

*Full Length Research Paper*

# The indigenous Oromo peacemaking ritual: The case of Tajoo among Waayyuu Oromo of Arsii, Ethiopia

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This paper tries to reveal Tajoo ritual, which is performed annually in Arfaasaa (spring) as a New Year celebration by Waayyuu Oromo of Arsii. The data for this study were collected through participant observation, interview, focus group discussion and secondary sources. As revealed by the study, Tajoo is a ritual celebrated commonly by the whole community of Waayyuu Oromo on Hinikkaa (the first day of Oromo calendar). Passing through different steps the ritual is concluded by sacrificial activities for Waaqaa (approximately God in English) and prayer to Him for peace, fertility and prosperity and declaration of Tajoo law. The findings of this paper indicate that Tajoo ritual has real significance in intercommunity peace-building and sustaining social solidarity, integration and re-integration. Therefore, using this indigenous institution as input is vital in future policy formulations in the country as peace issues are central to the realization of sustainable development.

**Key words:** Tajoo ritual, peacemaking, Arsii Oromo, indigenous, symbolism.

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## INTRODUCTION

Arsii Oromo, the largest in *Bareentuu* group of the Oromo<sup>1</sup> confederacies, is divided into two main branches: *Sikkoo* and *Mandoo*. These groups have settled across larger territory. In fact, they inhabit expansive settlement area in comparison with other Oromo groups. *Waayyuu* is one of main sub-branches of *Mandoo* moiety, which collectively called *Waayyuu shanan* (five *Waayyuus*). This paper focused on sub-branch of *Waayyuu* which inhabit *Adamii Tulluu Jiddoo*, *Kombolchaa* district around *Baattuu* town in central Rift Valley area of East *Shawaa* Zone of Oromia National Regional State in south central part of Ethiopia.

Arsii Oromo of the study area are followers of

traditional religion which is a belief in *Waaqa Gurracha*.<sup>2</sup> Some of them also follow Islam and Christian religion. However, the Islam and Christian religion is not deep rooted in the society's tradition.

There are different kinds of rituals performed at different times and places by the Arsii Oromo depending on Oromo calendar. Some of these rituals are *Tajoo*, *Ateetee*, *Boorantichaa*, *Wodaajaa*, *Falaa*, *Hanqiftuu* (*Hulluuqqoo*), *Wobaxaa* etc. This article focuses on *Tajoo ritual*, which is performed as a marker of Oromo New Year. The ritual takes place yearly at *Malkaa* (ford) through sacrifice and libation in the hope that *Tajoo*

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<sup>1</sup> The Oromo is the largest nation in Ethiopia. They reside in Ethiopia and Northern Kenya, speaking Eastern Cushitic of Afro Asiatic language family.

<sup>2</sup> *Waaqa Gurraacha* can loosely be translated into English word 'Black God'. *Waaqa Gurraacha*, for the Oromo, is the creator of universe, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent.

brings about peace and harmony in the society as a whole.

Ritual performance is common feature of human life. According to Schirch (2005, p.1) to study humanity, is to study ritual...to ponder the future of humanity is... to consider the future of ritual. The author also suggests that peace building should be thought of as a stage that must be constructed to engage people's emotions and feelings to capture their imagination and interest. Peace building and conflict resolution (such as principled negotiation), practitioners need to rely more on ritual.

Folklorists study rituals because their complexity and dramatic qualities make them dense with meanings: they are significant expressions of a group's traditions, beliefs, values, and identity. Because rituals are so important in making the process of folklore visible, we want to focus in depth on this complex category (Sims and Stephens, 2011, p.99).

*Tajoo* is a very important ritual performances in Oromo culture in general and Arsii Oromo in particular. *Ayyaan-laakkooftuus* (Oromo time-reckoners) determines and sets the exact date of the ritual, which varies from year to year. The *Gadaa*<sup>3</sup> leaders facilitate the ceremony by mobilizing the community to attend the ceremony. On the day of celebration, new law is set and announced; previous laws could be ratified, and conflicts are resolved by *Shanacha Gadaa* (*Gadaa* councils). Such and other related relevant aspects and outcomes of the ritual attracted the attention of the present researcher.

On the other hand, there are some existing studies, which attempted to highlight the southern, central and western Oromo ritual performances. These include the work of Legesse (1973) on the Borana *Gadaa* system, Bartels (1983) on Oromo religious rituals, Kelbessa (2001) on Oromo rituals in conserving environment, Gemechu, (2007) on ritual in blood price payment (*Guma*), Badhaasoo's (2000) and Qashu's (2009) researches on some wedding ceremonies are worth mentioning. Moreover, ateetee, *siinqee*, *qanafaa* and *rakoo* were studied by Deressa (2002), whereas, *siinqee* institution was studied by Kumsa (1997). These works did not touch the *Waayyuu* sub branch of Arsii Oromo, which is covered by this study. In addition, none of these researches discussed about *Tajoo* and its role in peace making and social integration. Therefore, to fill these gaps, this study focuses on indigenous Oromo peacemaking and social integration ritual focusing on *Tajoo* among Arsii Oromo. The paper intended to investigate the role of *Tajoo* ritual in peace-building and social integration, to define *Tajoo* ritual from the perspective of Arsii Oromo, to identify activities related to *Tajoo* ritual, to identify the participants in *Tajoo* ritual, to

explore the roles of participants in the ritual and to explore changes and continuities undergone in the ritual.

The research can be the basis for the future studies related to peace making rituals like *Tajoo*. The result of this research can also serve as an input in policy formulation in the country concerning peace building and social integration in the effort to achieve sustainable peace and social integration in the country.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### The concept of ritual

According to Sims and Stephens (2011), a ritual is a particular type of tradition that many folklorists study as a distinct category of folklore. Rituals are habitual actions, but they are more purposeful than customs; rituals are frequently highly organized and controlled, often meant to indicate or announce membership in a group. Most rituals bring together many types of folklore: verbal such as chants, recitations, poems, or songs; customary, such as gestures, dances, or movements; and materials, such as food, books, awards, clothing, and costumes.

In addition (Myerhoff (1977) cited in Sims and Stephens (2011) defines rituals as performances that are repeated and patterned and frequently include ceremonial symbols and actions. Perhaps most significant to our recognition of rituals is a frame that indicates when the ritual begins and ends.

However, for Schirch (2005) ritual includes a wide collection of activities, which may be religious or secular, traditional or modern, formal or informal, forming or transforming, and destructive or constructive.

### Types of ritual

The most common and widely held rituals include those related to important events such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death. Some rituals are practiced by an entire community or within a large geographic area, and many are related with a particular culture or ethnicity. The authors suggest that as with other folklore texts, categories overlap, and elements of each kind of ritual may be related to elements of other kinds. The labels we suggest are meant to help illustrate and describe the many situations in which rituals are performed and have meaning (Sims and Stephens, 2011). According to these authors, the following are major types of ritual.

### Rites of passage rituals

Rites of passage mark notable dates or stages in a person's life. Most rites of passage occur at times of

<sup>3</sup> *Gadaa* is indigenous Oromo democratic governance system. It is system of generation classes that succeed each other every eight years in assuming political, military, judicial, legislative and ritual responsibilities.

change or transition: birth, puberty, entering adulthood or coming of age, marriage, and death. In some groups, rites of passage involve fasting, body modifications, or ingestion of ceremonial foods or substances; in others, ceremonies are not as elaborate and are embedded within group interactions (Sims and Stephens, 2011).

For Gennep, these kinds of rituals have three stages: separation (preliminal), transition (liminal), and reincorporation (postliminal), when a person who has gone through a ritual returns to society with a new status (Gennep, 1960, cited in Sims and Stephens, 2011, p. 114). Rites of passage are practiced in all cultures. But the events celebrated vary from culture to culture. Coming-of-age rituals are a particular type of rite of passage that acknowledges the transition from childhood to adulthood. These rituals occur around the time of puberty and frequently involve extended community participation.

### Initiation rituals

Initiation rituals express a person's entrance into membership of a certain group. Groups with initiation rituals are usually well defined, with clear hierarchies and structures, perhaps even laws or rules of conduct. Some initiation ceremonies and rituals are private and secret; others are open to the public. Examples include sorority and fraternity initiations or ceremonies, and inductions into occupational or honorary societies. Rituals may include reciting promises or pledges, performing humiliating acts to prove one is willing to do anything to belong, or being presented with ceremonial artifacts or clothing that show others one is a member (Sims and Stephens, 2011).

Among the Guji Oromo, the initiation ceremony is known as *lagubasa* (liberating ceremony) and it involves testing the youth in skills, knowledge and morals required of adulthood. When entering the *raabaa* grade, a person attains adult status and legitimacy to have authority with intricate social roles and responsibilities (Tadesse, 2013).

### Naming rituals

According to Sims and Stephens (2011), there are many rituals associated with naming that ranges from a public presentation of an infant within an informal gathering of a family group to elaborate ceremonies in which names are bestowed by religious or community leaders. Among some groups, a child's name might be the same as or a

variation of a respected elder's or might be chosen to convey aspects of a particular ethnicity or culture, and rituals might be held to solidify those traditions. A seemingly simple act like giving a name to a baby may be a crucial element in forming identity and taking one's place in society and may be so important that groups express the value of the naming process through formal procedures. While names and traditions associated with them are important in most groups, some groups have developed rituals that concretize their importance through actions and performances.

Similarly, Tadesse (2013) states that, *gubbisa*, naming ritual, like any other Gadaa rituals, is performed once in eight years and all men who are in *Gadaa* generational grade would give a common name to all of their children. The ritual is led by *Abbaa Gadaa* and involves slaughtering of a bull, prayers and performances of folksongs.

### Ritual in conflict resolution

Rituals for Turner (1957 as cited in Dejene, 2007, p.13) are social drama that resolves crises by dramatizing the advantages of values and social arrangements. It is performed in response to the breach of law during times of social conflicts to restore the social order. Through rituals, social values are given sacred authority.

According to him, the drama of dispute settlement passes through four phases: (1) the breach of peace (2) the crises that result from the breach (3) the practice of resolving the crises and (4) the re-establishment of the unity of the groups. Although rituals may solve concrete conflicts, they do not extinguish contradictions, which continue to exist at a more basic structural level. For Turner, the effect of a ritual is a result of the performance that stimulates an emotional response and thereby transforms perception.

A conflict-resolving ritual transformation occurs in two ways. The first is resolving conflicts that occur between two or more people in order to reinstate a sense of mutually agreed-upon justice (redressive). The second is restoring stability, order, and harmony to social relations (reconciliation) (Al-Krenawi and Graham, 1999, p.163). Ritual offers an opportunity to interact in a space where the conflict seems to have no currency and where the social structures that often cause conflict no longer operate. People are reminded of their relationships and their shared desire for peace (Schirch, 2005). Schirch also suggests that there are some topics, issues, and feelings that can be communicated only through rituals.

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This is the case as individuals learn and communicate each other by doing. Peace building should emphasize ritual action and nonverbal communication rather than focusing solely on rational discussion. Through ritual, humans try out new ways of being together and create a new reality for themselves.

In the same way, *Gondoro* tradition has complex ritual procedures and strong symbolic representation of purification of the 'curse' and reconciliation of conflicting individuals/groups between the Guji Oromo and the Gedeo in Ethiopia. The tradition is performed not only as a mechanism of purifying the 'curse' from the guilty but also as a method of conflict resolution. Through the ritual processes, the guilty person and his clan would be reconciled with the relatives and clan members of the offended. The tradition works both in resolution of inter-personal as well as inter-group conflicts (Asebe, 2007).

For Bartels (1994), "peace making is always concluded with prayers and rituals of reconciliation with *Waaqa*, God". The Oromo believe that, whenever people enter into conflict with one another, they also enter into conflict with God. Bartels reported the Oromo saying: "*Waaqa* does not hear our prayers if we are not at peace with each other". God is said to be happy when humans (and all of his creatures for that matter) are at peace; God hates conflict (Bartels, 1994, cited in Tenna, 2013).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, qualitative research paradigm is used. Since ritual in peacemaking and social integration is the central point of the study, ethnographic methods of data collection were used to collect, analyze and interpret the data.

Ritual studies are ethnographic, drawing heavily on participant observation and interviews. It is also doggedly comparative, committed to charting cross-cultural similarities and differences (Schilderman, 2007). In field research on ritual, observation and interview are the usual correctives against stereotyping, projecting, and other ways of misunderstanding data.

However, before arriving at a field site, it is crucial to know what one knows, to disgorge what one takes for granted. In short, self-knowledge, not just knowledge of the other, is essential to ethnographic research (ibid).

Therefore, three methods were used for successful accomplishment of this study: participant observation, interview and focus group discussion. These three methods contributed to the achievement of the goals of the study. In addition, the researcher also tried to search the existing documents on the subject or similar subjects that would help to focus on, understand and interpret the basic issues.

Cultural research demands participant observation of actual situations and live activities. It involves getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with the observer's presence so that one can observe and record information about the observed. The main advantage of participant observation is its directness: it enables researchers to study action as it occurs. The researcher does not have to ask people about their behavior and the actions of others: he/she can simply watch as individuals act and speak. This in turn enables the investigator to collect data first-hand, thereby preventing contamination of the factors standing

between him and the object of the research (Russell, 2006).

*Tajoo* ritual is celebrated mostly in January and February depending on Oromo calendar. The 2014 *Tajoo* ritual took place on February 5. The current researcher attended and observed all pertinent ritual events and celebrants from the beginning to the end. The researcher took notes, captured pictures and recorded audio while the ritual activities were going on.

In-depth interview was a method of qualitative data collection which the researcher applied to generate relevant data. The researcher purposefully selected the *Gadaa* leaders and eleven elders depending on their knowledge, experience, and social responsibility. During interview, the researcher and co-data collector recorded audio data, took notes and photo of the participants after securing their consents.

Focus group discussion was also used to gather relevant data for this paper. Focus group discussion is usually exploratory in nature and is used to discover the underlying sentiment or attitudes toward the topic under discussion. It is a good way to gather together people from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest.

It is useful for the researcher in identifying normative issues, terms, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, interpretation, from a group of individuals (Russell, 2006). Therefore, for the purpose of this research, the researcher selected two groups each constituting eight individuals reasonably depending on their experience and knowledge. This includes *Gadaa* leaders of *Waayyuu* Oromo and eight elders.

Decisions were made earlier on ethical issues with concerned bodies. The voluntary nature of participation and the right of the participants to withdraw from the study at any time were clearly explained to them at the beginning of the study. Explanations were given regarding the issues of confidentiality, anonymity, and potential uses of the findings. Finally, qualitative methods of data analysis were used to analyze data. Interpretation and description were used for the data that have been collected through participant observation, interview and focus group discussion.

## RESULTS

### The concept of *Tajoo* ritual

In defining the term *Tajoo*, it is important to know the concept *ayyaanaa*. In this sense, the term *ayyaanaa* means day which is determined by Oromo time reckonings, *ayyaana-laakkayuu*. The name of particular *ayyaanaa* or the day on which the *Tajoo* ritual is celebrated is known as *Hinikkaa*. *Hinikkaa* means *ayyaanaa Waaqaa*, literally means God's Day. *Tajoo* performed on the day of *Hinikkaa* to celebrate *Waaqaa's* Day. Therefore, *Tajoo* means the ritual performed on the day of God. *Tajoo* is exclusive to Oromo for the Non-Oromo do not participate in the ritual. However, sometimes Non-Oromo and Non-Arsii Oromo clans such as Silte, Marako, Meskana, Gona and Sodo<sup>4</sup> may participate through their representative elders to present cases of conflict, which can be addressed on the

<sup>4</sup> Silte, Marako and Meskana are neighboring groups of *Waayyuu* of *Arsii* from non-Oromo groups, Gona and Sodo are from non-Arsii Oromo groups neighboring *Waayyuu*.

occasion of *Tajoo* ritual. The day of *Tajoo* is considered as the marriage day of *Waaqaa* (God), when all humans should celebrate the wedding.

It is one of the *Waaqaa's* ceremonies, held annually. Historically, *Tajoo* is the ritual, which brings the people together. It is considered ceremony of peace and rain that is celebrated for herd and community alike. *Tajoo* is sometimes considered as libation ceremony (*dhibaayyuu* or *muudaa*) which means anointment, and it refers to prayer period for the Oromo. It represents the idea of loyalty to the ideals of religion, sustainable socialization and human harmony. Information from the field attested that *Tajoo* belongs to the whole of 'Black' Arsii, '*Tajoon ta Arsii gurraachaati*'. According to *Waayyuu* elders, black Arsii means the strongest, the purest and the native Oromo, who do not fear enemy, who fear only *Waaqaa* and who keep secret, whose heart is seen only by *Waaqaa*.

### Actors and procedures of *Tajoo* ritual

Data from the field indicated that culturally, *Tajoo* ritual belongs to all followers of indigenous Oromo religion<sup>5</sup>. The entire Arsii Oromo can participate in it. In *Tajoo* ritual, everybody has her/his own role. All libation materials like *ciicoo* (milk container), other feasts as well as *siinqee* (ritual stick) are brought by women. Elders with *Gadaa* leader facilitate the way to sacrifice of the sacrificial animals and keep the schedule of each activity intact and make sure that everyone gets informed as well as discharges his/her responsibilities for the libation to take place. Adults keep sacrificial cattle and bring *xiribbaa* (small wooden peg).

*Gadaa* leaders are the most important actors in *Tajoo* ritual. They announce essential information to the community from the very beginning. They facilitate the ritual by maintaining different steps which the actors have to pass through. These are *qixxee*, *tolfannoo*, *dullacha golgaa*, *cirri eedduu*, *malkaa booreessuu*, *xiribbaa dhaabuu* and *seera tumuu*. Even though translating these activities into English would not do justice for it possibly distorts the meanings the following section attempts to explain their concepts.

### *Qixxee*

*Qixxee* is the assembly held at different levels for different purposes. For the purpose of *Tajoo* ritual, a *Gadaa* leader organizes *qixxee* (meeting) to discuss how the ritual would be conducted. It is held at kraal of *Gadaa* leader or at kraal of *hayyuu* (famous elder). All representatives of *Waayyuu* clans avail themselves and

participate in *qixxee* to hear the responsibility of their respective clans in *Tajoo* ritual. Time reckoners also participate in *qixxee* and inform the exact date of the *Tajoo* ritual. On that assembly, a *Gadaa* leader announces the date of the ritual publically. Responsibility is given to every clan on *qixxee* to prepare necessary items for the ritual.

### *Tolfannoo*

*Tolfannoo* is precondition for *Tajoo* ritual and symbolizes driving out enemies and evils from the region. It is performed on the *jalabultii* (eve) of *Tajoo* at a place called *Haroo Booramoo*, which also known as *Dirree Yaa'aa* (meeting place). On this day, people go to *Booramoo* on their horses' back and sacrifice grayish-brown and nearly black he-goat. At *tolfannoo* ceremony, they also perform *laallee*; etymologically it is related to *ilaallee* (we have observed). It marks the exorcising of enemies or cleanses the ancestors from evils. To perform *laallee* all participants climb uphill and point their spear, and *siinqee* (women's ritual stick) to the direction of the enemy, mostly to the southwest. Arsii Oromo used to curse saying "*dhidhimii bitaa aani or bitaa bu'i, Waaqni bitaa si haa buusu*", which means get lost to the south direction, may God get rid of you to the south.

### *Dullacha Golgaa*

For the Arsii Oromo, sacrificing an old cow is believed to clear all wrong actions and pacifies the society. Therefore, in the morning of *Tajoo* ritual (before going to *malkaa* (ford) for the ritual) people sacrifice *dullacha golgaa*, an old cow to clear the road to *Tajoo* ritual. This sacrificial is arranged in someone's house as per the decision of the clan assembly, which is decided during the initial meeting.

Women bring an old cow to be sacrificed and they tie it to the tree while the prayer goes on steadily. They also go around the cow eight times to symbolize the period of one *Gadaa* class, singing and praying for peace and fullness. Before sacrificing an old cow, the elder women bless the celebrants by moving her hand over the back of the cow gently. According to *Waayyuu* elders, woman is believed to be closer to *Waaqaa* because she is humbler, weaker; softer and innocent than male counterparts. Therefore, she is thought to be unfit for a fight. That is why the society thinks *Waaqaa* will listen more to women than to men. Thus, what a woman blesses is believed to be blessed; what she curses is believed to be cursed.

### *Cirri Eedduu*

*Cirrii* in Oromo refers to oxpecker and *eedduu* means

<sup>5</sup> A religion based on belief in one God known to the Oromo as *Waaqaa*, which according to the Oromo is the creator of the entire universe.

keepers. The two together means oxpecker keeper. Therefore, *Cirri eedduu* are people who cherish the materials of *Tajoo* ritual, which are kept on the bank of the river until libation. These cultural materials are *ciicoo* (milk container), *siinqee*, and others with cultural foods and drinks like *miccira* (Oromo cultural food, which is prepared from mixture of butter and flour of barley), *surree* (Oromo cultural food which is prepared from mixture of butter, honey and flour of barley), *caccabsaa* (Oromo cultural food, which is prepared from mixture of butter, pepper, honey and flour of wheat), *marmaaree* (Oromo cultural food, which is prepared from mixture of butter, honey and flour of wheat), milk and honey mead. Women bring all these materials and they put them at riverbank till libation time.

They are collectively known as *meeshaalee woyyoomaa*; sacred materials. *Cirri eedduu* oversee birds, flies, children, and dog from eating (spoiling) these sacred cultural materials. If these materials are damaged by children or dogs, it is considered as breach of law; and if foods and drinks are spilt out and chipped the law could be also broken. *Waayyuu* Oromo equate keeping oxpecker away from their cattle (which pecks the back of cattle) with *cirri eedduu*, who keep sacred materials on the *malkaa* (ford).

### ***Malkaa Booreessuu***

*Malkaa booreessuu* is done by moving sacrificial animals into the river and turn round them in the river to make the river turbid. The act is the symbol of rainfall, which floods and gets the soil water soaked, thereby ensuring peace and fertility for the society. To symbolize this, they go around the sacrificial animals. All participants in the ritual somberly watch when youngsters drag the sacrificial animals around in the river, males say, *Waaqni roobe Waaqni roobe!* Literally means, 'Rain is raining!' 'Rain is raining!' While females are ululating. After stirring the river, the participant's rash to *Odaa* (sycamore tree) shade to symbolize escaping from the coming heavy rainfall. They run hastily while reciting '*hitit, hitit... roobni nu dhaanee beenaa mana seennaa*', literally means let us go home; the rain is pouring on to us. *Hitit, hitit* is a reaction which someone says when feels serious cold.

### ***Xiribbaa Dhaabuu***

*Xiribbaa* is a small wooden peg made from *mi'eessaa*, *xaaxeessaa* (*Premna resinosa*) and *ejersaa* (*Olea europaea*) trees for different purpose in Arsii Oromo. The Arsii stake into ground this small peg for different purposes in different rituals. Data from the field showed that *Xiribbaa* indicates ownership of a certain land, keeps away evil deeds from the society, and warrants the

continual living of the people on their land. For the purpose of *Tajoo* ritual, it is be erected on the shore of river by *Gadaa* leaders and *cidha baaftuu* (people of ceremony) after sacrificial animals stirred in the river and turbid it (Figure 1).

All *Gadaa* classes should participate in the erection of *xiribbaa*. If anyone of the classes is absent, it is believed that bad luck would occur up on the entire community in general and that *Gadaa* class in particular. Ultimately, it signals failure of the ritual, as a result of which *Waaqaa* may harm the community. Thus, all *Gadaa* classes should be present on time to erect *xiribbaa*. *Xiribbaa* hammered first by *Gadaa* leader in power. Subsequently, all representatives of *Gadaa* class beat it according to their seniority.

Planting *xiribbaa* to the ground at *malkaa* is among rules and regulations of *Tajoo*. This is because the sacrificial animals are not tied to other pole on *Tajoo* ritual, but only to *Xiribbaa* after *Malkaa Boreessuu* ceremony (making the stream turbid). Erecting *xiribbaa* is believed to safeguard against any eviction from community's land, migration and calamities like earthquake, endemic disease, drought and etc (Figure 2).

### **Making and amending law during *Tajoo* ritual**

At the end of *Tajoo* ritual, *Gadaa* leader orders the *murtii biyyaas* (lawyers) to declare the law of *Tajoo* ritual as well as other laws. *Waayyuu* ratified *Tajoo* laws on *Tajoo* ritual every year. *Tajoo* law is declared only on *Tajoo* ritual day. Because Arsii Oromo believe that *Tajoo* law is considered as the law of *Waaqaa* that have to be amended and made on the day of *Waaqa*. They amend some laws because of global, national as well as local political, economic and social factors. For instance, they have amended and reduced *gumaa* (blood price payment) from hundred heads of cattle to fifty because of changing livelihood from the former pastoralist to agro-pastoralist. They also permit market place for the non-Oromo neighboring groups.

### **Changes and continuities in *Tajoo* ritual**

*Tajoo* ritual performance was forbidden by respective Ethiopian colonizer regimes of Oromo country. Haile Silassie regime outlawed the ritual and established Ziway Town, changing the place name from *Baatuu* to Ziway. During the *Derg* regime, people performed *Tajoo* ritual secretly. Later, *Derg* prohibited holding rites at rivers like *Malkaa Garbii*, *Deemsisaa*, *Lakkoolee*, *Waamichaa*, *Dambii*, *Waafiiqoo*, *Baatuu*, *Gootuu* and *Malkaa Tajoo*, which were sacred places for *Waayyuu* for different religious and secular rituals. *Tajoo* ritual was revitalized in 2007 in collaboration with *Waayyuu Gadaa* leaders and





**Figure 1.** Malkaa Booreessuu. Source: fieldwork, photo captured by Lenin Kuto during Malkaa booreessuu February 5, 2014.

Adami Tulu Culture and Tourism Bureau. Unlike in the past, the arrangement, performance, and or law enforcement for *Tajoo* ritual is largely determined by local government officials. The district officials facilitate it; sometimes, they even fix the date of ritual, forced people to repeal ritual laws, for instance the *laallee* ritual. There are frictions between elders and local administrative on the performance of *Tajoo* ritual.

## DISCUSSION

Although rituals are common features of human life, harmony is inherent in Oromo ritual and ceremonial activities for proper administrative, religious, moral, political and legal functions. For the Oromo, *nagaa* is an essential key to an orderly universe and societal well-being that humans must obey.

As stated in literature review, rituals for Turner are

social drama that resolves crises by dramatizing the advantages of values and social arrangements. Through rituals, social values are given sacred positions. Similar to this, *Tajoo* is dramatized and symbolically signifies the advantages of sustain peace, harmony, integration and reintegration among Arsii Oromo.

Legesse (2000) states that, among the Oromo, the concept of peace goes beyond the human domain. Peace is a pervasive and sustained concern in moral life. The long blessings that are given daily by Oromo elders are prayers for peace. The theme of peace is everywhere. Thus, the Oromo believe that everything must be at peace for societal well-being and development.

As portrayed by this study, Arsii Oromo believe that all things in the universe are interconnected. The divine and the secular are inseparable, and the activities, ceremonies, and rituals of day-to-day life are intended to secure balance in the universe. Peacemaking is inherently spiritual in that it illustrates on ceremony, prayer, ritual, and



**Figure 2.** *Gadaa* Leaders erecting *xiribbaa* February 5, 2014. Source: fieldwork, Photo captured by Lenin Kuto.

the supernatural to restore balance, harmony, and peace to the humanity.

Similarly, Tenna (2013) states that, the Oromo term *nagaa* literally means peace, but a definition that includes everything that it implies is yet to be given. Observations of Oromo ritual and ceremonial activities suggest that peace is the harmony of things or parties involved in certain relations; brings harmonious relations between different parts of the human and cosmic orders. For the Oromo, peace is understood as one of the necessities of life. In the absence of peace, even the fulfilment of basic necessities cannot be adequate for the preservation and development of human life.

Similar to Tenna's study, *Tajoo* ritual is also an institution or mechanism of peaceful social integration. It maintains peaceful social relationships. People in conflicts between themselves do not present on *Tajoo* ritual days unless they resolve the quarrel before the ritual. Therefore, *Gadaa* leaders order the representatives of each clan to identify and resolve minor and major conflicts at *qixxee* (assembly). Elders settle the conflicts between individuals, family, neighbor, inter-clan or intra-

clan levels.

According to Aguilar (2005, p. 58), "Oromo rituals recreate, enact, and maintain the social order [which] symbolically expresses the cosmological order. Prayers link the earthly part of the cosmological order with the divine one."

In line with this, *Tajoo* ritual has various roles politically, socially and economically for the society. The ritual especially builds peace and integration among participants. Arsii Oromo believe that when *Tajoo* is performed, it ensures all success. When *Tajoo* is performed improperly with a breach of its rules and regulations, all things would go wrong. Generally, the Arsii Oromo used to believe that with the performance of *Tajoo* ritual, the whole Arsii would be land of peace, love and prosperity.

Arsii Oromo believe that participating in *Tajoo* ritual with dispute even in heart would cause harm from *Waaqaa* (God). Consequently, people who have conflicts between or within members of the society should inform and resolve their conflicts ahead of ritual since restoring and perpetuating peace in the community is one of the



essential preconditions for performing *Tajoo* ritual's.

In addition to this, on the day of *Tajoo* ritual (before libation period *Gadaa* leader announces the following, "Those among you who have differences, and those who divide yourself in hate, forgive each other and give each other the kiss of peace before going to river for libation. Do not get us involved in dispute with *Waaqaa* (God); today the eye of *Waaqaa* is on all of us." After that, individuals who are in disputes forgive one other and reconcile. If there are major conflicts, such as inter-clan and intra-clan, two parties bring the issues to *Gadaa* leaders. Then *Gadaa* leaders discuss and give solution before libation time. It is not postponed to another day because that day is *Waaqaa's* day, when the peace should prevail.

Resolving cases of conflict also entails between the Arsii and non-Oromo neighbors, such as Marako, Silte, Gona, Maskana and Sodo through *Gurraachaa* institution.

*Gurraachaa* institution, entrusted to oversee the issues of conflicts between Arsii Oromo and non-Arsii people. It serves as peacemaking and social integration institution between Arsii and other non-Arsii groups.

According to Arsii elders, *Gurraachaa* institution settle major conflicts over looting cattle, duels over borders and pasture/grazing lands. As a result, these groups practice intermarriage, set up common market, use common grazing land, and share sources for drinking and watering their livestock. Some of them also use common law. For instance, the Marako is using Arsii Oromo traditional law through *Gurraachaa* institution.

## Conclusion

The important symbols and values of the people are used, provoked, communicated, or expressed in rituals. *Tajoo* ritual plays an important role in the peacemaking process, social integration and reintegration. It helps to link people to the past, present and future. Generally, according to Arsii Oromo elders through the performance of *Tajoo* ritual, harmony is established between all things in the universe. Overall, this study fairly argued that *Tajoo* ritual has real significance in intercommunity peace building and sustaining social solidarity, integration and re-integration. *Tajoo* ritual has broad concepts and meanings, which still need further investigation. For instance, the historical backgrounds of the ritual, the concept of Oromo New Year, associated with *Tajoo*, but which have been overlooked in Ethiopian studies demands further investigations. Therefore, to illustrate, preserve and conserve the indigenous culture and knowledge more and deep research and investigation is required.

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