact that the killing was indeed a hard-hearted one.

Under such circumstances, the blood price (BP) is paid in accordance with the *Heera Diinoo*. This law got its name from the root word *diina*, an ‘enemy’, hence ‘law for an enemy’. According to informants, to apply this law, there is a decree called *dabaa dhibii shantam*, ‘pay 150 cattle’. In this phrase, the word *dabaa*, a ‘cruel and wrong doing person’ signals how inhumanely the murderer behaved during the incident. *Dhibii-shantam*, on the other hand, denotes the number of cattle one has to pay to compensate for the murder. *Dhibii-shantam-dhibii dhibba* (one hundred) and *shantam* (fifty), therefore, refers to the one hundred and fifty cattle to be paid by the murderer.

3.2.2. The *amba* murder

The *amba* murder usually occurs when two individuals dispute over economic or other gains and one of them plans and assassinates the other but eventually regrets about his misdeed. In this context, although the killing is a planned one, it is to be understood that the offender does not have a plan or intention to take the life of the victim. Due to this, the act is concluded to be a short-sighted and an emotional one. Both persons may have struggled hard to harm each other but one eventually beats and hurts the other.

According to elders, there are different signs which they read from a murderer to know whether he has regretted or not. If the signs suggest that the person has regretted, then the offender is said to be an *amba*, a kin. Such signs of regret over what happened could be crying for help instead of hiding what happened, or immediately informing others about the fact that a life of

someone has been taken. The murderer who has regreted is said to care for the body of his victim. If the elders recognize these signs, the offender is said to be an *amba*, a kin regardless of his social or ethnic background.

According to the tradition of the Ituu, *Heera amboo*, the ‘law of a non-enemy’, is enacted for this kind of murder. The BP is based on the prescription called *qajeelaa dhibii say-tokko*, ‘good man’s hundred and one cattle’ and men who admit their wrongdoings are said to have socially-approved behaviours. This crime is obviously different from the deliberate murder for which the *heera diinoo* is applied. If a murderer does not show any sign of sympathy for a victim, he is considered as an enemy. The act of the murderer can further be implicated in case he has left his victim at the point without properly caring for the fallen body. Similarly, if the offender who could be from the victim’s *gosaa*, committed other atrocities on the body of the victim by flogging it or shot bullets repeatedly into it, and mutilated the body as a result, the crime is taken as an extreme case of cruelty and the BP should correspond to it.

In another occasion, if in a conflict situation or a battlefield someone leaves his own group to join the other side, he is said to be an enemy. And if this man is killed by his former group while fighting against them, the group he joined can request compensation for his blood during the post-conflict reconciliation. Similarly, if a household moves to an enemy territory and settles there and unfortunately, a conflict erupts between his former kin and the new group he now lives with, and he joins his new group and fights on the side of the latter, it is allowed for his former group to kill him since he no more belongs to them. Regarding this fact, there is a popular saying among the Ituu: *ol gale ambo, gadi gale diino*, ‘he who moves and settles with us is our kin while he who left us and settled in other’s territory is our enemy.’

3.2.3. The *Daguu* murder

Daguu is a sudden and surprise attack that inflicts a damage on a person. The *daguu* murder, therefore, denotes that the killing is unplanned where there is no initial intent to take the life a person. In the tradition, if a person is killed in this manner, the offender is not forced to compensate for the life lost. This does not, however, mean that there is no blood payment at all. Usually, as many as six cattle are given to the family of the victim. One of the cattle, called *qabbaneessituu*, ‘pacifier’ or ‘peace-maker’ is slaughtered at the victim’s homestead to herald a sustainable peace among the two groups. The slaughtering is the beginning of the reconciliation process and the remaining five cattle, called *shanan furrii* (paid to compensate for the shedded tears) are given to the victim’s families. This compensation is different from the other two discussed above in the sense that it neither is collected from the murderer’s *gosaa* nor is it divided among the victim’s family members.

3.3. The blood purification processes

3.3.1. Phase I: Establishing council of elders

In the Ituu tradition, *gumaa* payment undergoes long and complex procedure and the entire process of settling the dispute and executing the BP is called *dhiiga itichuu*, ‘thickening the blood’. The fact that the blood that was spilt and the families and the *gosaa* that were hurt need to be compensated through the gradual consoling and cooling down of the incident by way of *thickening* the boiled blood. The Ituu say this is an important part of their *gumaa* tradition.

The long process of reconciliation begins with a dialogue between the elders from both sides. Decisions are first made about the nature of the murder, and then move onto collecting the BP from the offender's *gosaa* to paying *gumaa* to the victim's family. Eventually, the BP is divided among the *gosaa* of the victim and finally, the whole *gumaa* journey is concluded with a firm and irreversible reconciliation between the two groups.

People believe that the long journey for reconciliation gives the chance even for the victim's families to realise the pains of the offenders who incur many forms of expenditure along the way. It is one way of settling the case and paving the way for eventual build-up of a sustainable peace. According to informants, taking more time is good because the longer the two sides stay together during the deliberation, the closer they get, and the better will be their chances of toning down their emotions.

Once the murder case is heard, the offender's family immediately leaves their residence and settle in another location until the *dhiiga itichuu* begins. Leaving their residence is part of the *gumaa* tradition and has two meanings. One, it is a strategy of escaping from a potential revenge from the victim's *gosaa*, and second, it is a sign that they have accepted the crime one of them committed.

To complete the purification process smoothly, experienced elders from a third *gosaa* are recruited and establish a neutral council of elders called *jaarsolii faajjii*, also referred to as *jaarsolii ambaa*, 'elders from a third *gosaa*'. This council plays a neutral role and closely follows the entire process and oversees the eventual reintegration of the families. The council also serves as a watchdog for the deliberation, and plays a number of roles in the process. It also convinces the victim's family not to take revenge on the offender's family and closely follows the cleansing process right from the beginning, and watches over cases of injustices in due course. Finally, the council carefully observes if the BP is paid in accordance with the Ituu *gumaa* law. According to informants, apart from this council of elders two other teams of elders are also recruited. One group represents the victim's family while the second group represents that of the offender's. These teams of elders are entrusted with the investigation of the crime in their own ways and make relevant decisions.

3.3.2. Phase II: Beginning talks between the council of elders

The offender's family or *gosaa* should immediately send the *jaarsolii-faajjii* to the victim's families who will soon contact the victim's *gosaa* elders. This council tells the elders from the victim's family that they are sent by the offender's *gosaa* to deliberate the murder case. The representatives of the victim's *gosaa* then welcome them, and allow them to move into their villages.

Upon arriving, the council says *gaaddisa naa taa'i, jilba naa cabsadhu; waraana gormuu naa buufadhu* to the elders as a way of begging and to pave the way for more discussions. 'Let you sit under the shade and bend your knees for us; let you put down your spears for us'. They then request the victim's side to open a door for more discussions and deliberations. Traditionally, the Oromo sit under the shade of large trees to settle disputes, including the *gumaa*. Also when one bends one's knees (as when seated), one agrees to discuss an issue. The elders on the victim's side then respond, '*gaaddisa sii taa'e, jilba sii cabsadhe, waraana gormuu sii*

buufadhe, ‘we have bent our knees, we have sat under a shade and put down our spears for you.’ This communication signals that the victim’s *gosaa* are ready for deliberation with the offenders’ side.

After this is done, *sabbata maruu* ‘belt-tying ritual’ on the waist of the victim’s mother follows. In case the victim has no mother, a close woman could be selected for the purpose. According to informants, the belt should be white in colour, and once it is tied, both *gosaa* will move forward with the deliberation. This ritual serves as an initial pacification process. *Sangaa baalaa*, ‘ox of the leaf’, brought by the victim’s *gosaa* is slaughtered, and elders from both sides should dine together. This occasion of dining together should take place before the deceased is buried.

The next issue is identifying and deciding whether the murder was an intentional, an intentional with regret or an unintentional one. To realise this, the council asks the offender some questions publicly and in the presence of eyewitnesses. The offender should properly address the questions and provide relevant answers, presenting evidences for his answers. The eyewitnesses can also support the offender in answering the questions. According to informants, an offender is not expected to lie since he has to free himself. Based on the answers and evidences presented by the offender, and those of the eyewitness accounts, the murder is named. This process of asking, answering and presenting evidences to categorize the murder type is termed *konfii dhaabuu*.

3.3.3. Phase III: Hanging gourd on offender’s hand, *buqqee rarraasuu*

After decisions were made about the type and nature of the murder, the elders on behalf of the offender return to their homestead to hold an urgent meeting, and decide to isolate the offender. A temporary hut is setup around the offender’s homestead, and order the murderer to live there alone. A gourd, *buqqee hadhooytuu*, is tied unto his hand to symbolise that he is a criminal, *nama harkaa*, ‘one whose hand is impure.’

After this, the offender is allowed neither to mix with anyone around nor change his clothes until the *gumaa* process ends. He is also not allowed to trim his nail and shave the hairs on his body. He neither bathes his body nor washes his hands even when eating. He is made to eat roasted food and is not entitled to drink or consume milk and its products. He instead drinkzs ‘black water’ and ‘black coffee’. According to our informants, these sanctions are meant to physiologically, emotionally and psychologically overwhelm the offender. However, except for these sanctions, the offender is not physically abused, and in case it happens, he has the right to defend himself.

3.3.4. Phase IV: Sending out BP collectors, *waldayii bobbaasuu*

Once the process of isolating the slayer ends, BP collection starts. According tradition, BP is collected from household members of the offender’s *gosaa* (clans and sub-clans).The offender’s family also contributes their share like the other households. That means they are not expected to contribute higher than others. This fact coincides with what the Oromoo in general and the Ituu in particular say, *ilmi ka gosaati*, ‘son belongs to the *gosaa*’. It is said that both credit and blame should go for both the family and the respective *gosaa* regarding the up bringing and

moulding of the behaviour of a son. The sharing of the BP, therefore, conveys the message that everyone in the *gosaa* is equally responsible for the behaviour of a child. Other relatives who are not from the offender's *gosaa* are not expected to contribute although an uncle from mother's side usually does.

A small group of adults and young men called *waldayii* are selected from the offender's *gosaa* to collect the BP. The selection is mandatory since the collection is a long process that requires assigning members to different villages. The *waldayii* are organised into different teams to campaign in different directions and to find the households of the offender's *gosaa*. According to key informants, the grouping should include at least an adult man and youths. The team starts its journey throughout the Ituuland mainly in Carcar and beyond, extending to eastern Shewa areas. The journey may take up to a month or more. The group is expected to bring all the livestock they collected, and once the required number of BP is obtained, all BP collectors return to the homestead of the offender.

According to the FGD discussants, there are a number of governing laws for BP collection. Orientation for the collection is given by elders since there might be members who have no prior experiences. These laws include the number of livestock to be collected; the identification of the *gosaa* households who have to contribute; not going to other households other than the ones suggested; leaving out those households who contributed BP for a prior *gumaa* payment, and not collecting the BP without the consent of or in absence of a housewife, *haadha karraa*. In case she is absent when the collectors arrive, they are required to wait until she returns since a husband cannot give out himself. The Ituu say the opposite of this fact does not hold.

Although only cattle are expected for contribution, households can also give goats or sheep in case they do not own the former. Yet, these animals are not counted as part of BP. They are instead sold to buy cattle. One of the rules for the BP collection says a household that does not have anything to contribute is not pressed to pay. Due to this, the collectors should report the case to the elders and ignore such households. If a household is unwilling to contribute or becomes reluctant due to lack of experiences, the *waldayii* have the right to force them. In case of a murder that demands large size of BP, the *waldayii* are sent to each and every household regardless of the household's capacity to contribute or not.

The *waldayii* do not collect BP from different members of a household at a time, and this practice of collecting BP from each household is *karbanaa*, from *karra*, 'gate' and *banaa*, 'open', to mean *open (all) gates to take livestock*. In case a household has two cattle, it is not traditional to take one from the two. But if they have only one, the animal can be taken away. According to Ituu elders, this practice has the lesson that individual households have to feel the pains of the misdeeds of *their son*, and the household that has contributed its only animal would realise that it is sacrificing to purify the son of their *gosaa*.

3.3.5. Phase V: Distributing the BP among the victim's households

The BP of a particular murder is received not only by members of the family of the victim but also by his *gosaa*. The distribution of the BP among the households is made by the council of elders of the victim's *gosaa*. Once the cattle are ready for sharing, they are taken to the victim's

family in three rounds. The first round, called *shanan furrii*, the ‘five cattle of tears’ are given to the bereaving family members immediately after the burial of the deceased. The general belief regarding this issue is that although the death of a man is saddening for all, not all family members shed tears equally and due to this, the *shanan furrii* is not uniformly divided among the family members.

Thus, one lactating cow is given to the mother of the victim; one mounted heifer is given to the father of the victim, and the third cattle is for a half-brother of the victim, and the fourth is the uncle of the victim while the fifth animal is a bull and is slaughtered to start the reconciliation process. Once the *shanan furrii* is divided in this way, the next round of distributing fifteen cattle among the victim’s sub-clans begins and is made based on the closeness of the sub-clans to the victim.

3.4. Discounting the BP, *daneessuu*

In the *gumaa* law of the Ituu, the BP is discounted, called *daneessuu*, in the due course of talks between the two councils for the *darba* and *amba* murders. The ground for the discount is stated in the *gumaa* law as: *gumaan heeraafi dhugaa deema*, ‘BP is paid according to law and truth.’ This fact implies that it is not mandatory to receive all of the *gumaa* deliberations. The contexts and realities for consideration could be the various costs that the offender’s *gosaa* had incurred during the blood purification and cleansing ceremonies and others.

The offender’s *gosaa* present their request for consideration to those of the victim’s *gosaa* elders. The appeal is made in case they managed to collect only a small number of cattle that does not satisfy the law, or if some of the animals do not qualify for the standard of *gumaa* payment. In this regard, the offender’s *gosaa* present their appeal in the following way:

Gabaabaa naa dheeressi!	Let you excuse and accept what is scarce from us!
Dheeraa naa gabaabsi!	Let you accept what is abundant with us!
Ciicoo dibicha naa godhi!	Let you accept my offer as a bull!
Qorii raada naa godhi!	Let you accept my offer as a heifer!

According to our informants, these requests are very fundamental in the Ituu *gumaa* laws since each line of the request carries its own cultural meanings. The first petition, the applicants are referring to the physical appearance of some of their animals which could be calves, skinny or short while others could be weak or sick, tail-cut or deformed. Given this fact, therefore, the receiving elders are expected to forgive. Similarly, when they ask for an excuse of another *gumaa* law, they are suggesting that the animals they are submitting are smaller in number than expected. Since the offender’s side obviously incurs lots of expenses in due course, they appeal for the consideration through cultural materials like *ciicoo*, ‘milk container’ *qorii*, ‘traditional plate to serve porridge’, and bull and heifer and their appeal is usually receives a favourable response.

3.5. Exceptional *gumaa* laws

3.5.1. BP of three trophy owners, *Gumaa qondaala sadeenii*

The Ituu say that there are three trophy owners *qondaala sadeen* who deserve unique *gumaa* payment. These *qondaala* are a virgin girl, head of a *gosaa* and a killer of an enemy or trophy

animals. *Qondaala* is a title given for a person who has killed an enemy or selected wild animals. Once he has killed either of these, he wears the feather of an ostrich, *baallii* on his hair as a symbol of a *qondaala*-hood. The *qondaala* title is applied only for one year, a period called *rarraga*, during which he is well-respected and recognized as a brave man.

According to the Ituu *gumaa* tradition, if the life of such a man is taken during his *qondaalahood*, his *gumaa* is uniquely treated for two reasons. For one, the man is a killer of an enemy and this bestows him a due respect. For another, he is appreciated for his bravery and due to this, his personality stands well above others. The second person to whom the title of *qondaala* is applied is a young girl who should be cared for and respected because of their purity and innocence. When expressing the two, people say the following *mirriga*, traditional song:

Irree maxxansaa qabdi	Girls have bracelets (worn to symbolise virginity)
Mataa qarreedha qabdi	Girls have shaved spots on their backhead (symbolising virginity)
Mataa baalliidha qabdi	Girls have ostrich feathers on their heads (symbolising virginity)
Heerri dubraa jabaadha	Girls have stronger rule (unlike the married ones)
Heera qondaalaati qabdi	They have a rule that equals that of a <i>qondaala</i>

The overall message of this song is that young girls, *qarree*, are socially the equals of a *qondaala*. The Oromo generally attach a unique social value to virginity, and to meet this demand, girls are expected to remain so.

Regarding the BP of a *gosaa* head, after the BP is paid following the usual procedure, the *gumaa* law asks another exceptional question. According to FGD discussants, the law says that an animal should be paid for each of the main body parts of the *gosaa* head. These body parts are the eye, ear, tongue, leg, head, backbone, and hand. They say the organs are selected because as the man performs different activities for his *gosaa* so do the organs for the proper function of the human body. The request for the additional payment is made as follows:

Ija keenyatu nu baqe!	We have lost our eyes!
Gurra keenyatu nu duude!	Our ears are deafened!
Arraba keenya dhabne!	We have lost our tongue (our speaker)!
Harka keenyatu caphe!	Our hands are broken!
Miila keenyatu caphe!	Our legs are broken!
Hidhii keenya dhabne!	We have lost our lips (one who speaks for us)!
Duddaatu nu cite!	Our backbone is broken!
Mataatu nurraa lafa bu'e!	We have been beheaded!

3.6. Reconciliation and reintegration in post-conflict situations

After the process of the BP collection and resource distribution is finalised, the reconciliation process that started with the *kuphla* ritual of cleansing the offender and reintegrating him to the community takes place. With this ritual, the offender, his family and his *gosaa* are reconciled with those of the victim's. The *kuphla* ritual begins with setting the offender free from his confinement that lasted for months. The freeing starts by unfastening the gourd that was tied to his hand soon after the murder incident. This practice is called *qorfee cabsuu*.

To untie the gourd, the council of elders from both sides and the neutral council of elders who witnessed the situation go to the compound where the offender was living. Before freeing him from the *traditional prison*, there is a law to be declared two times. The first one is made between the offender's and the victim's *gosaa*, and the second round is between the offender's *gosaa* and the council of elders. According to informants, the messages in both declarations are full of sadness, regrets and excuses. The council of elders from both sides stand flipping their faces from each other, and two elders (one from each side) make a decree loudly in the form of question and answer. The other elders join the declaration as follows:

Offender's gosaa, warra harkaa

Kuphla narraa baasi
Free me from the crime
Buqqee hadhooytuu narraa cabsi
Let you break the gourd from my hand
Malkaa ambaa na buusi
Allow me to use water-points with others
Gooroo Fugug na bobbaasi
Allow me to herd my cattle with others
Na amboomsii, amba na godhi
Let you make me an *amba*

Victim's gosaa, warra dhiigaa

Kuphla sirraa baase
We have freed you from the crime
Buqqee hadhooytuu sirraa cabse
We have broken the gourd from your hand
Malkaa ambaa si buufne
We have allowed you to use water-points with others
Gooroo Fugug si bobbaase
We have allowed you to herd with others
Nama ambaa si goone
We have made you an *amba*

Once this session ends, the next session will be between the offender's *gosaa* and those of the neutral council of elders. One may ask why this is needed, and in the *gumaa* law of the Ituu, the presence of an eye-witness is a requirement. This is done mainly to avoid any complaint that may arise afterwards. The decree is made in the presence of the victim's *gosaa*, and the elders from this *gosaa* leave the floor while the offender's *gosaa* remain at their place. The overall intention of this session is to make the council of elders witness when the victim's *gosaa* offer an excuse for the offender's. The elders from the victim's side listen carefully when the offender's group submit the following petition.

Offender's gosaa, warra harkaa

Odaa darrabbaan naa faajja'i (ragaa naaf tahi)
Let the Odaa, sycamore, be my witness
Kuphla narraa baasuu naa faajja'i
Let you witness my being free
Malkaa ambaa na buusuu naa faajja'i
Let you witness my being allowed to the *Malkaa*
Gooroo Fugug na bobbaasuu naa faajja'i
Let you witness my being allowed to herd with others
Na amboomsuu naa faajja'i
Let you witness my being made an *amba*

Elders of the Faji, Jaarsolii Faajjii

Odaa darrabbaan sii faajja'e
The Odaa has been your witness
Kuphla sirraa baasuu siif faajja'e
We have witnessed your being freed
Malkaa ambaa si buusuu siif faajja'e
We've witnessed your being allowed to the *Malkaa*.
Gooroo Fugug si bobbaasuu siif faajja'e
We've witnessed your being allowed to herd with others
Si amboomsuu sii faajja'e
We have witnessed your being made an 'amba'.

Once this session is completed, the offender's group is told to remove the gourd from the offender's hand and take him to a river to bath. Taking the offender to a river shows that he is now allowed to look after himself. According to informants, except for the hair on his private parts, the elders cut those on his body. The man is eventually immersed in the river to

symbolise his freedom from the blood on his hand. This act is not to be mistaken for a form of corporal punishment since in the *gumaa* law an offender is not entitled to any form of suffering. Similarly, the fact that the criminal was left out of his community and forbidden from looking after himself is not to be considered as a punishment but one effected to show that the crime he committed was intolerable and one that deserves serious social punishment. The seclusion is also said to generally save the criminal from any potential harm that may be inflicted on him.

Once he took bath, he will be taken back home, and after arriving at the homestead and before getting in, there is another ritual to be performed. Here, the council of elders with the offender stay for a couple of minutes at the front gate of the offender family's kraal where an adult ewe is slaughtered. After this, the man is allowed to meet and greet his family members and relatives whom he missed for months.

Finally, the council of elders of both *gosaa* begin to reconcile both families. To do this, honey and butter are mixed and elders make both sides consume this mixture from a spoon. While feeding them, they say: *akka daymaa walitti mi'aayaa; akka dhadhaa walitti qabbanaayaa; funyoo dayma tuyxe tayaa*, 'let you (both families) be sweet to each other like this honey; let you be a shade for one another; let you stick together like a rope that was smeared with honey.'

This study has revealed that the Ituu pay more attention to the post-*gumaa* relationships that should exist between the families and their corresponding *gosaa*. People believe that the two sides have to remain close to one another by some means possible. To this end, the Ituu tradition suggests to socially-tie the two families or *gosaa* together through a mechanism known as *koonnoo* and *koonnisa*.

Koonnoo and *koonnisa* are friendship mechanisms in which two males and two females, respectively, who belong to the two sides come together to forge a social relationship. This male-to-male and female-to-female bonding is employed in murder cases to fix the broken social ties. The *koonnoo/koonnisaa* social bonding creates a very strong friendship between the sexes who start to see each other as brothers and sisters. Similarly, two individuals can purposefully be tied to each other by means of *irbuu* and *kaka*, 'promise' and 'oath' for the betterment of relations between the two sides. The other social mechanism is made through matrimonial engagement. In this case, either of the two *gosaa* gives its daughter to the other in marriage to become in-laws, and in Oromo culture in general, in-laws, *soddaa*, are treated with due respect.

3.7. Conclusion

This research was conducted among the Ituu Oromo of eastern Oromia with the aim to describe the *gumaa* institution and to address the reconciliation and reintegration mechanisms of the institution in post-conflict situations. In the Ituu *gumaa* tradition, different forms of homicides look for different approaches to address. The major homicides are *darba*, *amba* and *daguu*, followed by *heera diinoo*, *heera amboo* and *heera danuu*, respectively. The BP for each of these murder types differs according to the intension of the crime committed.

The *gumaa* as a conflict resolution and restoration mechanism goes through a number of stages to bring the feuding parties into a sustainable and long-lasting peace. The necessary steps for

the *gumaa* procedure mainly includes establishing council of elders from both sides and beginning deliberations, hanging gourd on the offender's hand and beginning to collect blood prices from the families and *gosaa* of the offender.

The BP that was collected from the families and *gosaa* of the offender will be distributed among the family members and the *gosaa* of the victim. Generally, the Ituu pay great attention to the implementation of their traditional laws and procedures, and in the case of the *gumaa*, the post-conflict situation deserves special attention since peace should eventually be restored among the families on both sides.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank our informants for sharing with us their knowledge and life experiences on the *gumaa* processes. It was due their great generous contribution that this research was materialised. Finally, we thank Jimma University for offering the fund used for this research.

References

- Afendi Mutaki. (2020). *Boorena Ina Barentu. Oromoonna Oromiya Be Itinografi Ayin* (Amharic). Addis Ababa
- Alemayehu Haile. (1998). *History of the Oromoo to the Sixteenth Century; Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau*, Addis Ababa
- Ameyu Godesso & Melaku Abera. (2020). Customary Procedure of Homicide Dispute Settlement among the Tulama Oromoo of Ethiopia, *Journal of Business and Social Sciences Review. Vol. 23*
- Asafa Jalata. (2012). *Gadaa (Oromoo Democracy): An Example of Classical African Civilization*. Sociology Publications
- Asmarom Legesse. (1973). *Gada: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society*. The Free Press.
- Beyene, Fekadu. (2007). *The Role of Customary Institution in Managing Conflict on Grazing Lands: The Case of Meiso District, Eastern Ethiopia*. ICAR Discussion paper, No. 17. Berlin, Humboldt
- Boru Gumi. (2016). *Gondooroo as an Indigenous Method of Conflict Resolution and Justice Administration*, *Journal of Culture, Society and Development, An International Peer-reviewed*
- Boruu M. Burqaa. (2021). *Malkaa-Tarraamuu; Heritage Printing and Trading PLC*, Finfinne
- Boru Musa Burqa and Dejene Gemechu. (2022). *Foretelling Encounter, Symbolic Fighter and Yearning Winner: the Case of Korbeessaa-Goromtii Ritual among the Ituu Oromoo, Ethiopia; Gadaa Journal of the Institute of Oromoo Studies Vol. 5; Jimma University*
- Boruu M. Burqaa. (2023). *Duula Kanniisaa: Resistance of Ages, Political Conquest and the Weakening of the Gada System among the Ituu Oromoo*
- Negash Abebe. (2018). *Indigenous Mechanism of Homicide Reparation: The Case of 'Gumaa' among Tulama Oromoo of Kuyu District, Northern Shewa, Abyssinia Journal of Business and Social Sciences Vol. 3, No. 2, 2018, 18-26*

- Etefa, Tsega. (2002). Conflict Resolution through Cultural Tolerance: An Analysis of the Michu institution in Metekkel Region, Ethiopia. Addis Ababa, Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa
- Gadaa Melbaa. (1999). Oromia: An Introduction to the History of the Oromoo People. Kirk House Publisher
- Gemechu, Dejene. (2007). Conflict and Conflict Resolution among Waliso Oromoo of Eastern Macha: the Case of the Guma. Addis Ababa, Addis Ababa University Press.
- Hinnant, John. (1988). The Gada System of the Guji of Southern Ethiopia. The University of Kertzer. Ritual, Politics, and Power. Yale University Press, London
- Knutsson, Karl. (1967). Authority and Change: a Study of the Kallu Institution among the Macha 'Galla' of Ethiopia; Etnografiska Museet, Goteborg,
- Kuwee Kumsa. (1997). The Siiqqee Institution of Oromoo Women. *The Journal of Oromoo Studies*, 4 (1&2): 115-152
- Miressa Amenu. (2018). Exploring the Current Practices of Jaarsumma as Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanisms: The Case of Dambi Dollo Town
- Muchie Z, Bayeh E. (2015). Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms among Ambo Woreda Communities. *J Pol Sci Pub Aff* 3: 147. doi:10.4172/23320761.100014
- Negasa Gelan. (2022). Building Peace by Peaceful Approach: The Role of Oromoo Gadaa System in Peace-building
- Tesema Ta'a. (2016). The Gadaa System and Some of Its Institution among the Booranaa: A Historical Perspective. *EJOSSAH* Vol. XII, No.2
- Zelege, Meron. (2010). Ye Shakoch Chilot (the Court of the Sheikhs): A Traditional Institution of Conflict Resolution in Oromia Zone of Amhara Regional State, Ethiopia. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*