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# Effectiveness of the *Gadaa* System's Indigenous Peacebuilding Institutions in Addressing Local Disputes among the Liban Macha Oromo

Tsegaye Dejene [1*], Mohammed Hassen[2], Dereje Tadesse[3], Minhaj Alam[4], Yacob Cheka[5]

[1,4]Institute of Peace and Development Studies, Haramaya University, Ethiopia

[2,3]College of Social Science and Humanity, Haramaya University, Ethiopia

[5]Department of Civics and Ethical Studies , Dilla University, Oromia, Ethiopia

***Corresponding author: e-mail address**: tsdejene@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

*The Gadaa system represents one of the African indigenous peacebuilding platforms that look overwhelmed by the western model state institutions. This fact instigates to insight in other than liberal approach, indigenous peacebulding is rigorous at addressing local disputes. Principally, the investigation seeks to contribute to less covered experience of indigenous peace practice among the Liban Macha Oromo as a general objective. Many studies covering the Gadaa system are mainly confined to the southern branch of Oromoland as it is claimed as Gadaa largely remained fully functional in those areas. However, this study is grounded in the rationale that the Gadaa system among the Liban Macha Oromo is also meaningfully considerable and survived to revive as a mechanism of conflict resolution and peacebuilding among the locals and beyond. The study is qualitative in nature and the ethnographic case study design is applied along with the interpretivist paradigm of social constructivism. Data collected through 62 interview respondents, 3 focus group discussions, 3 observations, and document review were thematically analyzed. The findings reveal that in resolving local disputes among the Liban Macha Oromo, the Gadaa system's indigenous peacebuilding institutions pursue the approaches that conform to the African indigenous knowledge theories. The procedures to resolve micro-level disputes among the locals are oriented to the Oromo's philosophy of everything great but truth, humanity, and restorative justice. And their effectiveness has to do with strict observance of Safuu (moral excellence, ethical codes), Duudhaa (customs and cultural values), Hooda (moral and spiritual abstinence from evil), and Dhaha-milkii (Oromo's astrology of prophesy and success). Noteworthy, this paper argues and recommends that to have long lasting means of dispute resolution and peacebuilding, giving serious attention to indigenous socio-political institutions like Gadaa is more generative. And all stakeholders both governmental and non-governmental should enhance their positive role to vitalize this issue of concern. Hence, this empirical record will contribute to the world wide peacebuilding discourses that aspire to empower the local-based approach to peace.*

***Keywords*** **:- Dispute resolution, *Gadaa* system, Indigenous knowledge theories, Liban Macha Oromo, Peacebuilding**

## 1. Introduction

Broadly speaking, two methodologies prevail regarding dispute resolution and peacebuilding in the varied literature of peace studies: *dominant Western model* (structured through formal state institutions), and *indigenous platform* (existent in a community and less formal in a state-society arrangement). Peace research recognizes the importance of relying on indigenous resources within context (Lederach, 1996). Many African societies have indigenous knowledge systems and resources for dispute resolution and peacebuilding (Abdurahman, 2019). On the contrary, these resources are overwhelmed by the western model state institutions of conflict resolution and peacebuilding (Mapara, 2009). Whereas, the long-lasting means to resolve conflict and build sustainable peace are supposed to be ingrained in this local knowledge production or indigenous knowledge system (Omona et al., 2020).

The Oromo are typically known by the indigenous knowledge system-informed way of life known as the *Gadaa* system. *Gadaa* is an inbuilt, integrated, and holistic socio-political system of the Oromo (Megerssa & Kassam, 2019). Its peace potential has not been well studied, which is important given that Ethiopia has experienced multiple conflicts that have hampered the nation's socioeconomic development and made it more vulnerable. In the perspective of the Oromo people, peace transcends human well-being; harmony with nature is essential to maintaining peace, and this belief is ingrained in their worldview for peaceful cohabitation with nearby Oromo and non-Oromo people as well, which is the basis of the *Gadaa* system's peace (Negasa, 2022).

This study starts its exploration of below identified experience of indigenous peacebuilding from the conclusive remark that problematizes the inefficacy of western model state institutions to transform local disputes as they are dubbed to conform to legalism or legal rigidity being silent of post jurisdiction disputants' relations. And, Boege (2006) has witnessed even that in the availability of indigenous institutions the African state institutions of conflict resolution and peacebuilding replicate the liberal approaches of adjudication attributed to top-down working, less sensitive to local realities, rigid bureaucracy, and deficiency of grass root legitimacy.

This study has intended to contribute to less investigated case of *Gadaa* based indigenous peacebuilding experience of the Liban Macha Oromo. As many studies covering the *Gadaa* system are mainly confined to the southern branch of Oromoland as

it is claimed as *Gadaa* largely remained fully functional in those areas. In fact, few other studies attempted to uncover *Gadaa* practices among other Oromo locations, particularly in Macha and Tulama, including the Oromo Cultural Center Research Team (1998 & 2016): the history of the Oromo up to the 16th and 20th centuries A.D. while giving a perspective on the generic aspect of the *Gadaa* system; Alemayehu Haile (1999): the Tulama Oromo *Gadaa* system; Melkamu Tafessa (2020): the Settlement and Patterns of the *Maccaa* Oromo; Dejene Gemechu (2002): conflict and conflict resolution among Waliso Oromo of eastern Macha: The case of the guma; and Dejene Gemechu (2015): the survival and amendment of Waliso Liban *Gadaa*.

The last two works by Dejene (2002 and 2015) are worth mentioning in relation to this proposed study. The first work emphasized the *Gumaa* institution, which is only one of the *Gadaa* system's conflict resolution institutions and is limited to only Waliso from the three clans of the Liban (*Ammayyaa, Walisoo,* and *Kuttaayee*). The second work focused on the persistence of the *Gadaa* system among the Waliso and the *caffee tumaa* amendments on socio-cultural issues in the community. Upon this basis, the investigation seeks to contribute to less covered experience of indigenous peace practice at rejuvenation among the Liban Macha Oromo.

The main objective of this study is to explore the approaches and procedures that are pursued by the *Gadaa* system's indigenous peacebuilding institutions to address local disputes among the Liban Macha Oromo on one hand. And to inquire the effectiveness of these institutions in addressing local disputes (short term) and sustain peace (long term) on the other hand.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### *2.1. African Indigenous Knowledge Theories*

It is a thought process rephrased from the bigger theoretical entity known as indigenous knowledge theories and intensively popularized by the Zambian scholar Bentry Nkhata (2019) in his study of exploring selected theories applicable to educational disciplines and social sciences research. Selectively, African indigenous knowledge theories that reinforce African way of conflict resolution and peacebuilding include communalism, functionalism (positivism), holisticism (holism), preparedness (preparationism), perennialism, vitalism, and indigenous standpoint theory. Similarly, the *Gadaa* system's

institutions approach disputes and enhance peacebuilding in the spectrum of these theories.

Communalism is a crucial component of social existence and constituent of the indigenous belief of indivisibility of reality. Oromo's world view as it is embedded in the *Gadaa* system reflects unity, peaceful co-existence, and harmony that nurtured its indigenous peacebuilding. Contrary to structuralism (more importance on the structure of a phenomenon), the Functionalism (emphasis on the function of a phenomenon) states that each aspect of a system or society depends on each other as they impart to the overall stability and functioning of that system or society (Nkhata, 2019). The *Gadaa* system assigns a role to every Oromo person ranged in age grade and socialization takes place accordingly so that everyone places peace above all.

Holisticism (Holism) is a theory with the propound that components of an entirety are in a close interconnection, so that they cannot exist independently of the entire, or cannot be apprehended without reference to the entire (Nkhata, 2019). That is, life as an entirety demands multidimensional capability engaging in different aspects of living. *Gadaa* addresses all aspects of Oromo's mode of life and an individual is expected to fit in this way of life to maintain peace in the community. Preparedness (Preparationism) is a theory of preparing generation through socialization to become useful members of the community within the existing pattern of social setting (Nkhata, 2019). Oromo prepares the future generation through engaging children and youths in the *Gadaa* grade and socialization using oral tradition exercises like allegory, proverbs, puzzles, and education from elders.

And, similarly, the theory of perennialism is all about the continuity of a cultural heritage in indigenous African societies with a conservative mode that are not bound by time or place, and framed to remind the past, nurture the present, and aspire for the future (Nkhata, 2019). Oromo values generational hierarchy through its *Gadaa* system and sustain the continuity of its cultural heritage using the *Gadaa* age grade to let the persistence of wisdom of settling disputes and peacebuilding among the communities.

According to vitalism, "indigenous knowledge concerns itself with the idea that life is not explainable solely by the laws of physics and chemistry, but also by the presence of a vital life-force" (Hewson, 2015, p.12 cited in Nkhata, 2019). In the Oromo's world view, physical and metaphysical spaces are not mutually exclusive. Everyday life is regulated by

strict observance of the divinity serving peace, truth, and social harmony. Indigenous standpoint theory, it affirms actualities of everyday is the basis of the local population's ontology and epistemology or knowledge production (Nkhata, 2019). Oromo perceive that any activity of knowledge production should serve peace above all.

In general, the African indigenous knowledge theories are featured by the assumptions that the knowledge is localized, developed over long period, expressed in local languages, and all the systems need to be in balance with the local environment as it does to the Oromo also. Conceptually framed, *Gadaa* system's institutions as core engines of indigenous peacebuilding are founded upon the indigenous knowledge system pillars centered at worldview based on balance, nature, human connection, justice, and collective responsibility that passed down through generations by the means of oral tradition. Dispute resolution is processed through headship of elders that let truth-seeking and dialogue followed by reconciliation rituals and ceremonies. The outcome magnifies the prevalence of restorative justice while healing over punishment, community reintegration, and compensatory harmony domain the dispute resolution. The ultimate goal aspires for sustainable peace that promote uplifting the lasting harmony and trust among conflicting parties and the entire community to substantiate social cohesion, resilience, and inter-generational stability under the rubric of '*Nagaa'* (peace).

## 3. Research Methods

### *3.1. Description of the Study Area*

The Liban Macha Oromo communities literally live in both central Oromia and Ethiopia, particularly in the districts of Southwest and West Shewa zones (OCC, 2016). In Southwest Shewa, the Liban are found in the districts of Amaya, Wonchi, Waliso, Dawo, and neighboring areas. And in West Shewa, they occupy many districts, such as Dandi, Jaldu, Gindabarat, Abuna Gindabarat, Ambo, Dire Inchini, Toke Kutaye, and neighboring areas.

### *3.2. Research Paradigm, Approach, and Design*

This study has navigated a social constructivist paradigm from Indigenous perspective known as African indigenous knowledge theories. The social constructivist paradigm assumes relativist ontology (the existence of multiple realities), a subjectivist

epistemology (interactive between the researcher and the researched), a naturalistic (set up in the natural world) set of methodological frameworks, and is value-laden in its axiology (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). That is, it attempts to make a deep understanding and description of the multiple realities of the research inquiry from the subjective views of the local people in their existing set-up. And the research is qualitative in approach since the investigation attempts to have a deep understanding of the social world embedded in the meanings people give to their experiences and livelihoods.

This study applied a research design that falls under the ethnographic perspective, particularly, ethnographic case study, where an investigator starts by looking for common patterns within the group he/she is investigating. That is, "the ethnographic case study allows for the examination of an actual case within some cultural group" (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017, p.153). This design is preferred for this study since it aimed at capturing the actual case within some cultural group, unlike traditional ethnography (realist and critical design), which is exclusively focused on a group behavior. Hence, the design allows exploration over the indigenous peace practice as it delves into the *Gadaa* system's institutions, approaches, procedures, and their effectiveness in addressing local disputes among the Liban Macha Oromo.

### *3.3. Samples and Sampling Technique*

Purposive sampling technique (snowball/chain-referral, criterion sampling) was utilized to identify the four districts from the two zones; Ambo, Amaya, Dawo, and Waliso. Ambo and Waliso are zonal towns to trace actual participants of the study with administrative support and collect documents or archives from culture and tourism bureaus, and the remaining districts were chosen for their *Bokkuu* (symbolic scepter that stands for *Gadaa*'s power) centers and ritual sites. Accordingly, until meeting the data saturation, sixty two (62) participants or interview respondents (using criterion sampling and some enumerated through chain-referral sampling) with rich knowledge and deep insights on how the *Gadaa* system's indigenous peacebuilding institutions work on dispute resolution among the Liban Macha Oromo were contacted. Three focus group discussions took place to extract more comprehensive insights, and three special events of dispute resolution like *gumaa* process, *Siinqee* episode, and *kora Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa* gave opportunities for personal observations. These key informants were comprised of

*Abbaa Gadaa (Abbaa Guulaa)/Gadaa* leader*, Haadha Siinqee (beera kalaalee, beera cifiree)/* powerful Oromo women, community members, and culture and tourism bureau experts.

### *3.4. Sources and Methods of Data Collection and Analysis*

Both primary and secondary data were collected. The primary data were collected with the approval of ethical clearance from Haramaya University and zonal culture and tourism bureaus, through key informant and in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observation. And the secondary data were collected from relevant scholarly works including books, magazines, articles, and periodicals from different libraries, local-level cultural courts, and culture and tourism bureaus regarding the *Gadaa* system's institutions among the Liban Macha Oromo. Data analysis heavily relied on inputs from the collected data to selectively fit in to the discourse of how the *Gadaa* system's institutions successfully address local disputes and enhance communal peacebuilding among the Liban Macha Oromo. Those data were set to preparation and organization, initial immersion, coding, categorizing, and theming, and the interpretation grounded in the principles of triangulation and validity.

## 4. Results and Discussions

### *4.1. An overview of the Gadaa system and local disputes/micro-level conflicts among the Liban Macha Oromo*

#### *4.1.1. An overview of the Gadaa system among the Liban Macha Oromo*

Prior to intrusion into the *Gibe* and *Leqas* kingdoms by empire builder Menelik II, the Macha Oromo *Gadaa* system had experienced drastic change in these areas . It was the rise of the *Mootii* system which was wholly inconsistent with the basic tenets of the *Gadaa* system founded on the principles of fixed tenure and balance of power (Jalata, 2008; OCC, 2016). Nevertheless, the *Gadaa* system among the Liban Macha Oromo, which was outside of internal evolution of *Mootii* system but impacted by imperial expansion could survive at least beyond its existential operator.

According to Mohammed Hassen (1990), earlier, the Tulama and Macha clans shared a united *Gadaa* administration and legal system before and during the 16th century; what is now in central Oromia, *Odaa Nabee* served as the headquarter of their shared authority. The common *bokkuu* (a wooden scepter made up of olive tree) served as a metaphor for the common law reality and representation of political strength and solidarity (Hassen, 1990).

Tesema (1980) and Hassen (1990) claim that the Macha finally broke away from the Tulama and founded their center, *Odaa Bisil*, on the hill of Tute Bisil Osole. It was situated between the Gedo, Bilo, and Gibe Rivers in the upper Gibe basin. Tesema (1980) elaborates more that as the Macha continued to grow, *Odaa Bisil* ceased to be the group's common *Gadaa* center and instead gave rise to a number of regional *bokkuu* centers. Tesema also states that Liban was set up in western Shewa (present day-West shewa and Southwest shewa zones), which is in the far east of Macha territory. And this group is called the Eastern Macha by writers; as *Gadaa* became more fragmented among the Macha, the Eastern Macha (Liban Macha) now practice *Gadaa* locally.

The *Gadaa* system's basic structure remains the same among the Liban Macha Oromo, though names of each grade may vary (Dejene, 2002). It is framed as *Daballee (0-8); Itti makoo (Gaammee xixiqqaa) (9-16); Foollee (Gaammee gurguddaa) (17-24); Kuusa (Qondaala) (25-32), Raabaa Doorii (33-40),* and *Gadaa/Luba/ Guulaa (41-48).* In general, all the five *Gadaa* sets, the eight years time period of *Gadaa* set, the forty years time difference between two consecutive generations, and the hereditary principle of membership into a given *Gadaa* class have persisted.

The Liban have five *Gadaa* sets (parties) known as Birmaji, Michille, Horata, Dulo, and Robale in a descending order from eldest to youngest group. The current Liban Macha Oromo's *Gadaa* set (party) which is in power is Birmaji (presiding from 2018/19 – 2026/27). The five *Gadaa* sets are *misensa*s, which literally means members; and the *Gadaa* organization as a whole operates through the coalition of these *Gadaa* sets/parties. Each *Gadaa* set/party goes through commensurate *Gadaa* grades that last for eight years.

A candidate counts 80$^{th}$ of his grandfather and 40th of his father's *Gadaa* anniversary and joins the *Gadaa* rotation (Dejene, 2002). When he is prepared to receive the *Gadaa* approval, he teams up a friend who has already taken this *Gadaa* grade and ready to camp with him for the ceremony of '*fooqatti ulmaa ciisuu'*/camping alone for ritual meditation in a cottage built for this purpose with items of gift such as coffee, the trophy and the '*irreessaa'* of leafy tree's small branch. When the provisions are fulfilled, people must be present are; five *Gaammee* and virgin girls (symbolic to women's purity), five (5) members of the *Foollee*, five (5) members of the *Doorii*/ the prospective *Gadaa* cycle that will take over the power of the *Gadaa* administration in the next term, five (5) members of the *Raaba Gadaa*, and five (5) spears (*Abbaa Bokkuu*, KII-1, personal communication, September 23, 2024).

According to the tradition of the Liban Macha Oromo/Macha *Gadaa* system, the administrative structure has its own independent executive committee called *'salgee'*/the nines. The structure of '*salgee Abbaa Gadaa*' includes; *Abbaa Gadaa/Guulaa* (the leader of *Gadaa* administration), *Abbaa Saayyaa* (watches over the local economy), *Abbaa Malkaa* (the first in opening up the event on *Malkaa*-mid-range river), *Qaalluu/Abbaa Muudaa* (spiritual leader of *Waaqeffannaa*), *Abbaa Bokkuu* (the highest in Authority – the *bokkuu* lies in the hands of eldest kinship), *Abbaa Alangaa* (enact the legislation/law), *Noolee/Abbaa Caffee* (spokesman of the *Gadaa* law), *Abbaa Seeraa* (lead in producing law and is formerly *Abbaa Gadaa* in previous term), and *Abbaa Yaa'ii* (initiate and facilitate the deliberation of the *Gadaa* assembly)(*Abbaa Bokkuu*, KII-1, personal communication, September 23, 2024).

There is a wider consensus that the Liban Macha/ Macha *Gadaa* system has a reference of going back to the legacies of three important historical components (*Abbaa Bokkuu*, KII-1, personal communication, September 23, 2024): - (1) Prosecutorial and Elderly Law; (2) The Five Covenants of Macha; and (3) The Law of *Makkoo Bilii* (probably governed from 1588-1596 far west in the Oromoland and framed sixty five articles; but those laws were also resonated back to the Liban Macha Oromo areas in later days).

The *Gumii* or *caffee* (general assembly) of the Liban Macha Oromo/Macha has forty-five members divided into five groups of nine people elected from different levels of the community (*Abbaa Bokkuu*, KII-1, personal communication, September 23, 2024): (1) *Shanee Salgee* first - The first *shanee salgee* of nine virgin girls (symbolic to women's purity) are selected from the virgin squad between the ages of 9-24; (2) *Shanee Salgee* second - Nine of these young men between the ages of 9-24 are elected to become members of the Macha *Gadaa caffee*; (3) *Shanee Salgee* third - these are housewives aged 33-48 years; (4) *Shanee Salgee* fourth - this group is composed of married males aged between 33-64 years old and the criteria is someone who is strong, talented and disciplined; and (5) *Shanee Salgee* fifth - they are selected from both genders of four women (*marabbees or beerreen*) aged between 49-64 and five men aged between 65-80. And, the speaker of the council or *caffee* is elected from the fifth *shanee salgee* group (also known as *Hoolee*).

### *4.1.2. An overview of local disputes in the areas of Liban Macha Oromo*

Local disputes/micro-level conflicts in the area of Liban Macha Oromo go to multifaceted causes sourced from political, economic, socio-cultural, and psychological

divergence of interests. In the words of the *Abbootii Gadaa*/*Abbootii Guulaa*/*Gadaa* leaders from the area who confirmed the above-mentioned explanation, however, they explained the context of locally generated disagreements branching out into five aspects of actor: conflicts that arise from kids' clashes; disputes between women; clashes between adolescents or adults; interpersonal conflict; and skirmishes between sub-clans (*Abbaa Bokkuu*, KII-1, personal communication, September 23, 2024).

#### *4.1.2.1. Types of dispute brought to the Gadaa system's institutions*

***A. Homicide***

In the Liban Macha Oromo areas, homicide is the most detested and egregious crime against *namummaa*/humanity. No one can take someone's life except *Waaqaa*/God, and homicide is believed to cost both divine destiny and social cohesion. Homicide may happen inside and outside the kinship circle. The case of homicide is mainly taken to the *Gumaa* institution (an institution of blood reparation) and addressed through proceedings, rituals, and restitution. Yet, almost all the *Gadaa* system's indigenous peacebuilding institutions take part in the process of handling the case of homicide either directly or indirectly (*Abbaa Gadaa*, KII-2, personal communication, September 23, 2024).

***B. Conflict caused by physical injure and disabling***

Physical injure and disabling also fall into the range of *gumaa* process among the Liban Macha Oromo. There are about 62 (sixty-two) *gumaa* entities for the injured or disabled bodies that are strongly articulated by the *Gadaa* system's institution of *gumaa*. The most punitive injuries are those happened to the front body (for example:- genitals, eyes, teeth, hands, fingers, feet, ears, nose, and so on) (*Abbaa Gadaa*, KII-2, personal communication, September 23, 2024). If the front body like facial features are damaged, it will be examined how much hurt they will cause to the victim, and prices are determined then.

***C. Conflict caused by Theft and Robbery***

The conflict related to theft or robbery might be investigated in two ways through the *Gadaa* system's institutions (*Abbaa Gadaa*, KII-2, personal communication, September 23, 2024): one, proof of eyewitness, and two, prophesy. Using eyewitness, if the case of theft/robbery is proven, the defendant is subjected to remorse and compensating the plaintiff with the same stolen item or the conversion into cash. At the absence of

eyewitness, the the rituals to instigate prophesy take place arranged according to *dhaha-milkii* (Oromo's astrology of prophesy and success).

Guided by the moral excellence of *safuu Waaqaa*/ fear of God and *seera Gadaa*/*Gadaa* laws, if the truth they found out freed the defendant, they would publicly give testimony of his/her innocence. Otherwise, the defendant would receive punitive measures in accordance with both *Gadaa* laws of compensation for the stolen item and the imposition of social sanction for the breach of *safuu Waaqaa* or neglecting the moral duty of taking away others' belonging is curse.

### *D. Conflict due to Land and Natural Resources*

Land related conflicts arise over the land rights and boundaries between households or farmlands, inheritance issues, and so forth. Trespassing boundaries between households/farmlands/villages may cause disputes ranging from few individuals to significant number of community members (*Abbaa Gadaa*, KII-3, personal communication, January 04, 2025). Land rights inheritance issues may lead to disagreements among family members. Similarly, when two people exchange lease based land rights use for farm, the breach of terms of agreement may lead to conflict.

Moreover, land rights use might be deprived of somebody or neighborhood by the local government for public purpose without prior consultation that can lead to conflict (*Abbaa Bokkuu*, KII-1, personal communication, September 23, 2024). Competition over natural resources like pasture land, water, and trees may lead to disputes involved few individuals or mass neighbors. Disputes caused by land rights use and competition over natural resources are familiar in the Liban Macha Oromo areas owing to population increase and climate change. Overall, based on the extent and nature of disputes, the cases are taken to the appropriate *Gadaa* system's institutions in the area.

### *E. Social-cultural based conflict and marital case*

Prejudice or stereotypes against individuals or social group based on their clan membership, religious affiliation, cultural practice, occupational selection (blacksmith, pottery, tannery, etc), and health misfortunes (leprosy, disabilities, etc.) are sources of socio-cultural ordained disputes that the *Gadaa* system's institutions admit them for good (*Abbaa Gadaa*, KII-4, personal communication, June 06, 2024). Marital case is another important issue that received attention by the *Gadaa* system's institutions among the

Liban Macha Oromo (*Beera Kalaalee*, KII-5, personal communication, September 23, 2024). In some cases, the ownership of property that spouses possess before and after marriage may lead to disagreements over managing the resource together or during settling divorce. Mistrust relationship between spouses such as biological fatherhood/step parenthood, infidelity, and post divorce relations may trigger dispute.

### *4.2. The approaches, procedures, and effectiveness of the Gadaa system's institutions in addressing local disputes among the Liban Macha Oromo*

#### *4.2.1. The Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa/Council of Gadaa elders/Jaarsummaa institution*

The *Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa*, which is also known as the *Gadaa* elders' court, is an important element of the *Gadaa* system that involved in the prevention and resolution of disputes among the Oromo (Eticha, 2022). The administrative structure of the *Gadaa* system is the basis for the very composition of the *Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa*. Among the Liban Macha Oromo, many of the members who participate in the *Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa* are those who are highly involved in the existing structure of the *Gadaa* system named *Abbootii Gadaa* (*Abbaa Bokkuu*, KII-1, personal communication, September 23, 2024).

#### *A. Approaches*

Communalism (the indigenous belief of indivisibility of reality) drives the *Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa* or *Jaarsummaa* institution's endeavor to address local disputes and enhancement of peacebuilding. This is done through reference to the *Gadaa* laws aspired to serve truth as a spit image of *Waaqaa*/God. The *Gadaa* system as a comprehensive entity made up of its institutions, functionalism (each aspect of a system or society depend on each other as they contribute to the overall stability and functioning of that system or society) defines the institution of *Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa* as it works towards peace for all. Similarly, in the spectrum of Holisticism/Holism (parts of a whole are in intimate interconnection, so that they cannot exist independent from the whole, or cannot be understood without reference to the whole), the *Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa/Jaarsummaa* is an institution evolved out of the *Gadaa* system and operates as part and parcel of the whole.

Preparedness/Preparationism (preparing generation through socialization to become useful members of the community) is a full time work in the *Gadaa* system in general and

the S*hanacha Abbaa Gadaa* in particular. The younger generation is socialized for great future upon former generation's means of knowledge production (Indigenous Standpoint theory). Whenever the council of the *Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa* holds proceedings, everything takes place in the presence of at least selected youths that are curious about the *Gadaa* system, and this is called Perennialism or the continuity of cultural heritage. The institution of *Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa* preserves the philosophy of Vitalism or life is not explainable solely by the laws of physics and chemistry, but also by the presence of a vital life-force/*Waaqaa*/God.

### *B. Procedures*

First, the plaintiff takes his/her case to the *Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa* through *cora lammiʔ*/clan's *Gadaa* affiliate with all details, and attempts made to bring reconciliation so far and the *Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa* advises the representatives of *cora lammiʔ*/clan's *Gadaa* affiliate the way the *lukaa-lukee*/clan's network of both plaintiff and defendant start working on the case brought to them (*Abbaa Gadaa*, KII-2, personal communication, September 23, 2024). *Lukaa-lukee* intensively works on finding out the truth of the case under investigation and share wisdom from the *Gadaa* council along the spiritual assistance from *Qaalluu* and *Ateetee*.

Then, the *Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa* compiles all the details of the evidence set from the *lukaa-lukee* network and the case brought from the plaintiff along the words of refute by the defendant. That the proceedings start by the opening remarks preceded by blessings from the clan elders in descending order and prayers led by the *Qaalluu*/*Ayyaantuu* and *Haadha Ateetee* (*Abbaa Qaalluu*, KII-6, personal communication, October 12, 2024). The final proceeding brings forth every detail of the *Gadaa* laws in the area and *safuu Waaqaa* (divine morality) vis-a-vis the case brought to them. Coding some punitive statements which is not as traumatic as the modern jurisdictions do, instead constructive outcomes for social cohesion and restoration of relationships are given emphasis.

### *C. The Qualification and effectiveness of the reconciliation*

The *Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa* uses both formal and informal setting to make sure whether genuine reconciliation has taken place (*Abbaa Gadaa*, KII-3, personal communication, January 04, 2025). During the reconciliation, the *kakaa*/oath ritual takes place publicly using wet grass and stone (wet grass represents hope and prosperity, stone depicts the possibility of public curse if the promise is broken down). The formal setting implies the

spiritual authority of *kakaa*/oath and its possible consequence of social sanctions from disobedience. The informal setting hints the real experience of conflicting parties in their daily life activities being watched without their knowledge. The report from the informal setting enables the *Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa* to procure actual recognition for positive progress. Otherwise, social sanctions might be imposed against disobedient including exclusions from all communal engagements.

The effectiveness of the *Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa* in conflict resolution and peacebuilding streams from both authoritative procedures of the *Gadaa* laws and spiritual connotations of the covenants in all the proceedings to settle disputes. All the procedures of bringing back peace are deeply ingrained in the cultural setting of the community. The codes of *safuu safaqaa*/moral and ethics highly prevail in all proceedings that wholeheartedly engage both disputants and participants. The disputants understand things clearly without missing the language and cultural setting unlike the modern court system full of jargon, less clear protocol, and non-responsive to post-jurisdiction scenario. It is time saving and convenient to their permanent residence. The financial commitment to compensate victim is quite manageable and shared among the clan members within the sphere of the *Abbaa Kumaa* (the head of closer family trees under the (sub)clan).

### *4.2.2. The Gumaa institution*

*Gumaa* is a strong institution of blood reparation framed within the *Gadaa* system, and it is performed for two fundamental necessities i.e. for juridical responsibilities and supernatural requirements (Abebe, 2018). It is the process of compensation through money or animals for the slaughter or injuries caused between two or more people; the slayer or its group begs the victim's kinship/clan for forgiveness. *Gumaa* payment begins with humble gestures and prayer accompanied by the *'lukaa-lukee'* network (representatives of both the victim and offender mainly drawn from their immediate relatives and (sub) clan leaders calleds *'Abbaa Kumaa'*) (*Abbaa Bokkuu*, KII-1, personal communication, September 23, 2024).

Among the Liban Macha Oromo, there are 62 (sixty-two) *gumaa* bodies; the most highly-regarded of these are those in the front body (genitals, eyes, teeth, hands, fingers, feet, ears, nose, and so on), if these frontal features are damaged, it will be determined how much trouble they will cause to the person (*Abbaa Gadaa*, KII-2, personal communication, September 23, 2024). There are many stakeholders involved in the performance of the

*gumaa* process, however, the key figures that have the highest authority to conduct the process from start to finish are: - *Abbaa Bokkuu, Abbaa Irreensaa, Abbaa Guulaa (Abbaa Gadaa),* and prominent elders.

Within the *Gumaa* platform, there is important arrangement of practice called the *Lukaa – Lukee* network. The *'Lukaa-Lukee'* is a procedure by which both the victims and the perpetrators are represented and point out the truth on both sides. The victim side counts a five-member '*luka'* (mainly comprised of victim's uncle, brother, etc.) while the suspect counts a four-member *'lukee'* to exchange the truth and rituals between them. Rarely to happen, if a person kills a *'Raaba'* and a *'Doorii'* pays three hundred bulls, which means the *gumaa* holds one hundred and the remaining two hundred go to punishment (*Abbaa Bokkuu*, KII-1, personal communication, September 23, 2024). This stipulation implies the outweighing value that the Liban Macha Oromo give for the *Gadaa* system

### *A. Approaches*

The indigenous belief of indivisibility of reality (communalism) is the operating system of the *Gumaa* institution in its endeavor to resolve the homicide case. Each aspect of a system or society depends on each other as they contribute to the overall stability and functioning of that system or society (functionalism) is the working principle of the *Gumaa* institution. It holistically approaches homicide cases with close coordination or cooperation with other *Gadaa* system's institutions like the *Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa, Siinqee, Qaalluu,* and *Ateetee*. Preparedness or preparationism (preparing generation through socialization to become useful members of the community) lies at the center of the *Gumaa* institution with its inclusive approach that engages youths across all the procedures of blood reparation, and it is also all about the continuity of a cultural heritage (perennialism). In the spectrum of indigenous standpoint theory, actualities of the everyday life lead the ontology and epistemology of the community, as the whole processes of *Gumaa* induce strict allegiance to the Oromo's view of life-force/ *Waaqaa*/ God (vitalism).

### *B. Procedures*

The procedures to address the *gumaa* takes relatively longer thoughtful stages of blood reparations including case presentation, witness, rituals, confession, restitution, and reconciliation. When homicide appears either the offender/close family member or the victim's close family member gives notice to the closer *cora ollaa* or *Abbaa Guulaa*/*Abbaa*

*Gadaa,* and immediately the *Abbaa Kumaa* (offender's clan representative) upholds his responsibility to warn the offender to hide out and receive torment of guilty until he/she gets called back to the village since the major *gumaa* rituals do not start until the 40th day anniversary of the victim's death (it is believed that the deceased victim's eye burst in about forty days) (*Abbaa Qaalluu*, KII-6, personal communication, October 12, 2024). And, there are at least three stages of the *gumaa* processing: excogitation, jurisdiction of restitution, and reconciliation.

***Excogitation over the bloodshed on the way to the gumaa process***

After formal presentation of the homicide case to the head of the *gumaa* curer, mainly the *Abbaa Guulaa/Abbaa Gadaa*; the *Lukaa-lukee* network takes the homicide case into further investigation to find out the nature of the slaughter. The offender's side represented by the *Lukee* team, *beera kalaalee/haadha siinqee* (the wife of *Abbaa Gadaa*), two boys pulled by a yoke of oxen, virgin girls carrying non-burst inedible cucumber, bull and heifer of tied mouth, horse bridled, and dozens of the *Gadaa* symbolic sacred materials (*kallacha, alangee, caaccuu, horroorroo, siinqee, eeboo, etc*) march the ritual trip to the victim's village nearby *malkaa*/spring water, and conduct bowing rituals to beg the victim's family with the melody *'araara Waaqaa'* (mercy in the name of God) - *'hoodhaa gumaa'* (please take blood redemption) for three consecutive days, if not for five/seven/nine consecutive days based on the nature of the slaughter (for intentional slaughter nine consecutive days, for unintentional slaughter three or five or seven days) (*Abbaa Gadaa*, KII-4, personal communication, June 06, 2024).

The victim's side asks the *Abbaa Guulaas/Abbaa Gadaas* why they insisted with the bowing rituals. The *Abbaa Guulaas* continue begging them to let the slayer's hand be purified with all the rituals and give information about the case. The two sides come together and the brother of the victim appear with stick in his hand. The slayer appears with disguised features dressing rugged clothes and hat, face painted with charcoal, and standing behind the elders. He/she crashes the cucumber with left leg, untie the boys pulled over the yoke, throw away the yoke with left hand, put a container of barley grain under the horse removing its bridle, let the calf feed its cow, and face the victim's brother to throw away the stick from his hand (*Abbaa Gadaa*, KII-4, personal communication, June 06, 2024). Again, he/she faces the *beera kalaalee/haadha siinqee* to give her a handful of wet grass and hand over one hundred seventy Ethiopian birr signaling all people from

both sides are mixed in crowd. The *Abbaa Guulaas* request the victim's side representative *Abbaa Kumaa* to set appointment, jointly organize the *Gumaa* setter, and initiate the jurisdiction of the *Gumaa.*

### *Jurisdiction over the gumaa restitution*

The proceeding starts under the shade of the local nearby '*odaa'* tree/ sycamore tree at the presence of all the *Gumaa* settlers, with the prayer and blessings coming from the mouth of *Abbootii Guulaa, Qaalluu, Haawwan ateetee*, and elders. For the best wish of the *Gumaa* settlement, *Qaalluu,* and *Haadholii Ateetee* conduct some ritual activities using *weelluu*/spiritual songs and pouring milk over the verdict area. The *Abbaa Gadaa*/*Abbaa Guulaa* and the *Lukaa-lukee* network publicly stage everything about the crime in the form of a dialogue as the active members of the *Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa* and *Abootii Gaaddisaa* (former *Abbaa Gadaas*/*Abbaa Guulaas*) discuss and rewind the currently working *Gadaa* laws and proclamations in relation to the homicide case and the crime grade.

According to the Liban Macha's *Bokkuu* guardian (KII-1, personal communication, October 12, 2024) and *Abbaa Gadaas* (personal communication, KII-2, June 06, 2024; KII-3, September 23, 2024; & KII-4, January 04, 2025), any statement judges mark before exercising the jurisdiction is preceded by the words rewinding the moral pillars of the Liban Macha Oromo bound in, *'Jahaan safuu Maccaa*'/the six moral codes proclaimed in the Macha *Gadaa* system or *'Tumaa qananii safuu jahaan Gadaa*'/the six *Gadaa*'s moral codes: *'Waaqayyoon safuu dha'*/God is morally immune, *'Dacheen safuu dha'*/Earth is morally bound, *'Abbaan safuu dha'*/Father is morally bound, *'Haati safuu dha'*/Mother is morally bound, *'Tulluun safuu dha'*/Mountain/hill is morally protected, and *'Malkaan safuu dha'*/Spring water/small river is morally embraced.

### *The rituals of reconciliation*

Two sheep are prepared for slaughter with new blade from the offender's side for the ritual of purification; one sheep termed as *'hoolaa mixii'* /a sheep of sacrifice to trash out curse would be killed and the slayer throw it away to the nearby hidden site within the *malkaa*/small river and never look back, which signifies the beginning of the spiritual purification from the curse because of the bloodshed. All the participants crowd to the nearby hilly place under the shade of the *Odaa* tree/sycamore maple tree to deal with the

remaining ritual ceremony. Through internal organs of the second killed sheep known as *'korma araaraa'*/bull of sacrifice for forgiveness, both the slayer and victim's representatives leak their hands to hold and shake one another.

Then, both of them walk away to the nearby pond, and the *Abbaa Guulaa*/*Abbaa Gadaa* uses a branch of tree known as *'baala waatoo'*/bush tree or shrub to cleanse the hand of the slayer, and uses the *'hiddii'*/African holly (scientific name, *Solanum gigantum*) to cleanse their eyes signifying no more seeing each other for revenge. The slayer stays back alone waiting for his/her clan members and the whole families to wash him/her hands more; then, all seat together in crowd to share different food items including fried meat of the killed bull depicting no more revenge, disconnection, and segregation.

### *C. The qualification and effectiveness of the gumaa*

*Gumaa* provides restorative justice, works towards family reintegration, restores and strengthens relationships and builds mutual trust, fulfills through inaccessibility and felt inadequacy of state legal systems, addresses gaps and irrelevance in state legal systems, and serves as a rehabilitative psycho therapy. The *Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa* qualifies the *Gumaa* reconciliation when it meets the promises publicly set for both conflicting parties on the *kakaa*/oath ritual ceremony that every word in the *kakaa*/oath obliges them to make both spiritual and ethical allegiance to the promises of dropping out revenge and relief in forgiveness.

All the ritual procedures and intentions of compensation administered by the *Gumaa* institution induce its healing capacity to both the victim's family and slayer as the perpetrator mending their psycho-social fracture, which is irrelevant in the modern legal system. Hence, the effectiveness of the *Gumaa* institution relies on four important elements of the *Gadaa* system's philosophy of life including *Safuu* (morality and ethics), *Hooda* (the rituals of self-control), *Duudhaa* (customs and values), and *Milkii-dhaha* (astrology of success).

### *4.2.3. The institution of Beera Kalaalee and Beera Cifiree (the Siinqee institution)*

The Oromo people hold a deep belief that societal harmony hinges on maintaining a balanced dynamics between men and women. This mutual reliance is seen as essential for peace and well-being, both in spiritual and everyday life. When this equilibrium is disrupted, it's perceived as a violation of *safuu* and *seera Waaqaa* (divine law and order),

foreshadowing chaos and misfortune. Within Oromo communities, women hold significant roles and are highly regarded as the common saying goes, the honor of humanity is a woman (*kabajni ilma namaa dubartii dha*) that is symbolized also women who carry the s*iinqee* staff are seen as blessed or sacred figures in the society.

Basically, within the *Gadaa* system, the *Siinqee* institution holds significant importance for women; it was a practice established by the *Gadaa* laws and deeply valued by the community (Gutema, 2022). In the area of Liban Macha Oromo, *Siinqee* institution, is mainly known as the institution of *Beera Kalaalee* and *Beera Cifiree* (*Beera Kalaalee* is the wife of *Abbaa Gadaa*/*Abbaa Guulaa*; *Beera Cifiree* is the wife of *Abbaa Gaaddisaa* or the retired *Abbaa Gadaa*/*Abbaa Guulaa* or widow of former *Abbaa Gadaa*). Especially, *Beera Cifiree* holds a substantial power and moral authority in every procedure of *Buttaa Qaluu*/the ceremony of *Gadaa* power transfer among the Liban Macha Oromo. When a *Gadaa* power transfer takes place from a certain *Gadaa* group to other, nothing happens without *Beera Cifiree's* public recognition and blessings to the process. *Beera Cifiree* makes sure if all ceremonial and ritual requirements are fulfilled, and moderates ambitious proposals that might be forwarded by the incoming *Gadaa* group/party.

### *A. Approaches*

The indigenous belief of indivisibility of reality (communalism) is what the *Siinqee* institution sticks on while resolving disputes and enhance peacebuilding in the community under the rubric *'Dhugaan keenya kan waloo'*/ we have the communal truth and reality. According to functionalism, each aspect of a system or society depends on each other as they contribute to the overall stability and functioning of that system or society, and similarly holism assumes parts of a whole are in intimate interconnection, so that they cannot exist independently of the whole, or cannot be understood without reference to the whole. *Gadaa* as a system of the Oromo society, its institutions cover all aspects of Oromo livelihood, and each of them are interdependent and contribute to the societal equilibrium. The ontology and epistemology of the community relies on these actualities of everyday as to the indigenous standpoint theory.

The *Siinqee* institution provides autonomous platform for Oromo women to deal with their matters. It is not a separate institution that defies the workings of the *Gadaa* system, instead it is a *Gadaa* institution of women that maintains the Oromo societal equilibrium (Gutema, 2022). Preparing generation through socialization to the indigenous knowledge

production, so that it becomes useful members of the community lies at the center of indigenous standpoint theory, preparationism and perennialism as it is all about the continuity of a cultural heritage, and *Siinqee* institution targets youths or young girls in all its commitment to resolve disputes and deliver peacebuilding. Vitalism (life is not explainable solely by the laws of physics and chemistry, but also by the presence of a vital life-force) is the pillar of *Siinqee* institution in which every decision and action should align with actual commitment to serve the vital life-force who created the universe and all its creatures named *Waaqaa* (God).

### *B. Procedures*

Among the Liban Macha Oromo, any case of dispute presented to the institution of *Beera kalaalee* and *Beera cifiree*/the *Siinqee* institution receives at least three important stages of proceedings: entry of complaint, dispatch of jurisdiction, and the qualification of reconciliation. Many complaint go to the nearby alliance of *beera kalaalee* and *beera cifiree*, and there are two methodologies that are deployed to initiate jurisdiction based on the nature of the case. The first methodology, organizing collective action or rituals grieving against the offender if it is a husband, or the second methodology, opening up a stage that allow the *Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa* or *Gumaa* institution to cooperate with tougher case like homicide. *Beera kalalalee* and *beera cifiree* listen to women complaint that involved their husband under the tree shadow guaranteeing secrecy. If the case of dispute is heavily influenced by the lack of intimacy and treatment, the *beera kalaalee* and *beera cifiree* give the jurisdiction of order to her husband to make sure he would give her affection and treatment to his level best as he makes public oath/*kakaa* in the name of *Waaqaa*/God.

According to the heads of *beera kalaalee* and *beera cifiree* in the Liban Macha area, such as KII-5 (personal communication, September 23, 2024), KII-6 (personal communication, January 04, 2025), KII-7 (personal communication, June 06, 2024), & KII-8 (personal communication, December 01, 2024), severe physical violence and psychological torment against a woman would lead the *haadholii siinqee*/members of *beera kalaalee* and *beera cifiree* to team up and confront the complaint's husband at the front yard of the couple's compound. Hold tightly their *siinqee* staff and cry out in chant saying "*haadholee koo harma dachaa; hoosiftuu ilmoo baachaa; gudeedni kee taadhii; akkamiin namichi kee si harkaa gombisa daadhii*" (my sister of twin breast, you breastfeed caring for your child, you are fertile, how he dares

to ruin the honey wine in your hand). The chant is to remind her husband how precious his wife is in the essence of life.

Council of the *Gadaa* elders/*Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa* join the members of *beera kalaalee* and *beera cifiree* when critical cases such as hereditary rights and homicide appear. Hereditary rights demand deep investigation of the source of the problem that led the woman into dispute with her close family. The *Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa*/council of the *Gadaa* elders organizes a team of the *Lukaa-lukee* network in cooperation with the *Abbaa Kumaa* to exactly spot the problem and consult the *beera kalaalee* and *beera cifiree* on how to proceed with the remaining procedures. Hence, the joint session of the *Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa* and B*eera Kalaalee - Beera Cifiree* settle the dispute with allegiance to the truth and protection of women rights as ingrained in the *Gadaa* laws.

### *C. The qualification and effectiveness of reconciliation*

Effectiveness of the institution of B*eera kalaalee* and *Beera cifiree* among the Liban Macha Oromo in conflcit resolution and peacebuilding has to do with efficient utilization of the *Gadaa* system's standards of peacebuilding including *safuu* (morality and ethical codes), *hooda* (both moral and spiritual abstention from evil deeds), *duudhaa* (customs and values), and *milkii-dhaha* (astrology and divine calendar of success). And in their discourse making, there is frequent promotion of the Macha *Gadaa* system's six moral order and ethical codes that are built on the special respect of God, Earth, Father, Mother, Mountain, and Spring water representing the pillars of Oromo way of life.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In Oromo society, the restoration of peaceful relationship somewhere signifies the shared peace or peace dividend for all the Oromo communities. The Liban Macha Oromo use various *Gadaa* system's institutions to resolve disputes and enhance peacebuilding in their local such as *Shanacha Abbaa Gadaa*, *Gumaa*, and *Siinqee*. The approaches of these institutions are convergent to the African indigenous knowledge theories including communalism, functionalism (positivism), holisticism (holism), preparedness (preparationism), perennialism, vitalism, and indigenous standpoint theory. These approaches lie at the foundation of the *Gadaa* system and play their paramount role in outshining the Oromo's indigenous peacebuilding. The procedures to resolve disputes frequently uphold the Macha *Gadaa* system's six moral order and ethical codes that are built on the respect of God, Earth, Father, Mother, Mountain, and Spring water

representing the essences of life. Exactly, the procedures to resolve micro-level conflicts among the locals are oriented to the Oromo's philosophy of everything great but truth, humanity, and restorative justice.

The effectiveness of the *Gadaa* system's institutions among Liban Macha Oromo in conflcit resolution and peacebuilding has to do with efficient utilization of the *Gadaa* system's standards of peacebuilding including *safuu* (morality and ethical codes), *hooda* (both moral and spiritual abstention from evil deeds), *duudhaa* (customs and values), and *milkii-dhaha* (astrology and divine calendar of success). Adopting these typical indigenous peacebuilding standards would immensely benefit modern state institutions if they incorporate them in their approaches, procedures, and jurisdiction over conflict cases at any level. Hence, this empirical record will contribute to the world wide peacebuilding discourses that aspire to empower the local-based approach to peace.

In terms of limitations, had this study incorporated less visible religious aspect of the *Gadaa* system's indigenous peacebuilding institutions in the area such as *Qaalluu* institution and *Ateetee* communion, it would have been more comprehensive than it does now. Moreover, though the case under scrutiny looks experienced different historical path of the *Gadaa* system, the study could have been benefited a lot had it it included the remaining Macha clans for the investigation. However, these shortcomings happened to appear owing to difficulty in case manageability, time boundary, and budget inadequacy.

Attempts from different stakeholders to uphold the *Gadaa* system's institutions look promising. However, all stakeholders including governmental and non-governmental institutions, scholars, community leaders, and religious institutions should revitalize their positive contributions to regularize the *Gadaa* system's institutions to fully operate in the areas of conflict resolution and peacebuilding both in their realm and beyond. It is also productive to redefine the wrong approach pursued to accommodate cultural courts across Oromia using government led administrative structure other than clan lenient mode of *Gadaa* governance, which the accommodation looks far even from hosting the hybrid space between the two realm (state institutions vs. indigenous institutions).

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**Research ethics statement and consent**

Informed consent from all the participants was obtained through official letters and audio recordings before data collection.

**Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

**Data Availability Statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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