

Eessatti Mucucaanne?

The Oromo Social Fabric under Challenge: Evidence from the Jawi Oromo of Horro Guduru Wallagga Zone (19th century to 2024)

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Abstract

The Jawi Oromo of North-eastern Wallagga has recently experienced a serious social fragmentation. Individual-centred, hedonistic, and nihilistic views and practices have gravely affected the preexisting communal livelihood of the Oromo people. This article attempts to explore the causes that led to the erosion and change of the communal life social fabric among the Jawi Oromo of the Horro-Guduru-Wallagga Zone. Drawing on historical sources, the study employs qualitative methods. It is framed by Social Cohesion Theory and Institutional Change Theory to provide insights into how social bonds and shared values that maintain unity could end in fragmentation over time. The outcome of the study reveals that the erosion of the Oromo social fabric stems from age-old external and internal underlying factors. In addition to the cultural imperialism that systematically cracked social glues, the growing individual- and materialist-oriented living style has undermined the Oromo views, practices, and institutions of social cohesion. In response to these challenges, the study underscores the vitality of rebuilding indigenous social institutions that were once the cultural foundations and the 'living tissue' of the Jawi Oromo. The study recommends a rigorous cultural renaissance movement for sustainable social bonds and cultural pride among the Oromo. This cultural renaissance is imperative for fostering a resilient, just, and cohesive society in the face of modern individualist world.

Keywords: *Cultural imperialism; Cultural renaissance; Jawi Oromo; Social fragmentation; Social fabric.*

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1. Introduction

The Jawi Oromo of the Horro-Guduru-Wallagga Zone, namely, Amuru, Jarte-Jardaga, Horro Abay Comman, Jimma Rare, Jimma Ganati and Guduru districts, were known for their strong and rich social fabric, owing to their indigenous institutions, shared values, and solidarity. Nevertheless, recently, all forms of killings, displacement, looting of properties, kidnapping, conflict, humiliation, elders' disrespect, rape of teens and mothers have completely destroyed the social fabric. By examining the historical trajectories from the late 19th century to 2024, the paper seeks to investigate the factors and agencies that have contributed to the weakening of the social fabric in this zone.

Studies on institutions argue that cultural societies are mainly characterized by the intricate social fabric woven into their socio-economic and political lives. They are governed by indigenous social institutions, as a result of which they exhibit common values, traditions, and responsibilities. These institutions range from individual to kinship networks and social to economic and political systems that organize and regulate their interaction and preserve collective identity (North, 1990). The social cohesions that bind the society into a functional whole are central to their solidarity, sustenance and their resilience against internal friction and external pressures.

Social fabric, social glue, or otherwise "the living tissue" of a people implies interconnectedness, social relationships, norms, and institutions that reinforce a cohesive society. As described by Dragolov, G., Ignácz, Z. S., Lorenz, J., Delhey, J., Boehnke, K., & Unzicker, K (2016), it serves as an "invisible infrastructure" that establishes trust, cooperation, and collective problem-solving skills within a community. With its core components such as social institutions, social networks, collective consciousness, shared narrative and memory, reciprocity, and solidarity, it builds the people into a single entity (Durkheim, 1984). In such away it contributes to inclusive governance, enforcement of law and protection of cultural identity.² The best examples in this case are the governance systems of the German and the Japanese people that are rooted in, history, cultural identity, a strong sense of community, and social responsibility. In both countries, while indigenous cultural institutions remained the foundation of socio-political transformations, modern governance relied on strong cultural heritage, social harmony, and social values (Streeck & Yamamura, 2001). Likewise, historical and anthropological studies indicate that the Oromo were a cultural nation who sustained their social fabric through strong indigenous institutions rooted in the Gada system. Consequently, the Oromo used to maintain a collective identity, social cohesion, solidarity, and economic regulations (Asafa; 1993).

The Jawi Oromo, a subgroup residing in the Horro Guduru Wallagga Zone of

² Culture serves as a neutron of the nation, balancing both politics (electron) and economy (proton) of the people.

Western Ethiopia, had nine sons, including Horro, Jidda, Calliya, Limmu, Amuru, Jimma, Ebantu, Guduru, and KIRAMU (Alemayehu, 2004). Odaa Bulluq served all the Jawi descendants as the Gada Centre (Mohammed, 1990). This sub group was historically renowned for rich social institutions, peace and strong social cohesion that enabled them regulate internal affairs and defend external pressures for centuries (Ginbar, 2000). Increasingly, the social fabric that once unified the Jawi Oromo began to give way to individual-centered, hedonistic, and nihilistic social orientations. The assumption is that this shift is not merely a superficial change in lifestyle but an erosion of the deep-rooted values and practices that offer itself to questions how and when did this social slippage occur.

Scholarly debates on social cohesion and institutional dynamics provide a useful lens for understanding these changes. Of these, social cohesion theory posits that shared values, trust, and social networks are essential for societal unity and stability (Durkheim, 1984). Institutional Change Theory, on the other hand, highlights how changes in formal and informal institutions impact collective action and social order (North, 1990).

The causes for the weakening of the indigenous social institutions *mucucaachuu* (slippage) that ultimately led to fragmentation, conflict, and social problems and ultimately resulted in the decline of the capacity of social resilience require deep investigation. Existing research on the Oromo often emphasizes the resilience of indigenous institutions but also points to pressures from state centralization, globalization, and cultural imperialism as potent forces destabilizing traditional social structures (Mohammed, 2020; Assefa, T. 2017). This study argues that the erosion of the Oromo social fabric in the Horro Guduru Wallagga Zone resulted from a complex interplay of external pressures and internal changes. Therefore, *eessatti mucucaanne?* (Where did we slip?) is an irony to capture when and how social fabric of the Jawi Oromo declined. The study mainly examines the primary causes and manifestations of the challenges facing the social fabric of the Jawi Oromo, and how these challenges altered the preexisting social structure. Hence, the following questions guide the study.

1. What factors contributed to the decline of indigenous social bonds in study site region?
2. How did external pressures counterfeit the interweaving role of indigenous governance system?
3. How do the people endeavor to resuscitate their concealed old social fabric?
4. How do the people perceive the relevance of indigenous social institutions in addressing modern social crises?

In doing so, the study aims to explore the factors contributing to the weakening of

the indigenous Oromo social fabric and contributes towards the reclaiming of indigenous social institutions as foundational to restoring unity and cultural pride. In particular, the study aims to:

- ◆ Identify the internal and external drivers that have led to erosion of indigenous Oromo values and social norms in the study area;
- ◆ Explore the impact of modern socio-political changes on the intergenerational relations of the local people and;
- ◆ Assess how the society attempt to restore the concealed old social fabric
- ◆ Examine the status and functionality of indigenous institutions maintaining communal harmony.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design, which is well-suited for exploring complex social phenomena such as cultural transformation and social cohesion in indigenous communities. Qualitative methods enable a nuanced understanding of lived experiences, values, and social practices from the perspectives of those directly affected and dynamism of change undergone.

The study used oral and written data to answer the research questions. Oral sources were collected through semi-structured interviews from twenty elders and four focus group discussions with the Jawi Oromo of current Horro Guduru Wallagga Zone in 2024. The study also gathered data from both published and unpublished manuscripts and ethnographic documents to provide a longitudinal perspective on social change.

Culturally knowledgeable respondents were purposively selected from the seven districts. The approach enabled the investigator to capture a range of socio-demographic profiles of elders, adults, and the youth. Besides, to ensure diverse viewpoints and minimize culling data, attention was given to community leaders, cultural custodians, and women. Both interview and FGD questions were conducted in Afaan Oromo, the native language of the area. The purpose was to clearly communicate with the sources of information. Each interview was recorded with the agreement of the interviewees and then transcribed it. The data obtained were thematically analyzed to understand the preexisting social institutions, social cohesions, internal changes, and external pressures contributing to institutional change. The analysis employed both Social Cohesion Theory (Chan et al., 2006) and Institutional Change Theory (North, 1990) that enable an exploration of both causes of the decline in social bonds and changes influencing institutional dynamics. The study was conducted with full informed consent from all participants, guaranteeing anonymity and respect. The investigator certified sensitivity to local customs and avoided any actions that could harm social relationships. The study received approval from the Wollega University review board, affirming its adherence to ethical standards for research involving human subjects.

3. Historical Overview of Social institution and social bonds of the Jawi Oromo

Studies on the Oromo political culture reflect that the secret behind the social harmony, strength, and peacefulness of the Oromo people was the Gada system of governance. By the system, the Oromo used to organize their leadership and decision-making mechanisms to maintain social cohesion, enforce laws, and protect cultural identity (Mohammed, 1990). In the system, several institutions, strategies, norms, and rules functioned towards a humanity-centered life balanced exercise of power, maintenance of human-to-human, human-to-nature and human-to-supernatural relations; which generally served as an unwritten constitution. The strong social fabric was the result of three main elements of social covenants such as social consensus, social contract and promises, like the covenantal constitution of modern democratic federations (Asmerom, 2006). Above all, the covenant that the law of Gada cannot be broken by any means after it has been made prevented the violation of their collective and private rights and maintained social harmonies (Diribi, 2011).

In the late 19th century, European travelers were surprised by the peaceful, harmonious, and intergenerational social cohesion of the Jawi Oromo. A British diplomat and consul in Ethiopia from 1848 to 1860, Walter Plowden observed the Guduru Oromo and related the peaceful and democratic system of their governance to their indigenous institution known as the Gada System. Being surprised by the pure collective decision-making system, the traveler described it as "perhaps a specimen of nearly as pure a republic as can exist" (Plowden, 1868:80). As he witnessed, several institutions, structured members of the society and functions based on age and generational set cycles existed in order (Ibid). The people regulated their political, social, economic, and religious affairs and maintained order and unity through multiple institutions embodied in the Gada system. Contrasting with contemporary monarchies and autocratic regimes, Plowden further explained the egalitarian and participatory nature of Oromo governance based on collective responsibility, rule of law, and social cohesion (Ibid). On the other hand, De Selviac, suggested that the peaceful and harmonious relation of the people was owing to the Gada system of government (De Selviac, 1901). This indigenous knowledge system allowed the society to establish not only culture-based social and economic relations but also environmental governance and cohesive co-existence with nature.

Empirical and oral evidences also show that the *Saglan Jawi* used to maintain common moral foundations, social solidarity, and social responsibility through different institutions. They were organized and governed under the Gada government centered at Odaa Bulluq that was located 12 km north of Shambu Town. In the study area Gada values and *safuu* functioned as software of social connections. The oath that holds *Seerri Gadaa hinjigu; hincabu* (the value of the Gadaa Law does not fall; it doesn't break) contributed to the sustenance of

functions of the moral values. Hence, social norms and values remained the guide of social and economic lives of the society. Above all, these values guided and maintained two pillars of social cohesions of the Jawi Oromo namely; the consanguineal (blood/biological) and affinal (marital kinship) relations. Both governed multiple affairs where authority was rooted in family connections and ancestral ties from highest clan elder to an individual level (Desalegn, 2010). The kinship organization and governance of the Jawi Oromo constitute the foundational structure of social, political, and economic life of the society. The people organized their clan members based on descent (bloodlines/consanguinity) or marriage (affinity) and smoothly regulated these social relations (Dereje, 2000). Accordingly, the Jawi Oromo were organized into generational cohorts. It entails hierarchical and horizontal relations that govern the society from the clan level, *warra* (sub-clan) and *maatii* (family level) to *the qe'ee* (village) level. The clan structure ranged from Jawi to *Saglan Jawi* (nine Jawi clans) namely Horro, Guduru, Jimma, Amuru, Jidda, Limmu, Ebantu, Gudaya, and Iлуу. It further spanned into *kudharfan* (fourteen) Horro, *torban* (seven) Guduru, arfan Jimma, sadan Amuruu, shanan Jidda, sadan Gudayyaa, Limmu (kudha-tokko), kudha lamman Eebantuu and Saglan Iлуу. Each clan indicated above was also confederated into clan-based Gada governance, which was accountable to all matters in the respective domains of the clan. Each of these clans was also further classified into *warra* (sub-clans) who governed their matters according to the Gada administrative structure and intergenerational relations (Alemayehu, 2004:156). Informants explained that the kinship, marital and age-set organizations functioned as social glue in the history of the society. The social connections also enabled cooperation, respect, and social responsibility as well as knowledge transfer through generations. Through these social institutions, the Jawi Oromo maintained social order in times of crises that occurred in the last centuries (Informants: Mitiku Debela and Cherinet Wakwoya).

As explained by informants, elders, heads of lineages, or clans carried out governance with decentralized power structure. Each leader handled social matters, prioritizing the preservation of social harmony. Informants underscored that elders played a crucial role as custodians of cultural wisdom, mediators of conflicts, and leaders in social ceremonies; through these they reinforced communal continuity and social cohesion. Individuals belonged to a lineage, meaning a group that descended from common ancestors and owed allegiance to a specific leader. The senior member (*hangafa*) among the Saglan Jawi was authority and responsible for managing the affairs at specific level (informants: Galata Sagni and Irena Duressa).

The other social institution that contributed as social glue to respect, coexistence and harmony in the area was the marital kinship organization. Linked to the biological kinship, marriage ties (*soddummaa*) strengthened governance and social bonds in multiple ways. It was an important element of managing leadership roles, authority, and conflict resolution across all levels from clan to

lineage, and extended family structures. Among the Jawi Oromo, marital relation was both vertically and horizontally regulated by the clan structure as well as inter-generational relations. The basic institutional system that regulated the marital relation was the *Oboo-Coraa* intergenerational relation. In this system, sons/daughters of *Oboo*, were *Coraa*, and sons/daughters of *Coraa* were *Oboo* (informants). It means generation of father/mother are in the same cohort, as generation of children fall in the same cohort. The system repeats itself through generation where children fall in the cohort of their grandfather/grandmother. In the system, all members of generational cohort referred to as *Oboo* or *Coraa* were considered *hiriyya (gita) or equals* regardless of their age difference and have equal social status and privilege. According to the rule, marriage was arranged between similar *gita*(cohort) of different clans. It means *Oboo* is married to *Oboo* and *Coraa* must marry *Coraa* of a different clan. Otherwise, if a person with the *Oboo* cohort is married to *Coraa* or vice versa, it is considered as the person is married to his father/mother of his offspring. On the other hand, individuals who are included to the community through adoption or socialization are given the cohort of adopter's sons or daughters (informants: Cherinet Wakwoya and Galata Segni).

One of the fundamental means of keeping these social institutions functional was through socialization and sustenance of the active social networks. Socialization in this regard refers to individual's engagement in the social affairs, recognition, rights and privileges. It generally aims at *guddisuu* (upbringing a person to the sense of belonging to the clan and *oromummaa* at large) . in this context, individuals valued one another by maintaining the vertical and horizontal line of social relations. Children of the same *gadaa* class/*hiriyya* or the *Oboo* or *Coraa* generation as described earlier, were socialized to the similar class performing every social affair together. While family played central role in socialization, members of close relatives in the kinship such as *warra* (sub-clan), *fira* (*relatives*), etc were responsible in molding, educating, guiding, and orienting the social, and moral life of the children. A familial relationship was the source of authority and social order in the society (Desalegn, 2010). Children were socialized based on the ethical values such as "maal naan jedhu!" (which is similar to Safuu morality). They were instructed to be morally correct to avoid *dhala abbaan abaare* (the child cursed by family) or not to be *muka makmaaksaa* (bad example/blackmailed). In such a system, the major actors were close relatives, elders, and custodians of *safuu*. In particular, relatives were natural advisors and custodians of individual members. Apart from the family, they were major actors who instruct ethical ways of life and observe individual's adherence to *safuu* and *duudhaa* (values). Relatives were also considered as a helper in difficult times. They help in making every member of the society a work-loving person, a person avoiding laziness and not engaging in unethical activities. All members of the family were instructed to respect all his/her equals as brothers/sisters, all equals of his/her father/mothers as fathers/mothers, all equals

of his/her sons/daughters as his/her sons and daughters, etc. Besides, the values and sayings such as *dubartiin qananiidha*, *ijoolleen qananiidha*, *qeerroo/qarreen qananiidha*, *maanguddoon qananiidha*, etc. indicate that women, children, youth, elderly etc were imparted with special privilege. In the tradition and blessings, they all were addressed as privileged and as who need special care (Informants: Oljira Kumsa and Dorsis Duguma).

A family or *warra* who were successful in producing a morally, socially, and economically righteous members were known as *warra-guddaa* or *warra katte* (*extended family*). Among the Jawi Oromo, socialization was the only way of getting social capital, which also guarantee good social networks across and beyond the clan. This in turn was expected to generate strong social bond. In addition, *fira* (literally means relative complemented the strong social networks formed by the above social values). The close interpersonal relationships among members offered dependable support systems and resource-sharing channels, which strengthen collective identity and emotional bonds beyond immediate families, and which serve as reliable social safety nets. Although every member of the society was expected to be a custodian of the institutions and worked towards maintaining social order, family members, relatives and elders played significant roles in maintaining social order. All these social institutions functioned towards producing competent, ethical, *goota* (brave), work loving, and *arjaa* (generous) individuals, and building trust and reciprocity in intra and intergeneration relations (Informants: Dorsis Duguma and Oljira Kumsa). The father-son/daughter ties were very important and common value in all districts of the Zone in linking intergenerational solidarity. The saying *Hin-nyaadhu lafee/seenaa abbootakoo Naabaara ilmikoo* (roughly this means “I never betray the grace/brevity of my fathers”) how much fathers were concerned for their offsprings. It means that all members of the society felt that twisting the fame of their fathers was unethical. That was how social figures helped their children grow with social values and norms for ethical life.

These values and norms are meant to enable the society to regulate their internal affairs and defend external pressures. Among the indicators of healthy social relations of the Jawi Oromo in the past were the prevalence of ethical ways of life, manifested in the form of *nagaa* (peace), *amantaa* (trust), *marabbaa* (cooperation and unity), *tasgabbii* (tranquility), *suga* (satisfaction), low incidence of crime and social deviance, equitable resource sharing and peaceful conflict resolutions. Social connections also helped in marinating units of production. In such well-functioning social fabrics, the people supported one another through communal labor such as *daboo* (cooperative) *dugda*, and *daadoo* (reciprocative) labor system, *hirpha* (support) and other social welfare systems (informants: Galane Sima and Oljira Kumsa). Above all, the values that members of the community had for *nagaa* (maintaining social and natural order) and *qixxee* (equality/fairness) historically enable them to reduce conflicts, promote justice and reconciliation. With these values the Jawi Oromo contend to resist divisions

and hostility even after the impositions of alien cultures. allowing trust and cooperation to thrive over time. Among others, their social institutions and internal solidarity enabled them not only to stand against slavery in the early times and the imperial conquest until the late 19th century, but also helped them resist imperial repression and exploitation in the 20th century (Ginbar, 2000).

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Erosion of Indigenous Institutions and Values

In order to answer the question when and how the social institutions declined, it is vital to explore the social changes that took place in the Jawi Oromo since the late 19th century. Hence, this section of the paper examines historical trends (both internal and external) to identify factors that contributed towards the erosion of social institutions and ultimately societal fabric.

Evidences show that the erosion of indigenous institutions and, by implication, social fabric and social bonds among the Jawi Oromo were the result of multiple internal and external factors that happened over a course of time. Among the internal factors the underlying causes for the erosion of the social fabric was the socio-political change of the Jawi and the subsequent decline of the Gada system of governance. The moment the Gada system began to be violated, the social fabric began to wither away; institutions began to crack; and pan-Oromo was challenged. One critical turning point among the Jawi was the transformation of the republican governance system into a monarchical system in the second half of the 19th century (Cherinet, 1988; Desalegn, 2010). Although the evolution of monarchies appears to create political cohesion from the political point of view, building strong and centralized political power with such a leadership was a critical challenge in substituting the preexisting governance system.

The emergent monarchies seized power contrary to the values of the peaceful power transition and eight years of tenure of power. The *moti* (king) system not only made the Gada political culture of making leaders worthless, but also made age-based rights and responsibilities less valuable. The change was also followed by instituting social values and economic systems that was contrary to the Gada system. The system in general introduced a semi-feudo-capitalist arrangement that maintained personal and group interests as opposed to the preexisting societal and egalitarian ways of governance. The system favored some groups politically, socially, and economically over other groups. In due course, the new system led to the creation of ruling class who violated the previous egalitarian ways of the social and economic system of living (Informants: Dorsis Dugugama and Mitiku Teshoma).

One of the changes that further deteriorated the preexisting egalitarian and social bases of living in beginning of the late 19th century was the implementation of a divide and rule social system. The *moti* rule capitalized on the social divisions that served its system. In the system some groups were socially and economically

privileged while others (the *gabaroo*, *Yaabbata (slave)*, and *ogeeyyii* (artisans)) were created and made secondary to serve the privileged ones. The process created resentment among the majority of the society and enforced a system that not only deviated from the cultural rules but also brought conflict between the advantaged and the disadvantaged fellow members of the society (Desalegn, 2010).

As the saying goes, *Sa'a abbaan gaafa cabse, Ormi ija jaamsa (the cow which the owner broke its horns, others would make it blind)* the internal factors provided momentum for external forces in silencing and erasing of indigenous institutions during the last centuries. The external factors that dominantly caused the erosion of the institutions were associated with cultural domination and degeneration of indigenous epistemology since the late 19th century. Imperial powers considered the indigenous institutions archaic, uncivilized, and an obstacle to the colonial project that they called development (Asafa, 1993). In Ethiopia in general and the study area in particular, political oppression, cultural repression, and epistemological erosion were interlinked. Similar to what colonialists did in other parts of Africa, the imperial state in Ethiopia undertook cultural imperialism in the area. The system imposed its dominant culture that attempted to totally replace the preexisting institutions. This occurred through dissemination of cultures of the ruling class in such a way as administration, religion, education, language policies, and economic influence, which resulted in loss of cultural values of the subject people. Since the late 19th century, cultural domination of the Amhara and the Tigre ruling class was a critical external factor that undermined Oromo identity and social cohesion. The state and its agencies propagated narratives and education systems those were inconsistent with Oromo traditions (Mohammed, 2020). Regarding this, Alexander Bulatovich states that:

Oromo's "peaceful life, which could have become the ideal for philosophers and writers of the eighteenth century, if they had known it, was completely changed. Their peaceful way of life [was] broken; freedom [was] lost, and the independent freedom-loving {people} [found] themselves under the severe authority of the Abyssinian conquerors" (Bulatovich, 1898:54).

The cultural suppression first by the Gojjame (1876-82) and then the Shewan rulers since 1882 have brought two changes that affected the social fabric of the Jawi Oromo. The system imposed socio-economic and political institutions that replaced the indigenous institutions (Oljira, 1994). The centralized political systems and land tenure system introduced an incompatible governance system that favored individual wealth accumulation over collective welfare. Cultural imposition and reconfiguration of social relations disturbed the previous social bonds, giving rise to the formation of a new social formation (Assefa, 2017: 67).

In the long run, the imposed system replaced local leaders with autocratic rulers and local institutions with feudal system in the previously kinship governed areas. The moti system of administration dominated and benefited the Ethiopian ruling class. As a result, the areas that were governed through the indigenous systems, the cultural suppression led to the erosion of the original institutions and socio-economic relations. An example of system of erasure of the indigenous institutions was the implementation of public administrative arrangements and the establishment of *Sabaka* (parish) which brought new institutions such as *abaliji* (godfather/mother), *iddiri*, *harma-hodhaa* (breast feeding). These have replaced the Oromo clan territory model and social institutions. All these new social institutions functioned at the expense of the preexisting indigenous institutions, establishing new social fabric. In sum, the imposition of centralized authority weakened the autonomy of the Gada system and interfered with kinship-based resource management. This caused fragmentations in social cohesion. The disruption of the Oromo indigenous socio-economic organizations was also attributed to the introduction of the suppressive social institutions of the settlers until the mid-1980s. In the 1980s, the *Darg* resettled peoples from northern Ethiopia through *sigsega* system (intermingling) in the area. This, in turn, has added impetus to the ongoing acculturation at the expense of the preexisting institutions, social roles and responsibilities of the local people.

On the other hand, the Christian missionary imposed a profound challenge to the indigenous social fabric of the Jawi Oromo. With a rigid and intolerant attitude toward local customs, traditions, and indigenous wisdom, these missionaries conducted religious expansion across the region. Although Protestant missionaries promoted the ethical-moral order similar to *Safuu*, t in an attempt to produce Christian community, their process resulted in the fracture of former kinship and social cohesion. In addition, the dismissal of indigenous beliefs, which they labeled as backward, eroded intergenerational respect and indigenous authority which resulted in cultural vacuum that weakened social bonds. It also weakened cooperative and reciprocative working culture. Instead, cooperatives came to be organized under religious orientations. In the process, new converters were culturally dislocated which was alien to them and facilitated the spread of individualism, moral confusion, and social fragmentation. Thus, the process has disrupted the holistic worldview of Jawi Oromo and accelerated the disintegration of the social cohesion (Informants: Mitiku Tashoma and Dorsis Duguma).

Furthermore, since the early 1990s, the Jawi Oromo have experienced significant influence from media, technology, and global markets. These also challenged and further affected their preexisting values, practices and lifestyles. They also facilitated the adoption of foreign values which are often at odds with local practices and worldviews. These global pressures brought about cultural dilution and hybridity, which complicated efforts to preserve Oromo customs, and indigenous identity. The erosion of the longstanding social structures declined the roles of traditional authority and leadership within families and clans. It also

promoted the value systems such as kinship relations, marital relations; labor based social bonds in favor of the growing individualism. Attitudes toward justice and conflict resolution also changed from *jarsummaa*, *gumaa* and all sorts of cultural practices toward more fragmented and individualized rulers' court system. Hence, the process further undermined trust and cooperation between generations. The disconnection from Oromo cultural contexts shifted majority of the youth to value individualism and materialism (Tadesse, 2019). In addition, it made the younger generations to socially distance themselves from their communities and weakened the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge and practices.

4.2. Consequences of the Deterioration of Social Fabric

According to the theory of institutional change shift in institutions results in the social, political, and economic changes in accordance with the actors' interests and power dynamics (North, 1990). The cause of decline of social fabric and social crises were basically the breakdown of kinship organization and marital ties that used to foster collective decision-making, social cohesion and intergenerational solidarity. The community lost its core social organization which used to serve its political and economic life.

The decline of the social institutions and the social fabric of the Jawi Oromo has brought profound and multifaceted costs to the society. As indicated above, central to the decline were the institutional and indigenous governance structure failure, and the erosion of these indigenous institutions, the decline in indigenous governance structure and values further strained intergenerational relations. The erosion of elder based authority and the emergence of political dominance identities have fragmented communal solidarity, breaking the social glue that once held families and communities together.

The effects of the decline in social institutions can be witnessed right from the period of the conquest of the Oromo by the Abyssinian (Ethiopian) state in the late 19th century. The political control and the replacement of the local ways of governance resulted in the systematic devaluation of Oromo ways of living. (Bulcha, 1996). Among the Jawi Oromo this new political dissociation also resulted in "epistemicide"-the destruction of indigenous institutions, knowledge and practices. First and for most this situation fundamentally eroded the right of the Oromo people to exist as a distinct cultural entity. Imposition of alien culture through marginalizing the *safuu* has led to unprecedented internal conflicts and ecological vulnerabilities. Regarding the eradication of social institutions and values respondents remarked that:

Dhalli namaa dursa safuu cabsee Waaqayyo (Uumama) waliin wallole. Itti aansee sirna uumamaa cabsee hariiroo walta'aa uumama waliin qabu balleesse. Itti aansee ofitummaa fi of jaallachuu irraa kanka'e dhugaa dabsee; sirna hawaasummaa walta'aa ture jeeqe. Xumura irratti, fedhii dhuunfaa ykn garee

guuttachuuf jecha balleessaa, akkasumas yakka suukkanneessa fi abdi kutachiisaa keessa waangaleef, hawaasni keenya gama hundumaan qormaata kana hin jedhamne keessa galeera. Wal-saalfachuu, wal-kabajuun, waliin hojjechuufi wal-tumsuun haphate. Firoomni, soddoomni bakka dhabe. Wal-salphisuufi wal-ajjeesuun rakkoo hamaaf nusaaxile. (FGD).

This can be translated as

Humankind first broke safuu and conflicted with Waaqayyo (the Creator). Next, humankind broke the natural order and disturbed the harmonious relationship with nature. Then, out of selfishness and self-love, he betrayed the truth; disrupted the common social value and order. In conclusion, our society has faced these untold challenges in all aspects because it has learnt to commit crimes to satisfy personal or group interests. Mutual respect, cooperation and coexistence deteriorated. The kinship relationships lost their social values. Humiliating and killing exposed us to serious socio-economic and political problems.

As to this assertion, individualism with younger generations increased which prioritized personal gains and success, wealth accumulation, and hedonistic lifestyles over collective welfare and shared responsibilities. These all changes are attributed to intersection of historical state repression and the diffusion of globalization that have culminated in what can be described as an "ontological insecurity" for the Oromo livelihood. The foundational worldview defining relationships between *Waaqayyoo* (Creator), *Dachee* (Earth), and *Nama* (Humanity) are under threat from globalized cultural norms. The youth have remained aloof their indigenous social values. This growing generational rift created a cultural vacuum that has left the community vulnerable to immorality and social disintegration.

The effects of the fundamental socio-cultural degradation were visible in weakening intergenerational solidarity, social cohesion, and values of hard work. There has been a marked decline towards education, elders, and educated elites, which are exacerbated by cultural diffusion and generational differences. Valuing hard work and cooperative labor practices known as "*aadaa hojii*" and mutual aid networks, once the living tissue of Oromo social systems, have also declined. The decline in the social institutions and values also contributed to the prevalence of *aad-malee* (normlessness'). The following songs are recently sung by individuals who were engaged in theft in Horro District.

Oromo	Gloss
Yeroo weenniin korrisu ani dallaa keessan jira	When Colobus Monkey roars, I was in the cattle kraal
Yeroo handaaqqoon iyyitu ani qaleen foon hira	When the Chicken crew, I slaughtered it and shared the meat
Yemmuu abbaanshee iyyitu ani galeen mana jira	When the owner screamed, I went in and was at home
Gurbaan nyaattuu goobaafi mataa dirraa...	The guy who eats the goblet and the ridge of a bull

This reflects personal strength of individuals who are proud of themselves when engaged in criminal activities such as theft. Such unethical and normless practices in the society have disturbed the preexisting respect and balanced social relations and intergenerational interactions in general. Concerning this change respondents unanimously explain that:

Erga waggoota kudhanii drbanii as naannoon keenya (aanaalee hedduu keessatti) rakkoo hawaasummaa hamaa garalaafummaa dhabuu, hanna, maallaqaaf nama butuu fi ajjeechaa isa mudateera. Adeemsi sodaachisaan kun hawaasa keessatti safuu dhabuu kan calaqqisiisu yoo ta'u, duudhaafi walkabajuun akkasumas hariiroon hawaasummaa haalaan manca'aniiru. Maanguddootaa fi dhaloota dargaggootaa gidduutti walkabajuun dhabamuun isaa tasgabbii hawaasaa miidheera. Miseensonni hawaasaa tokko-tokko ilaalcha karaa qaxxaamuraa duroomuu qabachuun isaanii hariiroo diinagdee fi hawaasummaa duraan ture akka diigamu taasisseera. Sababa kanaaf maatii, fira fi hawaasa ofii shororkeessuun soda fi walamantaa dhabuu uumeera. Jeequmsi hawaasummaa bu'aa kanaan uumamu dinagdee naannoo tasgabbii dhabsiisuu qofa osoo hin taane caasaa bulchiinsa naannoo kanaa laaffisuun nageenya hawaasa kanaa balaadhaaf saaxileera (FGD).

This is roughly translated as

Since the last ten years, our region (in many districts) has faced serious social problems of inhumanity, theft, kidnapping and murder for money. This alarming trend reflects the lack of morality in the society, where traditions and mutual respect as well as social relations have been significantly eroded. The lack of mutual respect between the elderly and the younger generation has undermined social stability. Some members of the community have adopted the view of easy wealth accumulation, which has led to the breakdown of previous harmonious/collective economic and social growth. For this reason, terrorizing one's family, relatives and community have created fear and distrust. The resulting social unrest has not only

destabilized the local economy but also weakened the administrative structures of the region and threatened the security of these communities.

Youth engagement in armed theft, kidnappings, and killings for ransom have further destabilized the social environment and resulted in the social and political fragmentation in the Horro-Guduru Zone. A respondent sadly remarked that...*yeroo ilmi kee ykn namni ati guddiste sii saamu ykn sii-ajjeesu caalaa hammeenyi jiraare. Kun abaarsa mitiire?...* "...there is nothing worse than when your son or someone you have raised robs you or kills you. Isn't this a curse?..."

To the worst, the social fragmentations have invited other internal and external actors who utilized the opportunity for personal/group interest and exacerbate the situation. The ineffectiveness of elders and religious leaders to restore peace and cohesion has worsened fear and insecurity in the society. In several places of the zone social figures suffered punishment, including assassination, which has severely undermined indigenous leadership. This wiped away the collective ability of the society to address ongoing conflicts in all parts of the zone from Guduru to Amuru.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The social fabric and intergenerational affinities of the Jawi Oromo in the Horro-Guduru-Wallagga Zone have been deeply weakened by a combination of internal social change, and external pressures rooted there since the late 19th century. The erosion of indigenous social institutions coupled with rising individualism and cultural fragmentation, has weakened the community's social fabric. The erosion of social institution is evident in normlessness, the breakdown of respect between elders and youth, and the troubling increase in youth involvement in theft, ransom kidnappings, and violence, which have further destabilized the social, economic, and political environment in the zone. Despite these challenges, there is a significant potential for restoring social cohesion through culturally grounded, community-driven efforts that can be drawn from indigenous governance and values. These challenges could be addressed through the following recommendations:

1. **Indigenous Institutions should be revitalized:** the restoration and integration of indigenous social institutions and governance structures within modern local governance frameworks help to strengthen social cohesion;
2. **Intergenerational Dialogue should be Strengthened:** this helps to foster mutual respect and cooperation between elders and youth, targeting the transmission of Oromo cultural knowledge and values through community engagement.

3. Cultural Renaissance Movements should be installed: encouraging and celebrating cultural heritage, and ethical norms help to reinforce collective identity.
4. Inclusive Community Programs should be Developed: prioritizing collective welfare and addressing the root causes of youth involvement in criminal activities enable the restoration of shared responsibility and social solidarity.

In sum, by applying these mechanisms and practices, the Jawi Oromo could heal and rebuild their social fabric, reestablish trust and solidarity among members, and promote a stable community ground by retrieving the rich age-old heritage. It is believed that these efforts seem to be essential not only for the Horro-Guduru-Wallagga Zone but also a model for consolidating social cohesion in other regions of Oromiya and indigenous communities facing similar challenges.

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