

Psychosocial Roles of *Gumaa* as an Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanism: With Particular Reference to West Arsi Zone

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Abstract

Gumaa is one of the large numbers of Oromo indigenous institutions that helps the community to handle their problems in their own way. It has been, particularly, used to settle blood feuds of various types. Hence, the major purpose of the study was to explore the practices and psychosocial roles of *Gumaa* as an indigenous conflict resolution mechanism in West Ari Zone. For this purpose, a qualitative research approach was employed in the study. More specifically, three Elders from the victim clan, three elders from offenders' clan, and three neutral elders (intermediaries) from different clans, and seven participants (three from victim's family, three from offender's family and one Tourism officer from the zone) were selected by using purposive sampling. Focus Group Discussion and Semi-structure interviews were used for data collection purpose. Thematic data analysis approach was followed. From the data analysis the following major findings were drawn, *Gumaa*: has a collective focus, has collective compensation payment, ignores the past and focuses on building peaceful future, avoids the escalation of the conflict, uncommon to use witnesses, has no backdoor deals, protects social

capital, rehabilitates the emotional trauma, ends animosity and conflict. Based on these findings, some recommendations were forwarded as to how the insights gained in this study could be used to improve future conflict resolution mechanisms.

Key Terms: *Gumaa*, Conflict, Conflict Resolution, Indigenous Conflict Resolution, psycho-social

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Conflict destroys the bases of development: family, community and environmental resources, economic infrastructures, and the psychosocial ties that permit and sustain development. It is clear that no society loves conflict. However, many subjective and objective facts make conflict inevitable (Fisher & Keashly, cited in Fetherston 2000). As long as people live together, work together, and interact with each other, disputes remain predictable between individuals, groups, or between different clans. Disputes may further be fuelled by emotion and become unsolvable; which might develop into intra and intergroup conflicts.

The source of the conflicts could be the incompatibility of the objective and/or subjective interests of groups or individuals. The subjective elements like perceptions, attitudes, values, needs, and understandings have no limit, while objective elements like competition over scarce resources, quests for empowerment, and claims for autonomy remain relative concepts and usually create incompatibility of goals which in turn may lead to violence. Thus, conflict becomes unavoidable social behavior (Shapiro, 2004)

According to Deutsch (2006), the socio-psychological factors are more fundamental in the processes of conflict and in the constructive resolution of conflicts. These factors serve both as causes of conflict and a means for reestablishing sustainable peace among the conflicting parties. Analyzing these factors is therefore helpful in explaining why and how normative and perceptual processes create barriers to conflict resolution (Kelman, 2009). Normative processes involve social factors that encourage conflict behavior while perceptive processes refer to the cognitive process of interpreting conflict related information (Kelman, 2007).

Indigenous ways of conflict resolution involves procedures that are different from the formal conflict resolution mechanisms. In this respect, indigenous conflict resolution procedures are generated from general cultural life and daily experiences of community. In this context, tradition refers to the structures and the units of organization in a community that encompass the norms, values and beliefs that guide social interaction (Kendie & Guri, 2006). Brock–Utne (2001) notes that the immediate objective of indigenous conflict resolution is to restore the broken or damaged relationship, rectify wrongs, and restore justice. Another aim is to ensure the full integration of parties into their societies again, and to adopt the mood of co-operation. In addition, Mwagiru (1999) explained that the strongest point is that indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms helped to preserve unity even in the face of diversity.

Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms focus on the principles of empathy, sharing and cooperation in dealing with common problems which underline the essence of humanity (Ubuntu) of South Africa (Murithi, 2006).

The indigenous leadership plays critical roles in promoting and sustaining social cohesion, peace and order in societies. The role of elders, family heads, and others is not only to resolve conflicts but also to anticipate and stop/or intercept conflicts.

Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms are deeply rooted in the customs and traditions of peoples of Africa. Yakubu (1995) observes that in most African societies the indigenous resolution of conflict was guided by the principle of consensus, collective responsibility and communal solidarity. This means that societies are collectively responsible for the harmony and discord caused by their members. According to David (2008), in many local societies of sub-Saharan Africa, especially among the relatively less centralized political systems (e.g. the Masai of Kenya, the Ibo of Nigeria, the Kpelle of Liberia, the Fanti of Ghana, etc.), there exists a highly exercised indigenous conflict resolution, where the conflicting parties arrive at mediated settlements through the use of experienced elders.

In Ethiopia, most commonly recognized resolution mechanisms like reconciliation by elders and arbitration by tribe leaders and religious leaders are key participants in preventing and resolving conflicts (Mohammed & Zewdie, 2004). Such an institution acquires its status of authority and power from the tribal law which varies from tribe to tribe and has complex rules (Getachew & Shimelis, 2008). Different practices of conflict resolution mechanisms have been practiced in different ethnic groups with varying degrees which play significant role in the well-being, stability and security of societies (Jetu, 2012). That is, each ethnic group has its own indigenous methods of resolving conflicts. For instance, the Oromo people use

indigenous mechanisms to solve their disputes. They have various indigenous bases like *Jaarsa Biyyaa* or *Jaarsa Araaraa*[Elders] for the resolutions of conflicts among themselves and with other societies. Shocking crimes, such as homicides are dealt with *Gumaa*.

Gumaa has been widely practiced in West Arsi Zone as an *indigenous* conflict resolution mechanism to solve conflicts between groups, individuals and neighbors. This study, therefore, aims to examine the psychosocial roles of *Gumaa* as an indigenous conflict resolution mechanism in West Arsi Zone.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Gumaa as an indigenous conflict resolution mechanism plays a very significant role in the day-to-day lives of society in West Arsi Zone. The primary aim of the conflict settlement was the restoration of social harmony, and to a lesser extent the establishment of the truth about what had happened, the punishment of the person responsible for the crime committed, and compensation through contribution. Although the latter elements could be part of the resolution, they were subsidiary to the return and a purification of the social order. It is believed that *Gumaa* intends to calm down the feelings of the injured through payment of compensation to maintain interpersonal relationship, which is set by the local custom and practice. It also helps to achieve a rapprochement between the parties in dispute and avoid the sense of retaliation that would in turn lead to a vicious circle of revenge.

In spite of its wider usage, psycho-social analysis of *Gumaa* is missing in literature. Some existing literatures have mostly been analyzed from anthropological points of view. In other words, such analyses have been left

to anthropologists and literary scholars, who may not be able to see or may not be interested in the psychological and social aspects of these approaches, and the interface between the two sets of aspects. To the best knowledge of the researchers with regard to the psychosocial roles of Gumaa as an indigenous conflict resolution mechanism, there has been no study albeit it has been widely used in the zone. Hence this study was planned to fill this gap by generating relevant information related to the psychosocial roles of *Gumaa* as an indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms by exploring its practices in West Arsi Zone.

1.3. Research Questions

The following main research questions were formulated:

- How does Gumaa serve as an indigenous conflict resolution mechanism in the Zone?
- How does the West Arsi Zone society perceive the psychosocial roles of the *Gumaa*?

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to explore the psychosocial roles of Gumaa as an indigenous conflict resolution mechanism among West Arsi Zone societies. Specifically, this study intends to:-

- Explore how Gumaa serves as an indigenous conflict resolution mechanism among West Arsi Zone societies.
- Explore the psychosocial roles of *Gumaa* as an indigenous conflict resolution mechanism.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The purpose of the study was to conduct an exploratory study about the psychosocial role of *Gumaa* as an indigenous conflict resolution mechanism among West Arsi Zone societies. The findings of this study would be specific to the participants in the area. However, lessons from this study can be implied to provide an insight to other Oromo societies in similar settings. Thus, the current study may have the following significance:-

- It may give an insight for Oromo people who are engaged(intentionally or unintentionally) in conflict to make thoughtful decisions about their disagreements which eventually may increase the chances of mutual trust and understanding
- The findings of the study will hopefully provide planners and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) with reliable information on conflict management in West Arsi Zone Community and enable them to make appropriate interventions.
- It may facilitate reconciliation process of the people engaged in conflict within the society which eventually would decrease hostility
- It will create greater awareness within the society about the importance of *Gumaa* conflict resolution mechanism
- Furthermore, it will give an insight for similar research, contributing in sorting out gaps in research and practice regarding *Gumaa* System

1.6. Delimitation of the Study

To make the study manageable the scope of the study was delimited only to West Arsi Zone societies. This study looked specifically to the psychosocial

roles of *Gumaa* as an indigenous conflict resolution mechanism in West Arsi Zone.

1.7. Operational Terms/ Definition of Terms

Conflict: refers to disagreements between two or more people, groups or societies. It is a disagreement over the use of natural resources such as water, pasture and grazing land or disputes over ownership of livestock, land or even domestic quarrels.

Gumaa: is a blood price/ revenge/feud ritual of purification after homicide.

Conflict Resolution: is an approach based on mutual problem sharing and solving conflicts among conflicting parties. This is a method that aims at ending conflicts. Contemporary types often apply the method of addressing the root cause of the problems, which forms a basis for methodology.

Conflict resolution mechanisms: Are tools and methods, strategies and processes applied in analyzing and resolving conflict.

Indigenous conflict resolution: is the settlement of disputes outside the government courts.

Psychosocial: the relationship between the personal, internal environment and the wider social world. (i.e. the influence of social and psychological factors on an individual's mind or behavior)

2. METHOD

This section focuses on the methodological approach within which the study was undertaken. It has the following major sections namely: Research Design, Target population, Sampling and Sampling Techniques, Data Collection Tools, Methods of Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations.

2.1. Research Design

Since the objective of the study is to explore the subjective experiences of the sampled community, a qualitative research approach was used. It is a subjective approach to describe life experiences and give them meaning (Cress-well, 2009). Any research needs rationale as to how a research design is selected but it is worth mentioning in qualitative research. First according to Flick (2002:27) “a qualitative research is of specific relevance to the study of social relations owing to the fact of polarization of life worlds”. For example, this study raises such social issues as relationships of people with different background. Secondly; the view of research participants which is difficult to quantify, can be best treated through qualitative research methodology.

Thirdly, Qualitative study allows researchers to explore behaviors, perspectives, feelings, and experiences in depth quality and complexity of a situation through a holistic framework (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). Lastly the approach is selected due to its holistic nature and gives emphasis to the process of the research from its inceptions to its completion. And also it is interested in meaning, notably, how people make sense out of their lives’

experiences. Furthermore qualitative research has the advantage of meeting research participants in natural setting of the center.

2.2. Target Population

The participants include disputants (families of victims and families of offenders, including slayers) who were served by indigenous conflict resolution method (solved their conflict through *Gumaa* indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms) and community elders who involved in indigenous conflict resolution in the selected *woredas*.

2.3. Sampling and Sampling Techniques

Cress-well (2009) suggests that qualitative researchers use a small selective sample, because of the in-depth nature of the study and the analysis of data required. The researchers used purposive sampling technique to get the experienced elders and disputants who had resolved their conflict through *Gumaa* indigenous mechanisms. Purposeful sampling technique is commonly used in qualitative research. It involves selecting research participants according to the needs of the study in that researchers choose participants who may give a valid information that is suitable for detailed research.

Accordingly nine (9) key informants were selected. They were elders selected on the basis of leadership experience in the community, command of knowledge of the community's and way of life, and proven longstanding participation in forums to settle or manage conflicts and disputes in the community. In addition the researchers were used snowball sampling technique to get evenly the families of victims and families of offender who were solve their conflict through indigenous methods in the zone.

2.4. Data Collection Tools

To fulfill the major objectives set forward, researcher used semi-structured interview and focused group discussion data collection instruments. Besides, to supplement the interviews and FGDs institutional documents were consulted which were believed relevant to the *Gumaa* system Oromo societies of West Arsi Zone.

Interviews: Interview guides were prepared by the researcher in line with the *Gumaa* practice from literature and researcher's personal experience. However, the interview guides were flexible so as to accommodate new insights from participants. Silverman (2005) describe interviews as conversations between interviewer and respondent with the purpose of eliciting certain information from the respondent. On the other hand, Silverman (2005) argues that participants should be selected based on their ability to provide right knowledge or insight into the issue under study.

Accordingly, the researchers used the interview mainly to collect the desired data from elders. The interview with the elders was conducted in their home and in *Afaan Oromo* (Oromo language). The interview was ranged from 40 to 60 minutes. It was the participant's responses which determined the direction and length of the interview. During the interview, the researchers took notes and there was also audio-recording.

Focused Group Discussion: The study was conducted one focus group discussion to get the required data from the sample of three family of victims, three family of offender, and one administrative staff of the tourism and culture office of the zone. They were selected by snowballing sampling methods under the guidance of tourism and culture office of the zone. The

entire session of the focused group discussion took 3 hours and 30 minutes. The focused group discussion was conducted in “*Afaan Oromo*” and then transcribed into *English*. Similar to the interview, upon permission of the focused group discussion members, there was an audio-tape recording. And to supplement the audio-tape recording, the researcher took notes during focused group discussion.

2.5. Data Collection Procedures

The researchers were identified gatekeepers in the selected site for the study to easily get access to the community and study participants before the onset of the data collection. The researchers were contacted the study site Zone’s Office Administration and Tourism for its cooperation as this helps to gain additional support. The researchers were thus travel to the study areas and stay for prolonged period of time until he gets rich information on the subject of the study. After arrive the study areas, the researchers chiefly employ interviews and focused group discussions technique in collecting the data from the field.

2.6. Secondary Data

Again to supplement the data collected with interview and FGD, researcher used secondary data by referring to recent and relevant documents, and newspapers related to effects of indigenous way of conflict resolution mechanisms. Besides, written documents about Oromo indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms in general and West Arsi Zone in particular reviewed to triangulate with other data collection tools.

2.7. Methods of Data Analysis

In line with the aforementioned objectives, researchers analyzed the data to explore the psychosocial roles of Gumaa as an indigenous conflict resolution mechanism. And to achieve this objective thematic data analysis method was used. The following procedures were followed: First, researchers repeatedly listen and read the audio-taped documents and recorded notes respectively. Researchers carefully translated the original recoding from Afan Oromo to English. In order to identify major categories and themes researchers repeatedly read the transcribed data. While readying the transcription, researchers noticed the focus of the participants and made researcher own notes to identify contradictions and similarities. Researchers have tried to avoid his bias during the interview as well as during the transaction and data analysis. Once researchers have identified major categories, researcher started to look back and forth to identify major themes and sub-themes. At the end, the most unique themes were identified and thematically analyzed.

2.8. Ethical Consideration

According to Creswell, (2009) the researcher must anticipate any ethical issue that may arise during the qualitative research process. Research involves collecting data from people, about people (Punch, 2005). Researchers need to protect their research participants by developing trust with them, promoting the integrity of the research, guarding against misconduct and any impropriety that might reflect on their organizations or institutions, and cope with new challenging problems (ibid). First and foremost, the researchers have obligation to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the participants.

Accordingly, first the researchers took an official letter from Psychology Department to officials of West Arsi Zone. Then, in return, the researchers received confirmation letter from the center and the researchers' informed consent were collected before carrying out any interviews and focused group discussion. All participant were informed of what the study entailed and had the right to decline from participation at any time, the identities of all participant was not compromised, and subjects privacy rights were protected and also participants were reassured the option to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty or repercussions.

Furthermore, the study also considered ethical considerations by giving credit where it was due by citing all necessary work, scholarly articles, research, and ideas. Lastly, Participants were informed and assured that the information they provided was treated as confidential. In cases where the researchers were able to identify a particular participant's information, the researcher promised them not to reveal it publicly. Statements on confidentiality were written on the item of interview and focused group discussion, and also verbally communicated during interview and focused group discussion.

3. Analysis and Interpretation

In this section the major findings from interview, Focus Group Discussion and documents were presented based on the objective of the study. Elders, victims, offenders and tourism officer constituted as sources of data for this study. The practices and psychosocial roles of Gumaa between the victims and offenders were mainly treated. Analyses of data from data sources are presented thematically to answer the following basic questions: what are the

practices of *Gumaa* as an indigenous conflict resolution mechanism in West Arsi Zone? How does *Gumaa* as an indigenous institution restore the psychosocial aspects of conflict in the community of the West Arsi Zone? From the analysis of the data the following major themes were emerged:

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Informant Elders

Pseudonyms	Marital Status	Age	Religion	Educational Level	Occupation	Number of Children	Residence (in Woreda)
Roba	Married	45	Christian	Elementary School	farmer	4	Kofale
Gada	Married	55	Muslim	Elementary School	Self-employed	5	kore
Gamada	Married	65	Muslim	No formal Education	farmer	9	Arsi Nagelle
Mohammed	Married	42	Muslim	Elementary School	farmer	4	Gedeb Asasa
Tesfaye	Married	56	Christian	No formal Education	farmer	6	kokosa
Luba	Married	50	Christian	12th Complete	Self-employed	5	Gedeb Asasa
Ahmed	Married	46	Muslim	12th Complete	Self-employed	4	kore
Kufa	Married	67	Muslim	No formal Education	farmer	10	Kofale
Wako	Married	48	Christian	12th Complete	farmer	4	Arsi Nagelle

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Families of Victims and Families of Offender

Pseudonyms	Marital Status	Sex	Age	Religion	Educational Level	Occupation	Number of Children
Chala	Married	Male	50	Christian	12th Complete	Farmer	3
Biritu	Married	Female	32	Christian	Elementary School	-	
Degife	Single	Male	25	Christian	Self-Employed	Farmer	-
Wabe	Married	Male	40	Muslim	Elementary School	Farmer	2
Arabe	Married	Female	30	Muslim	No Formal Education	-	
Gamme	Single	Male	21	Muslim	12th Complete	Unemployed	-

3.1. *Gumaa* as an Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanism in West Arsi Zone

Gumaa refers to blood price or compensation that follows homicide or serious bodily injuries. Dibaba (2012:1) defines the core meaning of the word '*Gumaa*' as follows: '... *Gumaa* is a general institution of settling blood feuds ...' Therefore the word '*Gumaa*' is used here in its strictest sense to refer to the general institution of settling blood feuds between two persons, families, groups, clans, societies, or even nations. In the same way, in West Arsi Zone *Gumaa* is an indigenous institution of settling blood feuds

between parties and is conducted when the conflicts are of larger magnitude, often involving homicide and physical (body) injuries.

The focused group discussion and interview participants were asked a general question about what differentiates *Gumaa* from other ways of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms. The respondents stated that *Gumaa* is an indigenous system of collective compensation employed across West Arsi Zone. Disputes that involve deaths, serious bodily injuries are extremely sensitive in West Arsi Zone and thus require a *Gumaa*. Payment of *Gumaa* is seen as an honorable deed, symbolic of belonging to the group. The *Gumaa* is free and no penalties are imposed other than compensation for loss or bodily injury incurred in the conflict.

Gumaa tradition is performed not only as a mechanism of purifying the 'curse' from the guilty but also as a method of conflict resolution. Through the ritual processes, the guilty and his clans would be reconciled with the relatives and clan of the offended. *Guama* works as resolution of inter-personal, intra-group as well as inter-group conflicts.

Gumaa is an interesting method of seeking justice in West Arsi Zone and a way of asking those who have been wronged for forgiveness, and a way of restoring the spirits of those in conflict by helping them towards restoring healthy relationships. The purpose of this ritual in conflict resolution is to repair the harm that has been done in conflict, rebuild relationship, and create healing in the societies. In addition, *Gumaa* intends to pacify the feelings of the injured through payment of compensation, which is set by the local custom and practice. It helps to achieve a rapprochement between the parties

at feud and avoid the sense of retaliation that would in turn lead to another vengeance.

Gumaa also helps to repair the damage in violent situations where the perpetrator, with support from his/her family, must apologize and ask forgiveness of the victim and his/her family. In doing so, the perpetrator promises, in front of both families, not to commit such violent acts again. *Gumaa* conflict resolution is moving beyond resolution of conflict to build healthy relationships among societies, repairing and rebuilding of healthy or positive relationships between disputants and their families. It also helps to achieve a rapprochement between the parties at feud and avoid the sense of vendetta that would in turn lead to another vendetta.

3.2. The practices of *Gumaa* among West Arsi- Oromo societies *Selection of Gumaa Elders*

Whenever violent acts are happening, *Gumaa* elders would be selected with the initiative of the family members of a person who committed crime.

Neutral Elders (NE) reflected their experiences of the selection process:

Initially it is members of the family of the person who committed the crime approach the elders of their community and ask for assistance (, NE, 1). Elders would be selected from different clan. Three from killer's clan, three from the victim's clan and three from other clans which are different from those of the victims and the offenders (NE, 3).

The neutral elders are expected to have qualities to perform in accordance with the law and custom. Elders remarked:

For a person to be selected as jaarsa hambaa, one needs to have qualities as a member of the jaarsa biyyaa, plus a superior ability to use proverbs and metaphors, leadership ability to steer the discussion and keep tempers cool, and a record of success in making peace in the community and to be different from those conflicting (NE,2). The persons representing jaarsa hambaa physically sit between the elders representing the parties at conflict (NE, 3).

Before the reconciliation process the selected elders should have their own gathering to discuss the issues privately first then with the concerned parties.

Some of the issues are reflected by elders:

We usually discuss on the nature of the conflict [intentional or unintentional], on the law and the customs that have been violated, and the laws and customs that could be applied so as to resolve the case (NE, 1). The jaarsa biyyaa and jaarsa hambaa meet to develop a common understanding of the crisis at hand and the strategy to pursue to resolve the crisis. Before the rituals, elders gather and discuss on the issue openly (NE, 2).

Once the elders met separately, the next step would be meeting the conflicting parties and applying the legal inquiry procedure known as “*qorannoo*”, in which elders are allowed to ask any question with respect to the law and custom relating to the case at hand, sifting information and establishing basic facts.

Collective Focus

The *Gumaa* with its notion of responsibility is reflected as a collective unit but not conceptualized as an individual. It is the clan that is responsible for the deeds of its members. An Elder narrates:

“Gumaa gosatu basaa”, [which literally means Gumaa, is the concern of lineage]. The killer's lineage is corporately liable for the act of killing and responsible to compensate. They are responsible to pay blood price to the lineage of the slain and to take initiative of ritual of purification (NE, 1).

In collective societies such as the Oromo, if one is guilty of killing another person, especially when the homicide is an intentional one, the kinship or clan to which the killer belongs is by default guilty. The incident, therefore, destroys social accord between the groups concerned and is likely to lead to feud after feud. But *Gumaa* works to restore the social harmony. Elders reflected:

Gumaa system focuses on ‘collectivization’ of an individual’s offence and therefore works towards not only punishing the individual by means of fines, enforced compensations and social sanctions, but also restoring the social ties and harmonies through reconciliation (NE, 3)

Collective Compensation Payment

Whenever there were disputes that involve deaths, serious bodily injuries, there are collective compensation payments in the *Gumaa* system of conflict resolution. Some of the participants (**Victims Family Elders (VFE), Offenders Family Elders (OFE) and Tourism Officer (TO)**) reflected:

Payment of Gumaa is an honorable deed, symbolic of belonging to the group (TO, 1). The Gumaa is free and no penalties are imposed other than compensation for loss or bodily injury incurred in the conflict (VFE, 1). Gumaa intends to calm down

the feelings of the injured through payment of compensation, which is set by the local custom and practice (OFE, 2).

Participants remarked that blood price payment among the West Arsi Zone societies varies across in its character. Elders remarked their experiences:

Until recently, the compensation to the family of the deceased or redemption for the loss of life is cattle. But if it is an injury, the number of animals paid depends on the level of damage and as well as on whether the act was done intentionally or unintentionally (OFE, 1). The compensation amount depends on the quality of the animals, the nature of offense and time of its payment (VFE, 2).

Despite the diverse compensation mechanisms among the West Arsi Zone societies the amount of blood price does not vary across age and sex. Participants described:

Any loss of life would be compensated irrespective of the sex and age of the slayer and the slain (OFE, 3). There is no differentiation on age and sex on the individuals based on the view that a life is a life whoever is the slain. Compensation for a deceased child is not greater or less than compensation for an old man (VFE, 3).

On the other hand, the amount of blood price is differentiated (varying) based on the character of homicide, and types of bodily injuries. For example one of the participants described his experiences:

The compensation for bodily injuries depends, firstly, on the seriousness of the injury sustained. If disabling is serious and permanent, it leads to more fine and compensation than when it is a

temporary one. For instance, for each left part of the human body, the compensation is greater than for the right part. It is assumed that the left part of the human body is the most important part, since the left hand and shoulder are strong and carry heavy loads like the shield or gun (OFE, 2).

Similarly, Elders describe their focus areas in making decisions about compensation. They remarked the following:

In making compensation decision we give much more value for example to molar teeth than incisor for the former is grinder and has much to do with one's very life than the latter(NE, 2). We give much more value to eyes, legs and hands than to teeth. This is because the teeth can easily be replaced (NE, 1).

Focuses on Creation of Peaceful Future

Gumaa as an indigenous institution of settling blood feuds between parties and is conducted when the conflicts are of larger magnitude, often involving homicide and physical (body) injuries. Most of the participants remarked the importance of *Gumaa*. It is one of the indigenous conflict resolution processes widely used by the West Arsi Zone Oromo people. It is evident from Participants description that the ultimate goal of *Gumaa* indigenous conflict resolution mechanism is: psychosocial concerns, family reintegration, and reestablishment of community relationships and reunification of offenders into their societies by revitalizing emotional attachments of the parties in conflict. The important thing in the system is not judging past, but rather creating a peaceful future life. Elders described how *Gumaa* works in the selected woreda:

The primary aim of the Gumaa system is not maximize the benefits of the victim through compensation and restitution, but to help conflicting parties and victims recover from crises and from trauma and agony (NE, 3). The focus is not on punishing either of the conflicting parties, but is on restoring relationships by reconciling the groups in the conflict (NE, 1).

Gumaa tradition is used not only as a mechanism of conflict resolution but also purifying the ‘curse’ from the guilty. A key elder in the community remarked:

Through the Gumaa ritual processes, the guilty and his clans would be reconciled with the relatives and clan of the offended (NE, 2).

Avoids the Escalation of the Conflict

The Gumaa process moves through different stages which are full of meanings and symbols on its bid to manage and resolve the conflict and arrive at reconciliation. The act of killing or damaging could be intentional or unintentional. Participants reflected their experiences:

Whenever there were conflicts that may cause the death or bodily injury of a member of a certain clan in the Zone, Gumaa plays a role in avoiding the escalation of the conflict into violence (TO,1). If death is recognized as accidental, tensions would be lessened and both of them are willing to look at such accidents as the will of Waaqa (God) and are much more willing to manage the situation through reconciliation process (NE,1).

The situation seems different if the killing is proved to be an intentional act. The victim family would mobilize the resources for the purpose of revenge and, indeed the conflict could escalate so much that it could get out of hand.

Whenever violent acts were happening, especially intentional acts, the community elders, being cognizant of this enormous danger, usually took the role of intermediaries. An Elder reflected his experiences:

We usually teach the society to prevent violent acts but whenever such things happened, we mobilize the community for immediate intervention; to warn the killer's kin that they should conform to the seera of collective responsibility in the case of death caused by a kinsman, considering every kinsman of the killer to be a party to the killing and therefore liable for revenge by the kin of the victim and finally to avoid spilling more blood (NE, 2).

Participants believe that spilling Oromo blood would poison the total community, risking health to all the societies concerned. A participant reflected his belief within the tradition:

In Oromo tradition if a person touches or steps upon spilled blood, even when he or she has no part in the incident, he or she in due course, would develop leprosy or other similar diseases (TO,1).

Use of Witness is less common

Participants described their experience about the role of the witness in the reconciliation processes. According to them it is uncommon that they look for witnesses to testify the issue under litigation, except in few cases. Some of the elders remarked

The reconciliation process doesn't need to attest by witness but in cases where there is a need the presiding elders instruct the witnesses to tell the whole truth and examine the responses point by point and there is a case of interrogating the witnesses (VF,3).

It is clear from participants' descriptions that decisions are proposed by neutral elders based on the information from the litigants and rarely from witnesses. However, only decision to which both agree would be final. The elders would not dictate the disputants to accept their recommended decision. Rather elders encourage the disputants to make joint decision and they will try to avert the feelings of the contenders as a loser and urge them to accept the decision.

Gumaa has no Backdoor Deals

Gumaa doesn't fail to present the truth due to backdoor deals among the plaintiffs, the defendants and the witnesses.

Under the Gumaa system conflicting parties do not allowed bribing the elders or the witnesses in order to bring justice to their own side. Thus, the reconciliation becomes easier and less problematic and its outcome will not be considered as unjust by either of the parties (OF, 2).

Once decision are made under the *Gumaa* process, it is believed within participants that conflicting parties would not go in to conflict again with the sense of revenge, which eventually would bring long- lasting solution. A key community elder remarked his experiences:

All conflicting parties are expected to bring genuine information about conflict causes and the driving factors. The witness is expected to present unbiased or undistorted information in order to make the right decision. Thus, there would not be conflict again and hence they bring long- lasting peace among themselves (NE, 1).

3.3. Psychosocial Roles of *Gumaa* as an Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanism

Gumaa is one of the indigenous conflict resolution processes widely used by the West Arsi Zone Oromo people. As data collected from the informant indicate, the ultimate goal of *Gumaa* indigenous conflict resolution mechanism is psychosocial reintegration, reestablishment of community relationships and reunification of offenders into their societies by revitalizing emotional attachments of the parties in conflict. The important thing in the system is not judging the past, but rather creating a peaceful future life. According to the informants of this focused group discussion and interview, the primary outcome of the system is not only to maximize the benefits of the victim through compensation and restitution, but also to help conflicting parties and victims recover from psychosocial crises and from trauma and agony.

In addition, the focus is not only on punishing either of the conflicting parties, but is also on restoring relationships by reconciling the groups in the conflict. In general, the findings of the focused group discussion and interview clearly indicated that *Gumaa* has the following psychosocial roles as an indigenous conflict resolution in West Arsi Zone.

Healthy Social Relationship

Gumaa is a method of seeking justice and a way of asking those who have been wronged for forgiveness, and a way of restoring the spirits of those in conflict by helping them towards restoring healthy relationships. Elders in the community remarked:

Gumaa repairs the harm that has been done in conflict, rebuild relationship, and create healing in the societies (NE, 2). Gumaa helps to achieve a healthy relationship between the parties at feud and avoid the sense of retaliation that would in turn lead to revenge (OF, 3). Gumaa helps to repair the damage in violent situations where the perpetrator, with support from his/her family, must apologize and ask forgiveness of the victim and his/her family. In doing so, the perpetrator promises, in front of both families, not to commit such violent acts again (NE, 2).

Gumaa conflict resolution is moving for resolution of conflict to build healthy relationships among societies, repairing and rebuilding of healthy or positive relationships between disputants and their families. Participants believe that revenge may not necessarily be applied on the killer himself rather revenge could be executed upon any one of his kinsmen. Some of the participants reflected:

The tradition has not only been focusing on the killer. Irrespective of the killer, the victim families consider the killer's lineage or/and his clan as slayer. They usually call the killer by his clan or/and lineage name. For instance, Maaruutu ajjeese, [meaning 'Maruu killed', Maruu is the name of the clan] (TO, 1).

Participants remarked that the type and practices of revenge are different from clan to clan but in most cases, it was practiced by destroying properties: An Elder remarked his experiences:

Avengers often retaliated by molesting huts, destroying premises, setting fire to house and grain in the field, and slaughtering cattle (NE, 1).

Regenerate the Eroded Psychosocial Values

It is noted from participants' narrations that Gumaa as conflict resolution mechanism can regenerate the eroded social values and reintegrate the conflicting parties in the community. It focuses on the psychosocial aspects of the conflict. Some of the participants remarked the importance of focusing on peace building rather than punishing the offender:

Our family relived from hostility, fear of revenge, and anxieties that have developed from an accidental killing (OF, 3). The Gumaa system helped us to bridge loosen emotional attachments among close or distant family members (OF, 2). The trauma developed from the conflict is healed (VF, 2).

Gumaa helped conflicting parties to develop trust among them. It is evident from participants' narrations that Gumaa gives priority to social and psychological reconstruction. Elders remarked:

In order to make mutual trust among conflicting parties, they need to be open, honest and respectful (NE, 1). To restore violated social rules and detached emotional attachments, it is necessary that conflicting parties should have full confession, honest regret, and genuine apology (NE, 3).

Some of the participants described the role of Gumaa as tool to revive the normal social space that could be possible by restoring the psychosocial values. A Neutral elder remarked:

Through Gumaa system, it is possible to achieve long-lasting reconciliation among parties. This is because Gumaa is deeply rooted in the Oromo culture, and the Oromo community has a

strong sense of ownership of and belongingness to the Gumaa system (NE, 2).

Reintegrate Conflicting Parties

Elders also described the role of Gumaa for its capacity to effectively rebuild social bonds and reintegrate conflicting parties without any external pressure.

They described:

Gumaa makes emphasis on morals of the conflicting parties' and pays attention to social values and keeps the psychological makeup of engaged parties (NE, 1). Guma has the influence to prevent conflicts and helps the conflicting parties to eliminate hostility and a desire for revenge, and to the end it restores peace (OF, 2).

When Elders made decisions social, moral, or psychological factors are considered and will not have repercussions on the future peaceful coexistence of the conflicting parties and their families. This was evident from the Elders' descriptions:

Following the reconciliation process, conflicting parties are expected to forget hatred and develop a sense of belongingness within the society they live in. The reconciliation process would help conflicting parties feel moral and psychological security (NE, 3).

Gumaa Rehabilitates the Emotional Trauma

It is clear that killing someone inflicts psychological distress on the slayer, and that the distress may be even worse when the incident is between family members or close relatives. Participants described the rehabilitative role of Gumaa as a conflict resolution mechanism. Both the victims and victimizers

would go in to the state of psychological crisis and explained the role *Gumaa* played in keeping their psychological makeup:

When killings are happening, we usually develop feelings of guilt, fear of revenge (OF, 2). Family disintegration, worry of the future, and worry of traumatic events are major difficulties (OF, 1). I feel had it not been the reconciliation process, circumstances would not have been the same (OF, 3).

From the participants description one can notice that *Gumaa* plays a rehabilitative roles not only to the affected families but also to the victimizer families. For example some participants described the rehabilitative role of *Gumaa* in their life as:

When our case passed through Gumaa process, it cleared away fear of revenge from the victim side. It also cleared away a sense of guilt and sinfulness from my mind (OF, 1). Gumaa facilitates reconciliation, integration into the community, develops a sense of belongingness (VF, 1). Gumaa reduces traumatic experiences (VF, 3).

Ends Animosity and Conflict

Gumaa systems appear to recognize cultural elements and tend not to focus on punishing the individual found guilty. Elders described their experiences:

Regardless of what happened the Gumaa system doesn't recognize, for example, imprisonment (OF, 1). Unlike legal systems, it works towards avoiding further grudge and ending animosity between parties at feud with each other (OF, 2). Gumaa needs to be performed between family members of the deceased

left behind and those of the killer to protect the latter from imminent avenging by the former (TO, 1).

The end of animosity is declared through different rituals that the parties undertake under the dictation of the elderly throughout the purification.

The conflicting parties at blood feud feed each other honey to indicate the end of enmity and bitterness towards each other and the restoration of the once sweet relationship (TO, 1).

Whether it is interpersonal or intergroup, conflict leaves a history of mistrust and animosity between the parties involved. At the psychological level, it can be traumatizing and horrifying for the victims and the offenders as well as for the groups to which they belong. Participants reflected their experiences:

Homicide results in parties being at blood feud. Individuals or groups in 'warra-gumaa' is not allowed to eat together, attend the same school, church, meeting, market, or even to see each other. So, following homicide, at least the slayer, and sometimes his/her entire family, is required to disappear from the sight of the victims since their presence may intensify victims' grievances and may trigger retaliation from the victims' side (NE, 3). Feud between families resulting from homicide automatically changes to feud between lineages or clans (NE, 2).

The homicide phenomenon may become interethnic when a person from another ethnic group assassinates an individual. When this is the case, imprisonment of the slayer does not mean the end of the feud between persons or groups. Even if the conflict has subsided, it can resurface when

the slayer returns home upon finishing his/her jail term. His/her close relatives can also become the target of retaliation while he/she is still in jail, especially when the homicide was intentional. That is an individual's criminal act is likely to be attributed to the entire immediate group to which he/she belongs. In contexts such as this, modern state intervention may not work and hence *Gumaa* may become a more reasonable solution.

State interventions mostly focus on penalizing or correcting only the wrongdoer, thereby situating the problem solely in the individual. By doing so, state interventions fail to reach and heal the psychological and social capital that the incident of homicide has destroyed (TO, 1).

Gumaa system works in reconstructing and strengthening the social relationships and harmony among the parties involved appear to be more essential than punishing or correcting the wrongdoer as a separate entity.

State court/justice systems lack or have little ability to reach citizens' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral processes at all the levels concerned, thus making it difficult to bring about restorative justice (NE, 2). Gumaa has managed to heal the victims and the slayer at psychological and social levels which the state legal systems fail to manage (NE, 1).

4. DISCUSSION

Researchers attempted to show a gap of knowledge in the literature review, as little was known about the psychosocial role of *Gumaa* as an indigenous institution among West Arsi Oromos. Many of the studies available to me were conducted in political aspects and investigated the sources of conflict.

The wider roles of the *Gumaa* system and psychosocial issues that affected the conflicting families had not been explored. Hence, the questions guiding this study were: How does *Gumaa* function as an indigenous institution among Arsi- Oromo Community? How does *Gumaa* as an indigenous institution restore the psychosocial aspects of conflict in the zone? The data from this study summed up the experiences.

4.1. How does *Gumaa* function in West Arsi Oromo?

Gumaa as an indigenous institution focuses on not only in judging offenders from victims but also on restoring the psychosocial aspects of the conflict. Whenever violent conflicts are occurring, *Gumaa* elders would be selected with the initiative of the family members of a person who committed crime and ask for assistance. Elders would be selected from different clans: Three each from victim's and killer's clan, and three neutral elders from other clans. Neutral elders are expected to have qualities to perform in accordance with the *seera* (law) and *aadaa* (custom) plus a superior ability to use proverbs and metaphors, leadership ability to steer the discussion and keep tempers cool, and a record of success in making peace in the community and to be different from those conflicting clans.

Once the neutral elders are selected they should have their own gathering to discuss the issues privately first then with the concerned parties. Then after they would be meeting the conflicting parties and applying the legal inquiry procedure called “*qorannoo*”, in which neutral elders were allowed to ask any question with respect to the law and custom relating to the case at hand, sifting information and establishing basic facts.

The Gumaa functions as collective unit. The clan of the victim/offender is responsible for the deeds of its members. The killer's family is corporately liable for the act of killing and responsible to compensate. They are responsible to pay blood price to the lineage of the slain and to take initiative of ritual of purification. In collective societies such as the Oromo, if one is guilty of killing another person, especially when the homicide is an intentional one, the clan to which the killer belongs is by default guilty. In line with this finding, Dejene (2002) stated that Feud between families resulting from homicide automatically changes to feud between lineages or clans. Gumaa is well aware of such 'collectivization' of an individual's offence and therefore work towards not only punishing the individual by means of fines, enforced compensations and social sanctions, but also restoring the social ties and harmonies through reconciliation and compensation.

Disputes that involve deaths, bodily injuries, usually have collective compensation payment in the *Gumaa* system. Payment of *Gumaa* is seen as an honorable deed, symbolic of belonging to the group. Ndumbe (2001) argued that in using indigenous conflict resolution mechanism, reconciliation often requires symbolic gestures and associated rituals including exchange of gifts, and slaughter of animals such as chickens, goats, sheep, cows etc. The Gumaa is free and no penalties are imposed other than compensation for loss or bodily injury incurred in the conflict. Gumaa intends to appease the feelings of the injured through payment of compensation, which is set by the local custom and practice.

Participants remarked that blood price payment in West Arsi Zone varies across in its character. Compensation to the family of the deceased or redemption for the loss of life is cattle, which depends on the quality of the animals, the nature of offense and time of its payment but the amount of blood price does not vary across age and sex. Results showed any loss of life would be compensated irrespective of the sex and age of the slayer and the slain. For example, compensation for a deceased child is not greater or less than compensation for an old man.

On the other hand, the amount of blood price is varying based on the character of homicide, and types of bodily injuries. The compensation for bodily injuries depends, firstly, on the seriousness of the injury sustained. If disabling is serious and permanent, it leads to more fine and compensation than when it is a temporary one. For instance, for each left part of the human body, the compensation is greater than for the right part. It is assumed that the left part of the human body is the most important part, since the left hand and shoulder are strong and carry heavy loads like the shield or gun. Similarly, Elders described their focus areas in making decisions about compensation. They give much more value for example to molar teeth than incisor for the former is grinder and has much to do with one's very life than the latter. On the other hand, we give much more value to eyes, legs and hands than to teeth. This is because the teeth can easily be replaced.

The other important thing in the *Gumaa* system is not judging the past, but rather creating a peaceful future life. The primary outcome of the *Gumaa* system is not only to maximize the benefits of the victim through compensation and restitution, but also to help conflicting parties and victims

recover from crises and from trauma and agony (pain). The focus is not on punishing either of the conflicting parties, but is on restoring relationships by reconciling the groups in the conflict. Gumaa also plays a role in avoiding the escalation of the conflict into a cycle of violence. Whether accidental or intentional, the death of a person is treated by both kin groups with anxiety and vigilance. If it is recognized as accidental, tensions would be lessened and both of them are willing to look at such accidents as the will of Waaqa (God) and are much more willing to manage the situation through reconciliation process.

In cases where it is believed the killing was an intentional act, then the pressure to mobilize the resources for the purpose of revenge would be enormous and, indeed could escalate so much that the conflict could get out of hand. Elders are being cognizant of this enormous danger, usually took the role of intermediaries. Elders usually teach the society to prevent violent acts but whenever such things happened, they mobilize the community for immediate intervention; to warn the killer's kin that they should conform to the seera (law) of collective responsibility in the case of death caused by a kinsman, considering every kinsman of the killer to be a party to the killing and therefore liable for revenge by the kin of the victim and finally to avoid spilling more blood.

Participants described their experience about the role of the witness in the reconciliation processes. According to them it is uncommon that they look for witnesses to testify the issue under litigation, except in few cases. Supporting this finding, Lerche (2000) stated that reliance on eye-witnesses can be misleading because some witnesses may be guided by self-interest or

fear. In the Gumaa system, the reconciliation process doesn't need to attest by witness but in cases where there is a need the presiding elders instruct the witnesses to tell the whole truth and examine the responses point by point and there is a case of interrogating the witnesses.

It is clear from participants' descriptions that decisions are proposed by elders based on the information from the litigants and rarely from witnesses. However, only decision to which both agree would be final. The elders would not dictate the disputants to accept their recommended decision. Rather elders encourage the disputants to make joint decision and they will try to avert the feelings of the contenders as a loser and urge them to accept the decision.

Gumaa doesn't fail to present the truth due to backdoor deals among the plaintiffs, the defendants and the witnesses. Under the *Gumaa* system conflicting parties do not allowed bribing the elders or the witnesses in order to bring justice to their own side. Thus, the reconciliation becomes easier and less problematic and its outcome will not be considered as unjust by either of the parties. Against the role of witness in the justice system, Lewicki (2006) also stated that in the state justice system conflicting parties usually bribe the police, the judges, the prosecutors and/or the witnesses in order to bring justice to their own side. Thus, the justice system becomes more difficult and problematic and its outcome could also be considered as unjust by either of the parties. Unsatisfied parties go to the next higher level of justice for appeal and consequently justice may also linger for quite a long time. Once decision are made under the *Gumaa* process, it is believed within participants

that conflicting parties would not go in to conflict again with the sense of revenge, which eventually would bring long- lasting solution.

All conflicting parties are expected to bring genuine information about conflict causes and the driving factors. The witness is expected to present unbiased or undistorted information in order to make the right decision. Thus, there would not be conflict again and hence they bring long- lasting peace among themselves. Although violence leave victims with physical, emotional and psychological trauma, Elders reflected that under the *Gumaa* system there is no system of imprisoning the victimizer. This was because it is believed that imprisonment will not bring a long-lasting solution. Some of the participants remarked. Similarly, Choudree (1999) argued the focus is not only on punishing either of the conflicting parties, but is also on restoring relationships by reconciling the groups in the conflict. Sending the criminal to jail would create anger on the part of the imprisoned family members, and may exacerbate revenge and insecurity. The victimized family members may not satisfied with the decision of putting victimizer in prison, due to psychological factors and may take revenge on other family members of the offender.

4.2. How does *Gumaa* Restore Psychosocial Aspects of Conflict?

Participants described that whenever violent conflicts were happened between family members, clans and ethnic groups, it destroys social values. It was evident from elders' narrations that homicides between individuals, families, or small groups were happened and destroys the social capital of the community. Conflict destroys relationships, brings emotional damage to the affected person and his family. The society's peace disturbed with in

frequent homicides which may also lead to family conflict, clan conflict or ethnic conflict that in general destroy societal assets.

The psychological aspect of healing is essential because those who have experienced the pains of violent conflict are often injured emotionally and left traumatized. Karbo and Mutisi (2008) made similar arguments that the ultimate goal of any indigenous conflict resolution mechanism is psychosocial reintegration, reestablishment of community relationships and reunification of offenders into their societies by revitalizing emotional attachments of the parties in conflict. *Gumaa* helps to heal at the psychological crisis that again allows for the repairing of broken relationships and rebuilding and restoring of mutual trust lost, which is necessary for the human society to remain an integral and functional unity.

Gumaa is a method of seeking justice and a way of asking those who have been wronged for forgiveness, and a way of restoring the spirits of those in conflict by helping them towards restoring healthy relationships. In line with Macfarlane, (2007) stated in using indigenous justice systems it is more flexible and influential, and affects the lives of more ordinary people than the formal justice system. *Gumaa* repairs the harm that has been done in conflict, rebuild relationship, and create healing in the societies. *Gumaa* helps to achieve a rapprochement between the parties at feud and avoid the sense of retaliation that would in turn lead to another vengeance. *Gumaa* helps to repair the damage in violent situations where the perpetrator, with support from his/her family, must apologize and ask forgiveness of the victim and his/her family. In doing so, the perpetrator promises, in front of both families, not to commit such violent acts again.

It is noted from participants' narrations that *Gumaa* as conflict resolution mechanism can regenerate the eroded social values and reintegrate the conflicting parties in the community. Similarly, Imobighe (2003) stated that conflict resolution is concerned with the ways and means to controlling and harmonizing divergence relationship. *Gumaa* focuses on the psychosocial aspects of the conflict. Some of the participants remarked the importance of focusing on peace building rather than punishing the offender: Our family relived from hostility, fear of revenge, and anxieties that have developed from conflicting parties. The system helped us to bridge loosen emotional attachments among close or distant family members. The trauma developed from the conflict is healed.

Gumaa helped conflicting parties to develop trust among them. It is evident from participants' narrations that *Gumaa* gives priority to social and psychological reconstruction. In order to make mutual trust among conflicting parties, they need to be open, honest and respectful. To restore violated social rules and detached emotional attachments, it is necessary that conflicting parties should have full confession, honest regret, and genuine apology. This finding was supported with the work of Bar-Tal and Halperin (2011). They stated that peace building is possible when the conflicting parties are willing to come to a round table discussion, listen to each other and genuinely understand their competitors' emotions and feelings that requires rebuilding intergroup trust, renewing circumstantial beliefs, and reconfiguring emotional attachments that became detached due to fears and frustrations during the conflict. Deutsch (2006) also strengthened the above finding that the psychosocial factors are more fundamental in the processes of conflict and in the constructive resolution of conflicts.

Some of the participants described the role of *Gumaa* as tool to revive the normal social space that could be possible by restoring the psychosocial values. Through *Gumaa* system, it is possible to achieve long-lasting reconciliation among parties. This is because *Gumaa* is deeply rooted in the Oromo culture, and the Oromo community has a strong sense of ownership of and belongingness to the *Gumaa* system. Elders described the role of *Gumaa* for its capacity to effectively rebuild social bonds and reintegrate conflicting parties without any external pressure. *Gumaa* makes emphasis on morals of the conflicting parties, pays attention to social values and keeps the psychological makeup of engaged parties. *Gumaa* has the influence to prevent conflicts and helps the conflicting parties to eliminate hostility and a desire for revenge, and to the end it restores peace. In line with this finding, Christie (2001) argued that restoring interpersonal, intergroup or intercommunity relationships and reintegrating offenders into their societies are important goals of any sustainable conflict-resolving, justice-doing, and peace building process

When Elders made decisions social, moral, or psychological factors are considered and will not have repercussions on the future peaceful coexistence of the conflicting parties and their families. Following the reconciliation process, conflicting parties are expected to forget hatred and develop a sense of belongingness within the society they live in. The reconciliation process would help conflicting parties feel moral and psychological security. Contrary to this finding, Kelman (2007) stated that even though decisions are made, each party perceives the other as an enemy and justifies its own action as a right.

It is clear that killing someone inflicts psychological distress on the slayer, and that the distress may be even worse when the incident is between family members or close relatives. Participants described the rehabilitative role of *Gumaa* as a conflict resolution mechanism. Both the victims and victimizers would go in to the state of psychological crisis. *Gumaa* systems appear to recognize cultural elements and tend not to focus on punishing the individual found guilty. Elders described their experiences: Regardless of what happened the *Gumaa* system doesn't recognize, for example, imprisonment. Unlike legal systems, it works towards avoiding further grudge and ending animosity between parties at feud with each other. *Gumaa* needs to be performed between family members of the deceased left behind and those of the killer to protect the latter from imminent avenge by the former.

The end of animosity is declared through different rituals that the parties undertake under the dictation of the elderly throughout the purification. The conflicting parties at blood feud feed each other honey to indicate the end of enmity and bitterness towards each other and the restoration of the once sweet relationship.

In contexts of homicide phenomenon, modern state intervention may not work and hence *Gumaa* may become a more reasonable solution. State interventions mostly focus on penalizing or correcting only the wrongdoer, thereby situating the problem solely in the individual. By doing so, state interventions fail to reach and heal the psychological and social capital that the incident of homicide has destroyed. Reconstructing and strengthening the social relationships and harmony among the parties involved appear to be more essential than punishing or correcting the wrongdoer as a separate

entity. State court/justice systems lack or have little ability to reach citizens' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral processes at all the levels concerned, thus making it difficult to bring about restorative justice. *Gumaa* has managed to heal the victims and the slayer at psychological and social levels which the state legal systems fail to manage. *Gumaa* strives to bring about restorative justice by focusing on restoration of psychological and social capital destroyed in a case of homicide.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

The main objectives of the study were to explore how *Gumaa* functions and how it restores the psychosocial aspects of conflict. Thus, the following points conclude the findings of the study:

- When violent conflict happens, *Gumaa* elders (3 from killer's clan, 3 from victim's clan and 3 neutral elders) would be selected with the initiative of the family members of a person who committed crime.
- Neutral elders are expected to demonstrate and perform in accordance with the *seera* (law) and *aadaa* (custom).
- Neutral Elders are expected to have private discussion before the reconciliation process.
- The *Guma* system is reflected as the collective unit but not at individual level.
- Whenever there were disputes that involve deaths, serious bodily injuries, there was collective compensation payment in the *Gumaa* system of conflict resolution.

- Blood price payment in West Arsi Zone varies across in its character but does not vary across age and sex.
- The ultimate goal of *Gumaa* indigenous conflict resolution mechanism is: psychosocial concerns, family reintegration, and reestablishment of community relationships and reunification of offenders into their societies by revitalizing emotional attachments of the parties in conflict.
- The important thing in the *Gumaa* system is not judging the past, but rather creating a peaceful future life.
- The focus is not on punishing either of the conflicting parties, but is on restoring relationships by reconciling the groups in the conflict.
- *Gumaa* plays a role in avoiding the escalation of the conflict into a cycle of violence.
- It is uncommon that *Gumaa* leaders look for witnesses to testify the issue under litigation, except in few cases.
- Only decision to which both agree would be final. The elders would not dictate the disputants to accept their recommended decision.
- There is no backdoor deals in the *Gumaa* system
- *Gumaa* helps to heal at the psychological crisis that again allows for the repairing of broken relationships and rebuilding and restoring of mutual trust lost.
- *Gumaa* is a way of restoring the spirits of those in conflict by helping them towards restoring healthy relationships.
- *Gumaa* repairs the harm that has been done in conflict, rebuild relationship, and create healing in the societies.

- *Gumaa* can regenerate the eroded social values and reintegrate the conflicting parties in the community.
- The system helped us to bridge loosen emotional attachments among close or distant family members.
- It is evident from participants' narrations that *Gumaa* gives priority to social and psychological reconstruction.
- *Gumaa* strives to bring about restorative justice by focusing on restoration of psychological and social capital destroyed in a case of conflict.

5.2. Recommendations

Taking the findings of the study and the above conclusions as a spring board, the following recommendations can be forwarded, with regard to the question of what should be done to bring lasting peace to the study area. In order to dispel fears that customary law is an archaic, barbaric outfit and a competitor of modern formal courts, governments, international and local agencies should promote local dispute resolution mechanisms to ensure that local actors participate in conflict management by partnering with the local institutions.

- It is the positive conclusion of the study to encourage the use of indigenous peace building mechanisms combined with the modern democratic forms of conflict prevention.
- Develop a strategy for identifying conflict arbitrators and peacemakers within each community while validating and empowering existing conflict arbitrators, and creating opportunities for their interaction with other societies.

- Evaluate some of the traditions and approaches to peacemaking that worked in the past, and thinking over how they can be helpful today. The various customary mechanisms of conflict management and respective peace agreements be linked and harmonized. This will not only provide a framework for recognition and legislation of laws and policies that recognize and promote customary mediation but will also aid in wider inter-community collaborations and enhance complimentary efforts in solving conflicts. Recognizing the indigenous knowledge of the people and integrating it into the ‘modern’ state structure both in administrative, legal as well as educational systems is very important.

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